

# FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH

## THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Text: Psalm 128

Introduction:

1. According to the Bible, the function of government is to maintain societal order that promotes peace and liberty (Romans 13:1-7).
2. Through the concepts of "Nature's God," "Natural Law," and "People's Law," the founders of this country sought to pattern government after God's wisdom.
3. Foundational to this type of government was the freedom of religion.
4. The enumeration and protection of the rights of man came from a fundamental understanding of his nature.
5. As stated in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."
6. What was meant by, and, more importantly, what does the Bible teach about the pursuit of happiness?

### I. The Definition

- A. In modern times, most have a misunderstanding about what it means to pursue happiness.
- B. However, the Founding Fathers were clear as to what they meant.
- C. The right to life:
  1. This refers to the fact that all life is granted by God and must be respected by man (cf. Acts 17:25-26).
  2. In the early 1800's, Frederic Bastiat captured the attitude of the Founding Fathers when he wrote: "We hold from God the gift which includes all others. This gift is life – physical, intellectual, and moral life."
  3. Thomas Jefferson stated: "The God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time."
- D. The right to liberty:
  1. This refers to the fact that man possesses free will and is able to make his own decisions (cf. Joshua 24:15; Ezekiel 18:20).
  2. Benjamin Franklin wrote: "Freedom is not a gift bestowed upon us by other men, but a right that belongs to us by the laws of God and nature" (*Maxims and Morals from Dr. Franklin*, 1807).
  3. Samuel Adams declared: "Our unalterable resolution should be to be free."
  4. He boldly proclaimed: "If ye love wealth better than liberty, the tranquility of servitude better than the animating contest of freedom, go home from us in peace. We ask not your counsels or your arms. Crouch down and lick the hands which feed you. May your chains set lightly upon you, and may posterity forget that you were our countrymen."

# FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH

- E. The pursuit of happiness:
1. This refers to the fact that man has the freedom to seek and secure his own well-being and contentment.
  2. The Supreme Court defined it thus: "[T]he right to pursue any lawful business or vocation, in any manner not inconsistent with the equal rights of others, which may increase their prosperity or develop their faculties, so as to give to them their highest enjoyment" (*Butcher's Union Co. vs. Crescent City Co.*).
  3. The Constitution of Pennsylvania states in Article 1, Section 1: "All men are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent and indefeasible rights, among which are those of enjoying and defending life and liberty, of acquiring, possessing, and protecting property and reputation, and of pursuing their own happiness."
  4. John Adams defined it clearly: "All men are born free and independent, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights, among which may be reckoned the right of enjoying and defending their lives and liberties; that of acquiring, possessing, and protecting property; in fine, that of seeking and obtaining their safety and happiness."
  5. Thomas Jefferson wrote: "Rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add 'within the limits of the law' because law is often but the tyrant's will, and always so when it violates the rights of the individual."
  6. He stated further: "The happiest moments of my life have been the few which I have passed at home in the bosom of my family" (*Letter to Francis Willis, Jr.*).
  7. Thomas Paine wrote in *Common Sense*: "If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace."
  8. John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail: "I must study politics and war, that my sons may have the liberty to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, and naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry and porcelain" (May 12, 1780).
- F. These things – prosperity, education, property, reputation, safety, family, and legacy – are all a part of the pursuit of happiness.

## II. The Doctrine

- A. Like so many other philosophies of the Founding Fathers, the pursuit of happiness is taught in Scripture.
- B. Psalm 128 teaches that the blessed man will not only pursue but find happiness.
  1. This is not a fleshly or worldly happiness.
  2. Rather, it is a joy that comes from holiness and righteousness.
  3. The one who walks according to God's Word will enjoy the simple pleasures of a life well lived – work, food, family, and legacy.

# FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH

- C. Joshua described the pursuit of happiness as the children of Israel came into the Promised Land of Canaan (Joshua 1:14-15).
- D. Solomon learned and wrote of this principle (Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:12-13; 5:18).
- E. Paul also wrote of it (1 Timothy 6:17-19).
- F. True happiness is found in obeying the Lord (John 13:17).

## III. The Duty

- A. It is not the responsibility of government to make its citizens happy; rather, it is to provide an environment wherein citizens can exercise their free will to pursue their own happiness.
- B. Along with the blessings of God-given rights also come God-given duties.
- C. One has the duty to pursue happiness by providing for one's own (1 Timothy 5:8; 2 Corinthians 12:14).
- D. One has the duty to protect liberty (Galatians 2:3-5).
  - 1. Simeon Howard preached: "Men are also bound, individuals and societies, to take care of their temporal happiness, and do all they lawfully can, to promote it. But what can be more inconsistent with this duty, than submitting to great encroachments upon our liberty? Such submission tends to slavery; and complete slavery implies every evil that the malice of man and devils can inflict."
  - 2. James Madison wrote: "Liberty may be endangered by the abuses of liberty as well as the abuses of power."
- E. One has the duty to respect the rights of others (Matthew 7:12).
  - 1. John Adams wrote: "I would define liberty to be a power to do as we would be done by. The definition of liberty to be the power of doing whatever the law permits, meaning the civil laws, does not seem satisfactory" (*Letter to J. H. Tiffany, March 31, 1819*).
  - 2. Thomas Jefferson wrote to Benjamin Rush: "It behoves every man who values liberty of conscience for himself, to resist invasions of it in the case others."
- F. One has the duty of responsible citizenship (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17).
  - 1. John Adams wrote to Benjamin Rush: "Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives. We ought to do all we can."
  - 2. George Washington wrote: "The establishment of Civil and Religious Liberty was the Motive which induced me to the Field – the object is attained – and it now remains to be my earnest wish and prayer, that the Citizens of the United States could make a wise and virtuous use of the blessings placed before them."
- G. Freedom from sin also carries with it certain duties – faithfulness, worship, service, and evangelism.

Conclusion: "God grant, that not only the Love of Liberty, but a thorough Knowledge of the Rights of Man, may pervade all the Nations of the Earth, so that a Philosopher may set his Foot anywhere on its Surface, and say, 'This is my Country.'"

*Benjamin Franklin, Letter to David Hartley, December 4, 1789*