

# Why a Lack of Patriotism

by Vance Havner

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*America has lost its spirit, and the Church has lost its way, but a rebirth of patriotism and a return to spiritual vitality can make a difference.*

**Duration:** 34:42

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, John 8:32, Romans 12:2, James 4:7, 1 Peter 2:9, 1 Peter 2:11, Revelation 3:18

**Topics:** "Patriotism"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the state of America and compares it to the decline of Rome. He highlights the loss of patriotism and respect for heritage in the country. The preacher also draws parallels between the conditions in the country and the church, emphasizing the need for a practical understanding of the times and what needs to be done. He criticizes the lack of connection and understanding among experts and calls for a focus on fellowship and practical knowledge in the church.

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## Transcript

...mind the suitable time to think about some verses out of 1 Peter, the 2nd chapter, where we are told about our double responsibility to the country and as God's people in the church, beginning with verse 9. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, and holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye shall force the praises of him who has told you out of darkness into his marvelous light, which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God, which have not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which warn against the soul, having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works which they shall behold glorify God in the day of visitation. That's the church.

Now our duty to the country is to admit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king, or supreme, or under governors, as unto them that are sent by him, for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Then he sums everything up in a double-barreled verse, 17.

Our relationship to both. Honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the King. We're approaching the bicentennial of American independence.

Our country is almost 200 years old. The Church of Jesus Christ is almost 2,000 years old. And many of the conditions in the country are paralleled, amazingly, by corresponding conditions in the Church.

Recently I listened to and watched a group of high school students being interviewed on television. They were asked what they thought about the condition of this country. And they unhesitatingly replied, without being rehearsed, that America has lost her spirit, that patriotism is almost extinct, that we no longer respect our heritage or venerate the great men and women of the past.

And I thought as I sat there, same old story as Rome in her last days, same symptoms, same disease. Sad says the land of hastening ills of praise, where wealth accumulates and men decay. We have pretty much the same conditions in many respects.

You remember the Revolutionary War was fought over taxation without representation. They ought to see it now with representation. Once again, history repeats itself, and all we learn from history is that we don't learn anything from history.

For one thing, both America and the Church are rich today in what money can buy, and almost bankrupt in what it cannot buy. You remember perhaps reading how the Pope said once to Thomas Aquinas as they strode over the gardens of the Vatican, You see, no longer does the Church have to say, silver and gold have I an earn. And Thomas Aquinas answered quite true, but neither can she say, rise and walk.

The Church can stand anything better than prosperity and popularity. Persecution won't kill a Church, it thrives on that. But prosperity and popularity will do it every time.

The Church is poor when she's rich and rich when she's poor. Secure, in danger, but endangered by security. She has most treasure in heaven and she has least on earth.

Our Lord's message to Laodicea contains a verse that I must say, although I have read it all my days, it just jumped out of the page and grabbed me. You know how verses do that sometimes when you've read them all your days. It's the 18th verse of chapter 3 of Revelation, I counsel thee to buy of me, three times now you will find the phrase, that thou mayest.

Here are three things my Lord wants for his Church. Buy of me gold, tribes, and the fire, that thou mayest be rich. White raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.

And anoint thy eyes with eyeshade, that thou mayest see. That thou mayest be rich, that thou mayest be clothed, that thou mayest see. Now that's not my outline for tonight, but I want you to give some thought to it yourself.

Jesus wants three things for his Church, that it may be rich. Not get rich, God doesn't want any Church to get rich. But to be rich, which we are if we only knew it.

And him who though rich for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. And he wants us clothed in the garments of his righteousness, unspotted by the world. And he wants us to see, because we're suffering too much from spiritualist stigmatism.

In the second place, America has lost her regard for the flag. The stars and stripes have become cheap and commonplace, showing up almost anywhere. Gone are the days when it broke tears to our eyes, and a lump to the throat, and a tug to the heart.

