

Will America Survive? Billy Graham Answers

On New Year's Eve, 1975, Billy Graham gave a message that reminded Americans of their spiritual heritage and explained the only hope for the nation's continued existence as a free people. Mr. Graham's message is as relevant today as it was nearly 41 years ago.

The world is changing so rapidly that I hardly know it any more. While we Americans are glued to our television screens watching football games, the world is reeling and rocking from crisis to crisis. Dangerous explosions are almost everywhere. We are on the edge of a precipice.

When I hear talk of peace, I am reminded of what God said through Jeremiah to the false prophets of his day. God said they were shouting, "Peace, peace!" when there was no peace (Jer. 6:14). The psalmist warned about dealing with those whose words are smoother than butter—those who say, "I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war" (Ps. 120:7). Let's face it: There has never been so much talk of peace, nor such preparation for war, as there is today.

Many of our problems are getting worse with every passing day—the crime rate, drug addiction, massive debt, broken homes, abortion. I have a feeling that it is almost as if the American people are drugged and are oblivious to the perilous events happening at home and abroad.

What is wrong? America, possessing all the economic affluence for enjoying life, virtually leads the world in crime, narcotics abuse, pornography, immorality and debt.

We seem to be naive to what is happening in the real world. So we watch television and try to forget it all, hoping that it will go away. Or we take another highball and try to relax.

The rest of the world watches our self-inflicted wounds with amazement.

Before we take a look at the future, we should look at the past and remind ourselves of the roots from which we sprang.

I do not see how anyone could study the history of America without recognizing religious influences that have helped mold this nation from the beginning. In no other nation's founding documents can we find so many declarations of allegiance to God. Time after time in our history there have been appeals to the "Supreme Judge" in seeking to build a new nation. This idea of freedom as a right of all men everywhere is unique among nations.

But where did it come from? Any search for its origin takes us back to "our fathers' God ... Author of liberty." It takes us to the creation of man, whom God made in His own likeness, free to roam and replenish the earth. Free to decide how or even whether he would serve his Creator. And man chose rebellion. Today because of that choice by our first parents, we are alienated from God. Because of this alienation, we are a suffering planet, with the ultimate result of death for every generation.

This idea of freedom also takes us back to the Old Testament prophets, proclaiming in the face of kings and shouting from dungeons man's right to freedom under God. It takes us back to Moses, daring Pharaoh's wrath by demanding, "Let my people go" (Ex. 5:1) and later leading a great army of the former slaves into a new country where they could, at God's behest, "proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." Those words from Leviticus 25:10 (KJV) are inscribed on America's Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.

It takes us back to Jesus Christ who, standing in Nazareth, boldly declared His destiny—"to proclaim liberty to the captives and ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed"

(Luke 4:18).

The idea of the free man in God has always been terrifying to tyrants, and that is why religious liberty is being curtailed in so many parts of the world today. Give people the Bible and freedom to proclaim its message, and they will soon be free.

The Declaration of Independence reflects the feelings of men to whom religious faith was all-important. There was not an atheist or an agnostic among the 56 who signed that Declaration, though some were deists. Before they strode forward to append their signatures, each bowed his head in prayer. The Declaration's giant step was being taken, they affirmed, "with a firm reliance upon the protection of Divine Providence."

Such expressions were no mere polite gestures to God. They were a firm commitment to the principle that God must be central to any plan of government. Because they signed that document, some of those men were captured and hanged. Some were stripped of their possessions. Some were jailed. I have to ask myself tonight, at another hour of American crisis, do we have that kind of courage? How many people today would be willing to put their life on the line for freedom?

Eleven years later, after the Revolution was won, men from 13 colonies assembled in Philadelphia, charged with creating one of the most revolutionary political documents of all time: the U.S. Constitution.

When the Constitution was submitted for ratification, the people demanded a Bill of Rights that would settle certain fundamental freedoms once and for all. They were implied in the Constitution, but the people wanted them in black and white. In the Amendments making up the Bill of Rights, where was religion? First. In the top place!

The final wording was: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise

thereof." It was not government renouncing religious faith; it was government protecting our religious faith by forever removing religious rights from tampering by any public authority. Here we have a guarantee that America would never have a civil religion. But we would have freedom of religion, not freedom from religion as some have mistakenly interpreted this Amendment.

We may be a vastly different people today than we were 200 years ago. Our society is far more complex, more pluralistic. But of this we can be sure: God has not changed. His laws have not changed. He is still a God of love and mercy. But He is also a God of righteousness and judgment. Any individual or nation that ignores His moral and spiritual laws will ultimately face His judgment.

I believe that every problem facing us as Americans is basically a spiritual problem. Crime is a spiritual problem. Inflation is a spiritual problem. Corruption is a spiritual problem. Social injustice is a spiritual problem. The lack of will even to defend our freedoms is a spiritual problem.

The Lord, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, said, "I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' to a nation that was not called by My name. I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts; a people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face. ... When I spoke, you did not hear, but did evil before My eyes" (Is. 65:1-3, 12).

And judgment came!

The great question before us tonight is: Will this nation survive as a free society?

In a time similar to ours, when only a minority were true believers, Isaiah said, "Unless the Lord of hosts had left to

us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah" (Is. 1:9).

God is warning us that judgment is going to fall upon us unless we as a nation repent and turn to God. In pleading with ancient Israel, God said, "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord, 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword'; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Is. 1:18-20).

Will America turn to God at this late hour, or will America continue on the broad road that leads to destruction?

You may ask, "What can I as an individual do?

First, recognize that God loves you. The Bible says that He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Second, be honest before God. Admit that you have broken His laws and chosen to go your own way instead of His way. Be willing to let Him change your life.

Third, receive Jesus Christ into your heart as Savior and Lord.

Fourth, be a living example by your good works. Pray for those in authority. Be a good citizen. Help the poor. Help the distressed and oppressed of the world.

Fifth, get involved in the political process. I would challenge every deeply committed American who is qualified to think about running for political office. I do not believe that we as Christians should withdraw. We need men and women of integrity and Christian commitment who will run for political office. If you will do these things you could have a

part in helping America be the kind of country you want for your children and grandchildren.

America is too young to die. But unless we wake up and accept the challenge handed to us by our forefathers, we will die, like countries and civilizations of the past.

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