

Understanding the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence

By Susan Snelling

Welcome to this class on the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. What we're going to do in this class is to cover these two documents topically... meaning we're not going to go over the Constitution line-by-line but we are going to focus on certain principles, subjects in the context of these documents. It's very important that the Constitution and our approach to it are framed correctly. That is why we're going to begin with this introduction where we discuss the Declaration of Independence and focus primarily on a couple phrases, and one in particular. That one phrase is at the root of the American government, what the Founders called a grand experiment. Before I begin though I want to give a little background.

When I was growing up in a semi-small town in northern Minnesota, as an elementary school child, I had a sense and idea that America was good. That America did good in the world. That America was good to other nations; we help them, we gave them what they needed, we helped lift them up. And because this idea that America is good was the prevailing attitude at the time, Americans were good. We had a history we could be proud of, a few mistakes but overall it was good and decent. Imagine a child growing up with this idea that America is basically good. And that Americans are good. Of course I'm just speaking very generally. Imagine what that does to a child in their outlook and how they regard themselves.

What about children today who in their government schools and some private schools and through the media and the political landscape and other cultural areas are told that America is bad, America's evil, that America's history is evil, that Americans are evil and must apologize for themselves, and they see some of America's leaders apologize for America on foreign soil no less, or a Supreme Court Justice criticizes the Constitution to foreigners. What does that do to a child

who grows up with that kind of an atmosphere and all those messages coming at them from so many different directions? Even if parents at home are trying to raise a child with the right idea, they still have all of these other avenues that are influencing the child.

When I was growing up we said the Pledge of Allegiance every morning at school, there was something almost sacred about that. With so many works of art that told the story of the pilgrims, of America's founding, all these great historical moments that secured this nation emphasized, it was a different focus back then. I remember all of the wonderful creative works that portrayed the high points in our history and even some that were not so pleasant, but there was this idea that America was good. Also, architecture played a role.

We knew what government buildings were, they just had a certain look to them. We knew what churches were, they had a certain look to them as well. This is not to denigrate churches today that do not look like a church because we know it's not about the building but about the people. There are different factors like expense, convenience and some fellowships have to meet in underground churches or wherever they can. I want to make it clear that I am not putting down the different gathering places of Christians, but this is to make a broader more general point that even in architecture we are reminded of who we are and where we came from.

Thomas Jefferson was dubbed "The Father of the National Architecture." He designed solid and classic government buildings because he wanted to teach Americans an enduring quality. If you recall recently President Trump said he wants all new government buildings to be beautiful and classic. This would be in the tradition of Jefferson and other architects of the founding era. I was reading an article on this move in The Federalist News magazine and the author said that our government entities are for the common good and therefore their design should reflect our values; not the values of an architect in their own personal expression that is foisted on the rest of America. Our government buildings are supposed to be classic and beautiful, not nihilistic, empty, postmodern, and cold. Is that who we are as a people?

Man's expression of who we are as a nation in the arts, from paintings to architecture, to music, from The Star Spangled Banner, to America the Beautiful, to God Bless the USA, not to mention great writings and poetry. These were the kinds of things that were emphasized when I was growing up in my part of the country. I grew up in a very different time, with a different idea of who I was as an American, what my country was as America. Of course I am speaking generally because there are still children who are taught what is right. It's not all lost.

I harken back to something else from my past. I was elementary school aged. My mom and the neighbor lady were standing in our backyard by my mom's garden talking on a beautiful summer day. I went outside in the yard to be by my mom. They were talking about something called evolution. I had never heard of this before. They were upset about it. The neighbor lady told my mom that they were planning on teaching it in the schools. They were both shocked and appalled by this. I wanted to know what it was and I got an answer but it was foreign to me. I was shocked that there were people who believed that God didn't create everything; that they credited nature to something else. I knew by the tone of the discussion that this was evil... it was a very bad thing.

I locked it away and it wasn't until many years later that I began to realize what a damaging ideology this was. Actually, it wasn't until in recent years as a student of the Bible at Collegium Bible Institute where we studied apologetics and where I began to more fully realize evolution theories' effects on people especially young people; how it can rob them of their faith in Christ and lead them on a path of utter hopelessness. How it sets a culture up for violence and rabid disdain for any form of Godliness. Imagine that God didn't create you but you are the same level as animals and evolved from a primordial mass or amphibious creature; that you have no purpose, no hope, and that the hand of God wasn't involved in your creation. What is the purpose of your existence? We see this nihilistic, empty and ugly viewpoint in some of the arts today; not all expressions are of this nature, and this is not to negate all creative works by any means, but the messages are there enough to be problematic for young people and parents trying to raise them right.

You might be asking what does this have to do with the Constitution. You will see shortly. We want to begin by discussing the Declaration of Independence. Without a true understanding of what the founding fathers are saying in the Declaration it makes study of the Constitution almost a moot point. Without knowledge of the foundation of our government of laws, of who we are and where we came from, there's no appreciation for the Constitution and it cannot be interpreted as the Framers intended. The Declaration is the heart of America and the Constitution is that heart walked out; it's the heart of who we are and the Constitution is the Declaration applied.