Its white no longer means purity, and its blue no longer means love, and its red no longer thrills our hearts as we think about those who died that it might wave over the land of the free and the home of the brave. The banner of the Church is the cross. God forbid that I should glory in anything else, but it's the cross of Christ, because a Christless cross is as meaningless as a crossless Christ.

But the Church today has devised a new cross, an ornament to hang around the neck, a commonplace cymbal twisted out of context, sort of a holy horseshoe. It doesn't interfere with our godless living, it never goes against the grain of the old nature. Sunday morning churchgoers sing unconsciously because we are usually unconscious when we sing.

To the old rugged cross I'll ever be true. It's shame and reproach gladly bear, and I feel like getting up and saying, stop everything. Do you know what you've just done? It's shame and reproach, my soul, what do I know about that? Gladly bear, we don't bear it any kind of way, let alone gladly.

What do we know about going to him without the camp bearing his reproach? It's about time the stars and stripes meant something again in America, and it's about time the cross of Jesus Christ meant something to the Church. During the First World War, Caruso, that great tenor in whose throat God lodged a voice that perhaps has never been equaled in the throat of mortal man, came to one of our great cities for a patriotic rally, and he ended with the star-spangled banner. And the last note he put an octave high, and they said it took half an hour to get that crowd settled after that.

I'd like to see a crowd of Americans get that excited about old glory one more time, and I'd like to see a church full of professing Christians really get happy some Sunday morning, saying, in the cross of Christ, our glory towering o'er the wrecks of time, all the light of sacred story gathers round his head. Sublime. The way we sing it now, you'd think it was a lullaby instead of a reveille.

Then in the third place, the Constitution of the United States doesn't mean much to Americans, and the Bible doesn't mean much to the average church member. Daniel Webster said this, and you can change one word in it and you will see how many applications it can have. You may look at government and see that it possesses only external modes of freedom, and yet find no vitality in it, just as you may contemplate an embalmed body where art has preserved proportion and form amid nerves without action and veins without blood.

The Constitution has become a dead document to too many, and the Church peeracts and gathers dust on tables. Fine things are said about it, lovely tributes are paid to it, but few there be who make it the law of their lives. Church members are just about as ignorant of the Bible generally as Americans are of the Constitution.

I heard of a preacher down our way who got a little worried about Sunday school, and he decided he'd check on it, so he asked Johnny, just as a sort of a sample tryout, Johnny, who wants us to level the whole of the Jericho? Johnny said, well, I didn't do it. So he went to Johnny's teacher and said, what's going on in Sunday school? I asked Johnny, who levels the whole of the Jericho? He said he didn't do it. His teacher said, well, if he said he didn't do it, he didn't do it.

He said, what am I going to do? And he went to the chairman of our board of deacons and said, what's going on there? I asked Johnny, who levels the whole of the Jericho? He said he didn't do it, and his teacher said, if he said he didn't do it, he didn't do it. And the chairman said, well, I don't know who did it either, but send us the bill and we'll pay for it. Now, I don't think it's that bad.

I don't think it's that bad, but it's bad. It's bad. I'm not preaching bibliology.

We are not necessarily called upon to worship the Bible, but to guard the Christ of the Bible. But this is the only authorized textbook of our faith. And Jesus said, he preached a sermon, you know, that drove the crowd away.

We measure preachers today by how big a crowd they can attract. My Lord drove away one of his biggest crowds. And his text, I think, would amount to, except you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you.

That'll send out most Sunday morning congregations today, if you bear down on it. A lot of those folks are saying, they did then. They said this was a hard thing, who can hear it? You preach that today, and some of them say, I'm going over to the memorial church and hear Dr. Sound and Brass give book reviews.

I don't like this one. This book is God-breathed, and when you explore it in the Spirit, you have the feeling that Dr. Phillips put well in the foreword to one of his translations. He said, you will have the feeling of an electrician wiring an old house where the power has not been cut off.

I think that's terrific. You've tried that, haven't you? You ever get a shock or a charge, you ought to get one of the two. You know, preaching ought to do something for folks.

