

Can God Bless America?

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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In this era of terrorism, poverty, oppression and a few less-distinct enemies, waves of patriotism occasionally revive the slogan “God Bless America.” Sadly, though, the sentiment long ago became a cliché to which people rarely give serious thought. The phrase is even seen, ironically, on bumper stickers adjacent to other bumper stickers expressing humanistic and atheistic sentiments. One assumes that even those who don’t believe in God want His blessing on our nation.

Anti-God philosophies and worldviews now clearly dominate most of Western society. God has been removed from public discourse; prayer has been virtually banned from the public arena; agnosticism and humanism dominate public policy. So it is remarkable that the slogan “God Bless America” is still in vogue. We have to wonder what most people have in mind when they repeat it.

Originally, “God bless America” was a prayer for divine blessing. In its current form, it sometimes seems nothing more than a patriotic battle cry — usually intoned without much serious reflection. Perhaps it is sometimes recited with the superstitious belief that merely invoking God’s name can garner His blessing. One thing is clear: while Americans universally want God’s favor, as a whole, they do not want God.

Some apparently believe that America enjoys God’s blessing by divine right. After all, God has blessed America throughout history to a remarkable degree. But His blessings are not measured — as most people believe — by material affluence, power, and world dominance. The greatest blessings God has graciously given America have been spiritual blessings — freedom for the gospel to be propagated, sweeping revivals like those of the Great Awakenings, and growth and spiritual prosperity for the church in our nation. The sad truth is that all those blessings were in serious jeopardy long before the terrorist strikes reminded us that our freedom and material prosperity hang by a fragile thread.

Does our nation really desire God’s blessing? Do Americans truly long for the spiritual awakening that would be the necessary condition for true blessing, or would the policy-makers and media moguls in our society be as hostile to such a revival as they are to the threat of terrorism?

And what are the means by which the people of God should seek to have God’s blessing on our nation? Can we help position modern society to receive God’s blessing merely by influencing public policy through politics and protest, or is something more needed to fulfill the conditions under which

God will bless our nation? Can external moral reform alone make America fit for God's blessing, or is something even deeper needed in the lives of most Americans?

To ask such questions is to answer them. Scripture is clear that a wholesale spiritual renewal, brought about through the preaching of the gospel, is the true pathway to divine blessing. What is needed is not merely moral reform but spiritual regeneration. And unless this occurs on a widespread scale that deeply impacts all of society, we will continue to forfeit the true blessings of God for our nation. Merely reciting the slogan "God bless America" will do nothing for us until it becomes a heartfelt prayer for spiritual renewal and regeneration.

The remedy to our nation's moral and spiritual woes must begin at the house of God. The process starts with personal repentance. If Christians truly want to see God's blessing on our society, we ought to be models of genuine contrition and humility rather than merely pointing fingers of blame at the evils of secular society.

The church today is in a serious state of spiritual decline. Many churches are apparently more willing to imitate the world's fashions and opinions than to confront them with biblical truth. Meanwhile, Christians concerned about the moral evils of society often opt for all the wrong remedies — as if the only thing needed to cure the spiritual malaise of our nation were some kind of federal legislation against abortion, sexual promiscuity, pornography, or other forms of corruption.

I am by no means opposed to legislative efforts to outlaw abortion, drug abuse, and similar abominations. But political remedies to our nation's moral ills are no cure for the underlying spiritual problems. Of all people, Christians ought to know that, and the preponderance of our efforts ought to be focused on proclaiming the truth that can genuinely set people free. In other words, the majority of our energies ought to be invested in preaching the gospel and living the kind of life that gives testimony to the redeeming power of Christ.

Lives, not just laws, need to be transformed before America will be in a position to ask for and expect God's blessing. The blessings of God cannot be acquired by any legislative process. Law cannot make people righteous. Scripture is clear on this. No one is justified by works of law, but by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16). And saving faith is an individual matter; it cannot be imposed by legislative force.

In other words, society as a whole cannot be delivered from moral bankruptcy unless individual lives are transformed by the power of Christ. If that conviction does not frame the priorities of the people of God and drive the activities of the church on earth, we can forget about God's blessing on our nation.

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