

## *Romans 13:4*

### *Does Uncle Sam have a soul?*

- **N.C Constitution 1836** "No person who shall deny the being of God, or the truth of the Christian religion shall be capable of holding any office or place of trust or pulpit."
- **(150 YEARS LATER)** The *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph* in reviewing the Disney animation classic, *Pinocchio*, called it "a catalog of '40's prejudices." Honesty, dependability, self-control, and having a clean conscience were once *virtues*; then they became *values*; and now, apparently, they are *prejudices*.
- There is a battle raging in our nation - a civil war of values. Who has the right to shape the soul of Uncle Sam?
  1. Some are saying that because we are a **pluralistic democracy** all values are to be respected, especially those that are deemed politically correct by the movers and shakers of the great institutions of our land - the media, public education, courts and the mainline (liberal) church.
  2. Others are saying that this is a **Christian nation** and should draw its values from the Bible.
  3. **Does Uncle Sam have a soul?** If so, what does it look like? What is the basis of the values of our culture and nation? Who has the right to shape the soul of the American republic?
- In our study of Paul's letter to the Romans we have come to chapter 13 where he exhorts his readers to be subject to governing authorities.
  1. Jesus tells us to "***render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's***"
  2. This week we are going to observe that **America is a secular nation with a Biblically shaped soul**. And as the church of Jesus Christ we are the caretakers of the soul and conscience of Uncle Sam.

Proverbs 14:34 "*Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to any people.*"

Romans 13:4 "*for it is a minister of God to you for good.*"

*"of the people, by the people and for the people"*

- **If Uncle Sam is commissioned by God to provide for the good of all its citizens and the government is of the people, then rendering to Uncle Sam**

means that Christian citizens have a mandate to work to make the government good for all.

- **My concern:**
  1. **We are uninvolved:**
    - As long as Government works for us we stay out of it.
    - To submit to Uncle Sam or to render to him his due requires not passive compliance but active input.
    - This is a nation governed of, by and for the people.
  2. **When we do get involved it is often for the wrong reasons.**
    - We are concerned about our interests only. "A recession is when my neighbor is out of work. A depression is when I am out of work."
    - Or we have some need to manipulate and control others. **We don't want our children influenced by secular ideas.**
- **There are three reasons to believe that Uncle Sam has a soul.**

Religious (transcendent authority) not only should, but must, be recognized and respected in the public square of 20th century American life because:

**1. It was the conviction (assumed world and life view) of the framers of the American Republic.**

a. America - two principles held in balanced tension.

E PLURIBUS	UNUM
Diversity	Unity
Enlightenment ideals	Classical & Biblical values
Freedom	Order
Individuality	Community
Personal choice	Common good
Personal rights	Social responsibilities
Man is exalted by self	Man is both sacred & sinful
Man deserves freedom	Man needs restraint
A democracy	A republic
The Constitution	The Bill of Rights

b. America is not to be **E PLURIBUS (Period)** — a radical democracy where everyone is free to do what is right in their own eyes, a tyranny of the masses.

- c. Nor is America to be **E PLURIBUS UNUM (IN CHRISTO)** — a theocratic state where unity is “in Christ” or defined by evangelical Christianity.
- d. **The preservation of this balance is fragile** and only possible with the cooperation of the great institutions of our nation — the universities, the churches, the courts, and the legislative government.
- e. **The loss of balance and its consequences.**
  1. **When E PLURIBUS is exalted at the expense of UNUM** (as is the case today) —
    - a. **Idealism** tends to result. No compromises of personal rights are allowed, out of respect for diversity.
    - b. The civilized values he retains are **borrowed capital from the past**. They have no logical root in the prevailing philosophy.
  2. Aids testing is out of favor because of “personal rights” but in the public interest. It is an indication of where we are at this point in our nation.
- f. America was founded as a “**Christian nation**” only in the sense that it:
  1. Assumed a **God-centered** universe.
  2. Assumed a **Biblical**-personal and public **ethic**.
  3. Assumed a sense of **Divine calling and favor**.
    - “Progressive patriotic Protestantism” = civil religion.
    - “Manifest destiny” - a right to occupy and control.
  4. Assumed a view of humanity that respected both its **dignity and depravity**.
    - A balance of powers in government.
    - A trust in people to govern themselves.
- g. America was not an evangelical Christian nation, but rather a nation that held to a very **general Biblical ethic** and world-view.
 

