**“I Pledge Allegiance To…” By Andy Diestelkamp**

Loyalty, fidelity, faithfulness, devotion, and allegiance are all synonyms which generally have positive connotations. Of course, whether these are actually admirable qualities is entirely dependent upon whether or not the *object* of the allegiance is itself good. For example, when a bride and groom make vows of fidelity to one another in the sight of God and men, people are often emotionally moved by the solemnity of the event and believe that such pledges can and should have major impact on their attitudes and behaviors as husband and wife. We take these pledges seriously.

However, consider this pledge of allegiance.

 "I swear to God this holy oath that I shall render unconditional obedience to the Leader of the German Reich and people, Adolf Hitler, supreme commander of the armed forces, and that as a brave soldier I shall at all times be prepared to give my life for this oath." (Defense Force Oath - effective March 16, 1935)

 It is quite easy to see the danger of whole nations of people taking such oaths even (and especially) if God’s name is invoked and divine terms like *holy* are employed. Pledges are essentially vows which must not be taken lightly or recited casually. Indeed, it should cause us to ponder how many oaths any one person should undertake in their lives and whether or not such an oath to any earthly government is wise in view of the devotion we are to have first and foremost to God. Loyalties are things which are constantly tested, and our loyalty to God is no exception.

 The stories of Daniel and his fellow Hebrew companions as captive servants in the governments of Babylon and the Persians are exemplary of what faithfulness to God looks like when tested by other allegiances. From their conscientious (yet respectful) objections to the defilements that would come with the official regimen prescribed for preparing young men for the king’s service (Daniel 1:8ff) to their absolute refusal to bow down to the king’s image of gold under the threat of death (3:1ff), their allegiance to the one true God is unquestionable. Indeed, so well-known was this devotion, that Daniel’s enemies figured that the surest way to get him out of favor with the king was to pit the king’s own law against the law of Daniel’s God (6:4,5). They concocted such a law which forbade Daniel’s custom of prayer; and when Daniel persisted in his devotion (as they knew he would), they challenged his allegiance to the king saying, “That Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree you have signed …” (6:13). Of course, since we know the rest of the story and share Daniel’s perspective with regard to where our allegiance should be, it is easy for us to imagine ourselves doing likewise in like circumstances.

The purpose of any national pledge of allegiance is to inspire patriotism, affirm loyalty, and evoke pride in one’s native or adopted country. While none of these are inherently incompatible with being loyal to God, nationalistic fervor certainly has the potential to warp one’s worldview and values. Thus, for those of us whose allegiance is “seek[ing] first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Mt. 6:33), there is reason for concern because nationalistic pride easily moves to extremes and, if unbridled by a greater allegiance to God, can lead to all kinds of rationalizations and compromises which blaspheme God’s ways even as His name is invoked.

It is relatively easy for us to see this danger in the citizens of *other* nations or ethnic groups as their pride drives them to oppose American interests and influence. We certainly see it in the Jews of the first century in their rejection of Jesus even as they imagined themselves being God’s chosen people simply because they had Abraham as their father (cf. Jn. 8:37ff). Seeing that nationalistic proclivities have blinded the loyal citizens of other times and countries to the point of abominable behavior should be sufficient caution for Christians of any nation.

Thus, I propose a pledge that imitates the length and meter of the American pledge of allegiance as one which should cause our hearts to swell in greater loyal devotion to a cause much more noble and far-reaching than anything the USA can offer.

I pledge allegiance to the LORD,

 The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

 And to their Dominion for which I stand,

 One Body, under Christ, indivisible,

 With liberty and justice for all.

While this pledge might be thought a parody by those whose love of country is unbalanced, for followers of Jesus Christ it would be an affirmation that their pledge of allegiance is first and foremost to Him as King. It is God and His divine rule that actually makes possible the liberty, justice, and unity that is merely idealized in our nation’s patriotic pledge and certainly has not been realized (and never will be) under any human government.

 What’s my point? Saints gather on the first day of each week to remember the most important series of events in human history: the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is only in Him that we should boast. In Christ alone (not America) is the last, great, hope of mankind. We cannot serve two Masters. We will be loyal to one and despise the other. If our nationalistic patriotism comes anywhere close to rivaling our passion for and allegiance toward Christ, then not only do we do a great disservice to our nation, families, and churches, but we are on the road to idolizing the things of Babylon and being loyal to it while despising the Kingdom of God. We sing, “The kingdoms of earth pass away one by one, but the kingdom of heaven remains.” To which do you pledge your allegiance?