They ought to get a charge or a shock, one of the two. Anything's better than nothing. Something ought to happen.

I can't stand dry, dead, dismal, desolate meetings. God never intended that any gospel meeting should be like that. I have a friend, Dan McBride.

He's a Southern Baptist. He goes around picking his guitar and taking off on us Southern Baptists, tiptoe through the tithers and all the rest of that sort of thing. He and I were at a big supper up in Detroit some years ago, and he told that crowd about a little boy in church one Sunday morning.

No, it was a dry meeting. The preacher was through, but he wouldn't quit. And he had looked through the hymn book, and that's not a very exciting thing just to look through, and he'd drawn all the pictures he needed drawn.

He said, Mama, what's that flag over there? What's that? That's the American flag. What's that? Well, that's the Christian flag. What's the little one with the stars in it? Well, that's the service flag for those who have died in the service.

He said, the morning service for the evening. I don't blame him. I don't blame him.

Now, in this day when the living faith of the dead has become the dead faith of the living, just as America needs to get back to the flag and the Constitution so the Church needs to get back to the cross and the Bible, America needs statesmen and the Church needs prophets. We never have had many prophets. We've had pastors, teachers, and evangelists.

I do not discern a full-time prophet today on the horizon. Others preach prophetic sermons, but Billy Graham preaches prophetic sermons at times. He's an evangelist.

Bible teachers teach prophecy, but they're Bible teachers. There is a place for the New Testament prophet, and I hope everywhere I go I can interest at least one young fellow who will hear the call of God to be a New Testament prophet. No salary.

You'll not find it in any denominational book. There isn't any category in the denominations for prophets, but I think there is one in the book of God. And America is oversupplied with politicians running for something, and very few statesmen standing for anything.

Of course we have some good men in office, men of ability and integrity, but as of tonight, so far as I'm concerned, there is no outstanding character of statesmanship caliber discernable on the horizon. Now, I hope it's not too late. Sometimes one appears when least expected, and not at all according to our plans and specifications.

Abe Lincoln looks like anything in the world but a statesman. We've looked for too much out of Washington. Woodrow Wilson was greeted like a messiah in Europe at the end of World War I. Franklin D. Roosevelt sailed for Europe on the liner Manhattan at the end of World War II, and some cynical reporter had this to say.

The messiah is not on the Manhattan. Well said. Now, we have to look some other direction.

We've looked to experts who have all the answers and don't know what the question is. And for all our technology and our know-how and our expertise, we have painted ourselves into a corner in this country. You know that.

We're not setting the mustard today. We're not meeting the situation. I was in Knoxville for two weeks in meetings, and they've got a new Hive House Hotel there that's slant in the front and looks like a power dam.

And right on the Tennessee River, you know, TDA country, where they've built all those dams and changed the country. That's them. They said the drunk came by some time ago, looked at the thing, said, I knew TDA would do it sometime, built the dam and missed the river.

That's what we've done in America. We've built the biggest dam ever with all our technology. But we're not connecting.

You know that. You listen to these fellows on TV, these experts discussing this and that. Do you know any more when they get through? I have not as yet accumulated any usable information.

They call it a symposium. That's where we pool our ignorance. And you don't know.

Because they don't know. The children of Issachar, the Bible says, had understanding of the times, not knowledge alone, but understanding of the times to know. Now that's where the knowledge comes in.

What Israel ought to do. What it takes. Now our news writers today have a great knowledge of the times.

They're smart men, but they don't understand the universe. We need an understanding that leads to knowledge, a practical knowledge of what to do. What it takes.

Somebody go out and start preaching on that. We need that in this land as never before. But America suffers from another problem.

Too many people within our borders are Americans only in name. And too many people in our churches are Christian only in name. The church has a corresponding ailment.

Teddy Roosevelt, who is just about my favorite president, said during World War I when we had a problem with German-Americans and the divided allegiance, he said, if you're an American in something else, you're not an American. And he talks about hyphenated Americans. We've got a lot of hyphenated church members.

