

Patriotism and Christianity: Is God in Favor?

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It was one fine day, we were at church, indeed an exceptional Sabbath service, as we had some special guests visiting our church for the first time. They were the soldiers of the Indian Army, and I could see the entire right-side wing of the church was filled with them. It was a great experience to see these young soldiers of our nation visiting us. A feeling of security flared over me as I looked upon them, and immediately I recollected the memories of the wars our country was into; may it be the Indo-Pak war of 1965 and 1971 or the “Operation Ocean Shield” against Somali pirates.

Ever since a little boy, I have always desired to serve in the Indian Army. Most of my family members and relatives either serve in Indian Police Services or the Indian Army. However, God chose an entirely different life for me, to be a soldier of God’s word and not the world.

Patriotism

Such feeling amazes us with a varied attitude towards our country as, Patriotism. The word Patriotism can simply be defined as love of country. It is the kind of sentimental love towards your country when you hear the National Anthem of India or the famous song “*Ae mere Watan ke logon*” sung by Lata Mangeshkar. It is the feeling of magnanimous gratitude for freedom, democracy, culture, values, or even language.

Is God in favor of Patriotism?

One significant thing one must understand is that patriotism and nationalism are two very different attitudes towards a nation. While Patriotism is simply about loving one’s country, nationalism is about loving one’s country even at the expense of other nations. Nationalism is the belief that one’s own country is superior than all others. However, there indeed is a thin line between Patriotism and Nationalism.

How Should Patriotism be Understood?

As Christians, the only example or mentor we have is Jesus, so it is important to understand what Jesus did to embody patriotism. In Luke 13: 31-35, we can read that Jesus loved his people, city, and nation, and this emotion is echoed later in chapter 19 vs. 41- 44, where Jesus lament over His city. He did not curse the city for rejecting the Lordship of Jesus, but it was out of concern that the nation had rejected God and his messengers several times. This can be the best way to understand Christian Patriotism. This love for the country is practical, as it reflects love, truth, and justice. This love is not the same as nationalism, in which the love for your country is grounded on the grieving of other nations. One must be able to judge his nation in its success and its shortcoming. That is the real patriotism Jesus manifested towards Jerusalem.

Patriotism, How God Expects?

Christ gave us a great lesson in a straightforward presentation. We can see that Jesus' word means that we can maintain a healthy love for our country without diminishing God's commandment of loving him alone, and there can be no one beside Him (Exodus 20:3). C.S. Lewis writes that the love of one's country "becomes a demon when it becomes a God." It means that one's love for the nation can usurp over their love for God. Humans tend to idolize anything (gift or blessings) that comes from God and replace Him.

Therefore, a Christian's prime allegiance should be God and His church, which can sometimes make a Christian patriot disagree with his country and do things contrary to the nation's civil duty. As Christian patriots, it is our duty to proclaim patriotism even when it is uncomfortable or contrary for the safety, security, and development of the society.

Conclusion

Patriotism is well understood and can be practiced ideally only based on Biblical teaching. Paul says in Romans 13 that we must obey the rulers of a nation because God appoints them over us to lead us and guide us. Nevertheless, at the same time, we must not forget that it is also true that our patriotism towards our nation should not replace our God. When Polycarp was sentenced to death for refusing to burn incense to the Roman Emperor, the Roman soldiers finally asked him to bow to Caesar and call him Lord, but he refused to do this. He said, *"Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked."* Any Christian patriot needs to understand that patriotism for their nation must be submitted at the feet of our Lord as the first fruit of our love.

When a Christian patriot puts God's love above all otherworldly love, he can see the fulfillment of God's promise to His church. Revelation 7: 9- 10 gives us a glimpse of the bigger picture of the future event, it says "After this, I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." That is the promise; all nations, tribes, people, and language will hail to God and submit their love to Him alone.