

Our God Is Dependable

Job 38

You may not realize how intense is the unseen war boiling around you. No, there is no clash of weaponry, no booming bombs and cannon to give it definition. This war is almost silent. Some people call it a “culture war”. Instead of force, the adversaries use persuasion. Currently the most aggressive side is winning.

There was a day when America frankly acknowledged the power of God. We wrote it into our Declaration of Independence, with blunt references to our Creator and Nature’s God. Every school day began with scripture and prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Every teacher was required to make clear the differences between right and wrong. As one early historian said, here in Rockbridge County: “they raised them rough; they raised them well. If their feet were turned toward the paths of hell they put in their hearts the fear of God, and tanned their hides with a stiff ramrod.” Things have changed. Few people seem to care if the child’s feet are turned toward heaven or toward hell. Little is taught about respect for anything, including reverence for God. With the best of intentions, try administering an old-fashioned “tanning” on your little juvenile delinquent, even if he is begging for it. You may have to face criminal charges! Verily, things have changed, for better or for worse.

We want to be fair with everybody. We lean over backwards to be tolerant. Gradually we have sifted out every item that might be offensive. We hide the Ten Commandments. We banish the Bible from every school. We abolish prayer, even silent prayer. We bow to the noble idea of “Inclusiveness”, but are careful not to include our own heritage. Are we crazy? No, we are simply contending with an army who is more dedicated than we are.

They may not be smarter than we, but they claim to be. No intelligent person could possibly believe in God, they say. And they are winning. You and I are in the fight this minute. We have come to church today. But are you aware that nearly half of America’s population circles “None” whenever asked about religious affiliation? These are not primitive backwoodsmen. They dominate our culture, especially in our universities, our media, and Hollywood. You may not even realize how much these “Nones” are influencing American culture. But you and I are much less inclined to speak about our religion publicly. When the movies portray every Christian pastor as a wimpy fool, we wonder. When uttering a public prayer is illegal, we fall silent. When a presidential candidate is strongly committed to his Christian faith, we elect someone else.

The venerable Constitution of the United States has come under the influence of the “Nones”. It is the final law of the land, and says bluntly that our free exercise of religion must never be prohibited. Notice, though, how it is being misinterpreted to guarantee free exercise to every religion except Christianity, the foundation of our culture and our nation. Even the new Affordable Care Act, sometimes called

Obamacare, specifically exempts Muslims from the requirement to pay. Muslims claim insurance is a form of gambling. Many Christians feel the same way, but their protests are ignored. They are forced to comply.

All this represents a climate change in American culture. For complicated reasons, most of them political, our religious heritage is being discredited. Faith in God is being portrayed as a detriment to progress and to liberty. These trends have been dominant for a generation or two, but I am confident the tide will turn. Why? Because history proves it, over and over. Where, for example, is the Thousand Year Reich, so prominent and anti-religious sixty years ago? Gone forever. Where is the Soviet Worker's Paradise? They have gone to dust. The Bible is now read again in the churches over there, and the Torah in the synagogues. At one time they were outlawed, on pain of death. Religion survived. Other ideologies perished.

Let me make a reasonable suggestion. It comes from our Bible, the book of Job. God asks some rather searching questions, and they need to be answered. They have to do with faith in God, and life, and death, and eternity.....all big questions. God roars: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the world? Did you fashion the boundaries for the ocean? Have you ever once commanded the dawn to come, or the sun to rise? Can you govern the stars? Do you control the seasons? Can you direct the lightning strike? Where do you think your own wisdom comes from?"

Even the most intellectual elite must admit that there is a power, a force out there far beyond all collective human knowledge and achievement. In fact, human existence is pitifully confined. Lift us slightly above the mere skin we call atmosphere, and we perish immediately. Push us a few inches under the ocean, or a few miles under earth's surface, and we are instantly doomed. Miraculously, God provided everything needed for life in this wafer-thin layer. People who pride themselves on their superior intellect often claim it all came to be as some cosmic accident. Maybe. I contend that such a stance requires an intellectual vacuum far greater than I find in religious belief. Some power is obviously in charge. I call it God, but am happy to concede other titles, such as Creator, Great Spirit, Eternal Consciousness, Mother Nature or Heavenly Father. We come each Sunday to this little church in an effort to connect with that power.

Can someone show me what harm lies in religious faith and practice? To be spiritual is to be happy. Your spirit eventually outlives your body. Science is proving daily that consciousness does not end with physical death. To nourish your soul is to care for the most important element in your constitution. Enemies of religion persuasively argue otherwise, even passing laws to support their position. If it were not so, this chapel on the hill would be overflowing every Sunday. Even some of you here in this room have been culturally brainwashed. You wondered whether to nourish you soul in church today or to enjoy a picnic on the river. The battle is relentless. For the moment, public religion is losing.

Religion produces better health. Regular churchgoers live an average ten years longer than the “Nones”. Why doesn’t that medical fact make daily headlines? The answer is clear: the media doesn’t like it. Be aware, the Christian faith encompasses a wide variety of followers. Some are strict and coercive. Some are extremely tolerant, for example urging that homosexuals be ordained as church leaders. Some fringe Christians demand that you handle live rattlesnakes to strengthen your ties with God. Some devout churches think a drink of liquor will send you straight to hell; others serve alcohol in observance of the holiest sacrament as we do here at Oxford. Yes, there are all kinds of religious people. Some of them test my patience with their bizarre demands. But all are trying to revere their God in their own way. The Bible asserts with great authority that God has a sense of humor. In more than one place you will find this verse, “He who sits in the heavens laughs.” Obviously, God allows quite a variety of religious expression. Regardless, people who are devout simply live longer. So why not be devout?

Then there comes the question of eternity. Give me one sane reason why you should reject the possibility of life eternal. You live a longer, happier life on this earth. When you die, you move right on into heaven. Even if you don’t; even if your religion is mistaken, what have you lost? Being devout is a win-win proposition. Don’t let social and political and intellectual correctness intimidate you, as it has so successfully done to a majority.

Lift your face and square your shoulders. Speak your religious convictions in a strong, clear voice. Come to church and live longer. Sure, you may stir up a bit of comedy, even ridicule. But you will eventually win. Religious faith does not come out of thin air. There is in you and in every human being, an inherent urge to connect with your Creator. Recognize that hunger. Be glad it’s there. Over the long haul religious faith has proven itself the most powerful and enduring force in human history. It undergirded our nation. It still provides noble civic leaders. Religious people are the most generous in their charitable contributions. Our notion of the sacredness of liberty comes from religious roots. Destroy religious faith, and liberty will be the next to go. Time will tell over the next century who will win the culture war in America. Appearances are deceptive. God may be taking a few licks now, but the battle is not over. I hope you choose to depend on God. Your life will, in the long run, be better for that reasonable, voluntary choice.

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May 19, 2013**