We call them worldly Christians. There is no such thing. Billy Sunder used to say, you might as well talk about a heavenly devil.

There's no such thing. Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

And Teddy Roosevelt said, America is not a polyglot boarding house. That's terrific. Neither is the church.

Now, it's a melting pot. America's a melting pot, and the church is a melting pot, where all colors and all races and all grades and on the social strata become Christians in World War I. A melting pot. But when that melting pot becomes a pressure cooker, then you've got problems.

I've been in some churches that started out as a sheepfold and have become a zoo. We'll have a better America when we have better Americans, and we'll have better churches when we have better Christians. One of our church statesmen down south said of us Baptists, he said, the trouble with us is we're many, but we're not much.

That's the problem. Oh, we're proud of our statistics. You know, there are three kinds of lies.

Black lies, white lies, and statistics. We're very fond of that. I tell my crowd down there that two million Baptists can't even be located.

Two million more don't belong where they live, and I don't know how many more survive to be in fellowship. Let me ask you tonight, we brag on our statistics. The other day I heard a young preacher out at Jack Taylor's church in San Antonio make this statement.

He said, we claim we're the soul of the earth, and we're so proud of our church membership statistics. He said, if there's this much soul in America, why is the country so corrupt? We say we're the light of the world. He said, if there's this much life, why are we in the dark? I know Jesus is coming.

The world's not going to be converted. I know all that. But that's no excuse for the poor showing we're making as Christians on this day and generation.

That doesn't excuse that at all. I know it would be a lot worse if we weren't here, but it ought to be a lot better because we are here. We ought to make a difference.

We have a great Black preacher, E.G. Hill, who was with me down in Birmingham in a evangelistic conference there with several thousand preachers. I read a tape of his, he's one man I could listen on and on to that man preaching, right out of Watts in Los Angeles. And he said, we've had trouble out there, and he told me about this great city where block after block after block is filled with people who are terrified, they close early in the evening, they're afraid to get up and walk at night, all on account of Black Panthers at that time.

But he said, I checked into it and I asked the FBI, how many Black Panthers are there in this neighborhood? And they said, well, we have counted 81. He said, if 81 agents of the devil can paralyze a city, what about all these church members in all the cities over America complacently living our little lives and the world goes on hardly conscious of the existence of most of us? That's the situation. And then America suffers from a low-grade patriotism, if we had any.

I remember World War I, there was a sense of mission, we were making the world safe for democracy. It's never been safe for anything since. That patriotism grew weaker by World War II, then it was just a dirty job that had to be done, and it almost disappeared in the Korean and Vietnamese wars.

And today we have a new internationalism, and we've lost our national identity. Don't forget that a man is a better citizen of the world of nations if he's a better citizen of his own nation, and that a man's a better member of the human family if he's a good member of his own family. I heard Douglas MacArthur say, strange voices are heard across the land decrying this old and proven concept of patriotism.

Seductive murmurs are arising that it is now outmoded that we are provincial and immature, reactionary and stupid when we idealize our own country, that there is a higher destiny for us under another and more general flag. He said, repudiated from the pulpit and from the platform. Just as America has gone international the wrong way in some applications, the Church has gone universal the wrong way.

I heard of a fellow who wanted to join a certain church choir, but he didn't want to join the Church. And the pastor said, Well, where do you belong? He said, Well, I belong to the invisible church. The preacher said, I suggest you join the invisible choir.

We've got some professing Christians today that are so universal that they don't know how to be local. They're so general they can't be particular. They're so excited about the world church, they're no good in the home church.

I am convinced the great need of today is a rebirth of the spirit of patriotism in the country and the spirit of Pentecost in the Church. But if America and the Church are to return to God, it'll never be brought about by formal days of prayer put on by chambers of commerce, civic clubs, and carnal churches. It'll never happen until we take the Bible recipe and humble ourselves and pray and keep God's faith and turn from our wicked ways.