**NOTE:** American republic did not indorse the Historic Christian gospel but rather embraced a general Biblical ethic and world-view.

  1. The **first amendment** to the constitution. It separated the state from the church (any one denomination or sect), but not the state from a generic theism or some general over-arching moral and spiritual authority.
  2. Thomas Jefferson called it “**general religion**” (the general creed that distills values common to all sects, in all religions, from all cultures).
  3. It was for this reason the churches were given **tenured status** in the culture.

- Tax exemption
- Symbolic recognition in government of general ethics.
- Radical separation is a new concept.

## 2. It still is the conviction of the vast majority of American citizens.

a. The elite in our culture are in general agreement that the more modern a society becomes, the more secular it will be. This notion seems to have everything going for it but the **empirical evidence**.

95% believe in God or a Universal Spirit

87% pray to God

71% believe in life after death

70% believe Jesus is God

68% have church membership

48% have encouraged someone to accept Christ

40% attend church or synagogue at least once per week

40% claim to be born-again Christians

38% believe the Bible is the literal Word of God

b. The **media's image** of a secular (religion-less) America is largely a wishful myth.

c. **Traditional religious institutions and values** in media are:

- **absent**,

- put in the context of the **18th century**,

- or ridiculed as **manipulative, hypocritical, and/or obstructive to basic freedoms and rights**.

d. **Tolerance** is touted as the ultimate virtue and the intolerance of absolutes as the only absolute.

## 3. It is a practical necessity for democratic capitalism and a public social ethic in a free society.

a. America - three systems that are linked.

- A **Biblical value system** held on a deeply personal level
- A **Democratic government** centered in the people
- A **Capitalistic free enterprise economic system**

b. As our country tries to sustain a democratic government and a capitalistic economy without encouraging basic Biblical values, it reflects

a "cut flower" mentality. Hoping the flower will survive while discarding the root system necessary to sustain it.

- c. Without this spirit:
  - 1. **Capitalism** becomes the exploitation of the economically weak by the economically powerful.
  - 2. **Democracy** becomes an endless litigation of rights and the manipulation of the naive by the clever.
  - 3. **Pluralism** dignifies every kind of divergence as a form of creativity.
- d. The social ethical agenda in our public life grows out of our **real or sentimental attachment to Judeo-Christian values.**

Once we abandon the idea that there is a shared understanding of "the good" or even of how the world is constructed, there is little left but the **arbitrary sentiment of the most powerful in society.**

"Political correctness"

- e. *"We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Our constitution was made only for a moral and a religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other."* John Adams
  - 1. Our institutions presuppose the existence of a transcendent authority, a supreme being, a God, and are wholly incapable of properly functioning without His influence in our private lives and public expectations.
  - 2. *"Can the liberties of a nation be sure when we remove their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people, that these liberties are the gift of God?"* Thomas Jefferson

### **The Church's role**

- 1. Stay private — **A SPECTATOR**
  - a. The Church's interest and power is primarily spiritual, not political.
  - b. *"My kingdom is not of this world."* Jn.18:36
- 2. Build responsible citizens — **A RESOURCE**
  - a. The Church's interest and power is personal, not public policy.
  - b. **NOTE:** For the Christian, the goal in politics is not power, but justice. When the Church seeks and gets political power, it not only deserves the disdain that it gets from the broader public, but it runs the risk of the Gospel of Jesus Christ being held hostage to a political agenda.
  - c. *"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's."* Matt. 22:21

3. Support the authority of the State — **A CHAPLAIN**
  - a. The Church's interest and power is in upholding the State's legitimate but limited authority and role.
  - b. *"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution: whether to a king as the one in authority; or to governors."* I Pet. 2:13-14
4. Be a renewing force in the State — **A PROPHET**
  - a. The Church's interest and power is in being the moral conscience of the State.
  - b. *"I must obey God rather than man."* Acts 5:29
5. **NOTE:** When one of these aspects is emphasized at the expense of the others, both the Church and the State suffer.
  - a. **Anabaptists'** radical separation of Church and State
  - b. **Evangelicals'** "behind the scenes only" posture
  - c. **Civil religion's** support of the status quo
  - d. **Roman Catholic, liberal Protestant, and Reconstructionist** wedding of Church and State