I don't hear anything like that out of Washington these days. I hear it said, We've licked everything in the past, come on, we can lick everything in the future. That sounds dangerously like the pride that goeth before destruction and the haughty spirit that precedes the fall.

I don't hear much of this in the Church. I hear a lot of boasting of denominational prestige, and we forget that God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. I tell my own crowd, I tell the Southern Baptists that we ought to have one of our conventions in L.A. They've got a lot of smoke out there, and I think we could blow it out in three days.

Neither America nor the Church will return to God as long as we try to work out our own salvation. Our forefathers had a dream of building a nation on scriptural principles. But the vision of those early colonists got mixed up with the democratic philosophies of Tom Paine and Thomas Jefferson, which is humanistic belief in the innate goodness of man and his own perfectibility.

Part of it came out of the Reformation, and part of it came out of the French Revolution. And today, the brotherhood of man is confused in the average mind with the priesthood of the believers, and we're trying to create a false millennium and a counterfeit kingdom of God superimposed on an unregenerate society. The Church began in the spirit and is trying to make itself perfect in the flesh.

For centuries, Romanism wrapped the Church in too much mystery. Then liberalism came along and took all the mystery away. Even Thomas Jefferson said, the sum of all religion as expressed by its best preachers, fear God and love thy neighbor, and that contains no mystery.

When it doesn't have any mystery, it isn't the gospel. Great is the mystery of goodness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, King of angels, preached among the nations, believed only in the world, received up in the glory.

But the world wants that other kind of gospel today with no mystery. And you're going to see, we're already seeing, the celebration of the B-U-I, somebody's already called it Centennial, because it will be commercialized, of course, like everything else in America today. The mass media will take care of a lot of that.

You will see the greatest orgy of commercialization ever. You could make a fast buck these days, selling three-cornered hats and neat trousers and powdered wigs and ringing bells, and it'll be a great year for tourism. And that would be all right, but after all, the hoopla is over.

Are we going to think back into post-Watergate cynicism and despair? You'll never get back to Spirit of 76 that way. And the Church is doing almost the same thing with our expos and our expos and our crusades of the America. We do some, they do some good.

Any time the gospel is presented, God blesses it. But these gigantic extravaganzas never seep down from the top echelons to the folks. They don't get down there.

And just as Christmas and Easter have been exploited by the world, and just as even Father's Day and Mother's Day is really a field day for the department stores, we find the Church trying to commemorate without duplicating. Lorenzo of Florence long ago put on a pageant of Pentecost, and I'm always scared of dramas, because the Church always has more drama when it has least fear of shabbat. It goes in for make-believe when it hasn't got the real thing.

Lorenzo put on this drama of Pentecost. It was going to be the real thing. Sure enough, fire was to fall.

He had the twelve apostles all lined up down there, everything ready, but something went wrong. The fire fell all right, but the apostles caught on fire, and the curtains caught on fire, and the building caught on fire, and everybody got burned up. That's always the way it is when you try to stage a synthetic Pentecost.

It won't work. And even if you could fill the Churches with people who read the Bible, go to church, pray in public, tithe, separated from the world and win others, you would only be doing what our Lord most scathingly condemned in people who did that and who were the spearhead of the movement that crucified him. You compass sea and land to make one cross the line.

When you've made him, he's too full, more the child of hell than you are. I said to the young people over on the island this morning, the worst enemy Jesus ever had were people who went to church, read the Bible, prayed in public, tithed, separated from the world, lived clean moral lives, won others. Jesus said,

the publicans and harlots will get there before you except your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

You won't make it. It's amazing how good you can be and never get to heaven. Now, we ought to go to church, we ought to read the Bible, we ought to tithe, we ought to be separated from the world, we ought to win others, but that won't save you.

And our dear people today, some of them have never found out that it won't. There's the same danger of dramatizing Christianity without duplicating it. The Methodists some years ago celebrated Aldersgate, that experience that changed John Wesley and changed all England, and made its impact on the social life of the country and started some beneficence that endures to this day.

But one of their preachers wrote an article that I've worn out, I think it's one of the finest things I ever read, What Happened to Aldersgate? And he went on to say, we have celebrated it, but we don't duplicate it. And we have said today, now if we can have a similar experience to what John Wesley had, we can have similar results to what he had. If we can create a reasonable facsimile of what he had at Aldersgate, we might be able to do what he did.

No, no, you don't have a reasonable facsimile of what happened at Aldersgate. So John Wesley had a head-on collision with Jesus Christ and with Almighty God, and the thing was real. And you don't stage things like that.

And so my Lord used that very term, play-acting, which is what the word for hypocrite means, play-acting. We're putting on a performance when we need an experience, and even fundamentalism does it a lot. Don't spend all your time firing away at the liberals.

We would do well to clean our own house today. There's plenty of sin among us. We don't have to look any distance to locate it.

It's among us as well. And we can, the Pharisees were orthodox. You can be as straight as a gun-barrel theologian and just as empty as a gun-barrel spiritualist.

You're going to hear let freedom ring from here on. That replica of the Liberty Bell is going all over the country, and that's nice, but let me close by saying you never have freedom without truth. You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Now, waving flags and putting on all these extravaganzas, that won't do it. John 8.32 is an amazing verse. A preacher won't never take a text that begins with the word, and, and make it the full text for his message.

Because when you start with a verse that begins with and, you're not telling the people all that God's trying to say at that place. So start at verse 30. At least, although we could go much farther up, as he states these words, many believed on him.

Believe, get that in your mind. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, if, now if comes before and, you see, if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. Now, don't you see what a difference it makes when you start where God started with this passage of scripture? I hear sermons on Romans 12, too, that says, be not conformed to this world, but transformed with the renewing of your mind.

But the first word, man, and you know what comes first, presents your body as a living sacrifice. People are not going to cut loose in the world, and they're going at it backward if they have not first presented themselves like that verse in James, submit yourselves to the Lord and resist the devil. You can't say no to the devil successfully until you first say yes to the Lord.

So let's get it the way the Bible has it. It begins with faith in Jesus Christ, discipleship continuing the Christ-ness, and then the continuance, and then we shall know the truth. Truth is not an abstraction.

Freedom is not an abstraction. Pilate said, what is truth? He didn't know the truth's not a what, truth's somebody. I am the way, the truth, and the life.

We are reaping in America the harvest of a pagan philosophy to the effect that man's just an educated animal. We've had all the wild, weird educational theories of John Dewey and others, and out of all this we have a generation that's wrecking their lives and destroying their homes and tearing down their schools, even liberally, filling the prisons with criminals and the hospitals with lunatics and the graves with suicide. Jesus said there are two sources of error, ye doer not knowing two things, the scriptures and the power of God.

When a man doesn't know those two things, he's in ignorance in the sight of God. Maybe a Ph.D. that only means phenomenal dirt in his case. He does not know.

Ye are in error because you don't know the scriptures and the power of God. And so it isn't enough to say America needs to get back to God. That's theism, that's deism.

Thomas Jefferson was a deist. No man cometh to the Father but by means. And there's a great danger today that even many churches and preachers go a little easy on that today, and never get much further than this insistence on getting back to God.

Well, we get to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought to make it plain everywhere we go. And only when we believe in Jesus Christ, continue in the word, then do we know the truth, and then are we set free.

That's the message of the gospel, that only when we believe and receive the gospel, will freedom reign. Our Father, we thank thee tonight for this country. There's a lot wrong with it, but Lord, we're still proud of America.

It's the best patch of dirt on this planet, and they're still trying to get in over here and get out of other places. O Lord, thou hast been so patient with us and put up with so much. Thou hast put up with us who name thy name because we've been so remiss in our own beauties and privileges under God.

Help us tonight to check on our loyalty to our land and our loyalty to our Lord, and be honest about it, and make due confession and proper amends for both. We pray the glory of God, and in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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