## The First Amendment and modern thought

1. In the years between 1875 and 1925 a **great shift** took place in American culture.
  - a. It moved from being a secular state with a recognized religious canopy to a secular state that questioned and abandoned all notions of transcendent authority.
  - b. This shift swept first through the universities and from those to other institutions of culture.
2. **Public education's** emphasis upon:
  - a. Absolute autonomy of the individual
  - b. Radical relativity of values
  - c. Comprehensive contingency of all phenomena
  - d. Total temporality of all reality
3. **The media's** distorted image of American life
  - a. Traditional values and ideals are portrayed as outdated and out of place in public life.
  - b. The only public virtue is "tolerance" of everything but "political incorrectness."
4. **The court's** interpretation of the first amendment
  - a. The Supreme Court has evolved in differing directions with respect to its reading of the First Amendment. In most recent years it has respected a compromise between the thinking of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson (reflected in the chart below).

	<b><i>John Adams</i></b>	<b><i>Thomas Jefferson</i></b>
<b><i>Context</i></b>	Massachusetts Constitution	Virginia's Constitution
<b><i>Degree of separation between church and state.</i></b>	Porous wall of separation - The establishment of one non-sectarian public religion is encouraged.	Solid wall of separation - Religion should be wholly private.
<b><i>State support</i></b>	State support (chaplains, tax exemptions, etc) of general religion is needed.	No state support in any form to any religion is permitted.
<b><i>Rational</i></b>	The State needs a common religious foundation for its core values.	Any state support tends to limit freedom of private religion.
<b><i>Symbols</i></b>	Public religious symbols were appropriate.	No public religious symbols should be permitted.
<b><i>Extent of free exercise of religion</i></b>	Religious freedom is tempered by public religious values.	Radical freedom for all religious expressions in private life is permitted.
<b><i>Extent of disestablishment of religion</i></b>	A "mild and equitable" establishment of one public religion is necessary.	Disestablishment of all religions is necessary.
<b><i>Public institutions</i></b>	They should support general religion.	They should have nothing to do with religion.

- b. Four tenants seemed to have emerged from the courts compromise.
1. There is a place for public recognition of religion. Public religion must be as free as private religion.
  2. Freedom of public religion sometimes requires the support of the state.
  3. A public religion cannot be a common religion. It must be open to all forms of private religious faith.
  4. Freedom of public religion also requires freedom from public religion. People cannot be forced to affirm the public display of religion.
- c. It seems clear that the "no establishment" provision of the first amendment should be in the service of the "free exercise" provision. Free exercise is the end, and no establishment is one means in the service of that end. In recent court decisions this order seems to have been reversed.
- d. Separation of Church and State has come to imply separation of traditional classical religious views from the public square while at the same time supporting secular materialistic worldviews in public life.
1. **"Free exercise"** is granted only to secular materialistic views in public.

2. **"Disestablishment"** is applied to traditional classical worldviews only.
- e. The First Amendment is seen as protecting the State from religion as opposed to protecting religion from the State.
    1. When the Church becomes involved in the public square the cry has been "this is a violation of Church and State."
    2. When the State is attempting to interfere with and regulate the Church, the State argues there is no absolute separation of Church and State.
  - f. Three tests have been developed to decide the constitutionality of laws that have a religious component:
    1. **The Lemon test:** This was defined in a Supreme Court ruling in 1971. To be constitutional, a law must 1) have a secular purpose, and 2) be neutral towards religion - neither hindering nor advancing it, and 3) not result in excessive entanglements between the government and religion.
    2. **The Endorsement Test:** Justice O'Connor created this criteria: a law is unconstitutional if it favors one religion over another in a way that makes some people feel like outsiders and others feel like insiders.
    3. **The Coercion Test:** Justice Kennedy proposed this criteria: a law is constitutional even if it recognizes or accommodates a religion, as long as its demonstration of support does not appear to coerce individuals to support or participate in a religion.