The Declaration of Independence is the founding fathers expression of the will of God for all people for all nations at all times but specifically is the foundation for America's government. It is America's charter.

I want to briefly read the parts of the Declaration that I want to take a deeper look at today.

The Declaration Begins "the unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America when in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the Earth the separate and equal station to which **the laws of nature and of Nature's God entitle them.**" I want to stop right there and focus on the phrase the laws of nature and of Nature's God. Without a thorough understanding of this phrase it is difficult to interpret the Constitution correctly. It is difficult to interpret the events of today correctly.

The phrase the law of Nature and of Nature's God is the root of our government. This is what the founding fathers believed and it is intrinsic and key to our entire system of government and to who we are as a people and a nation. It is essential to know what this means and why it is so important that we as a people or as an individual get back to what this key phrase in the Declaration means.

Jefferson got the phrase from Lord Bolingbroke whom he studied for years. Bolingbroke believed that the laws that are of Nature's God means that they are the laws found in the Word of God. As a further insight into Bolingbroke's beliefs

that Jefferson borrowed from, Bolingbroke wrote: "You will find that it is the modest, not the presumptuous enquirer, who makes a real, and safe progress in the discovery of divine truths. One follows nature, and nature's God; that is, he follows God in his works, and in his word."

Nature and Natural Law:

The laws of nature and the laws of Nature's God were considered to be two sets of laws but identical. Samuel Adams said:

In the Declaration of Independence the Laws of Nature are announced and appealed to as identical with the laws of nature's God, and as the foundation of all obligatory human laws.

There is one Law Giver, from whom all natural laws originate. According to James Wilson:

The law of nature and the law of revelation are both Divine; they flow, though in different channels, from the same adorable source. It is indeed preposterous to separate them from each other.

Sir William Blackstone, an influential philosopher at the time of the Founders wrote:

Upon these two foundations, the law of nature and the law of revelation, depend on all human laws; that is to say, no human laws should be suffered to contradict these.

The law of nature and the law of revelation have God as their source. The Founding Fathers devised the Constitution and the American government in a way so as to not violate these laws. They understood that all human law depends on the two foundations of nature's law and of Nature's God.

Alexander Hamilton said that the natural rights of man depend on the law of nature, and that the law of nature is an "eternal and immutable law" which comes from God. Blackstone said "the laws of nature are the will of the Maker." They are intrinsically linked and cannot be separated.

This natural law that comes from God is evident in human nature. John Adams gives this example:

Human nature itself is evermore an advocate for liberty. There is also in human nature a resentment of injury, and indignation against wrong. A love of truth and a veneration of virtue.

One of those natural rights that comes from natural law that Madison called "the first law of nature" is "self-preservation:"

Among the natural rights of the colonists are these: first, a right to life; secondly, to liberty; thirdly to property; together with the right to support and defend them in the best manner they can. Those are evident branches of, rather than deductions from, the duty of self-preservation, commonly called the first law of nature.

The Founding Fathers believed that civil laws should not violate God's laws and that all legislation should reflect them. If civil laws do oppose the laws of God, we still stand before the Supreme Judge and civil laws cannot protect us from Divine punishment.

George Mason understood this principle when he said:

the laws of nature are the laws of God; whose authority can be superseded by no power on earth. A legislature must not obstruct our obedience to him from whose punishments they cannot protect us.

Natural Law is God's Law and on this the US Constitution is based and all legislation should be founded; with the natural rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

God took up the laws of creation with Job when He said in Job chapter 38: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" "Do you know the ordinances of the heavens, or fix their rule over the earth?" There are many bible verses on God as creator of the laws of nature and as Supreme Judge and Lawgiver. Those laws are unchangeable as God is unchangeable. We all are subjected to those laws and pay the penalty for violating them.

When you look at nature and you consider all the laws that govern it, there is order to Nature that you can't help but observe. God made Himself clear in Creation, in nature. So clear has God made Himself known that it is a testimony that no one can claim innocence... that they didn't know. We also inherently

know, besides what we observe in nature and the order in it, that certain behaviors are wrong. In 1 Corinthians 11:14, Paul says, “doesn't nature itself teach you...” God's law is written on every man's heart so there are things that we just know are wrong. We know from creation, from nature and the behavior in nature.

Romans chapter 1:18-20 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

That is the Law of Nature. Our civil laws, are supposed to align with the Laws of God. There is the legal Latin phrase **lex spectat naturae ordinem** which in English means “The law regards the order of nature.” This principle that our laws should or must align with the laws of nature is ancient and goes back to British common law and further... to the creation. Our laws should also align with the laws of revelation which is the written Word of God. The Founding Fathers intended that none of our laws should disagree with the laws of God.

God's Laws have been in our legal system from the beginning. They were expressed by Aristotle, Cicero and others. Cicero called natural law “true law.” Genesis 1:1 says in the beginning God. The laws came from Him. There are a couple Latin phrases that are common in the legal system. **Malum in se** are those crimes that are morally wrong, whether anyone sees you commit them or not or whether you have civil laws saying they are wrong or not. These are crimes that in and of themselves are morally wrong. **These are actions that violate the laws of God.** Malum prohibitum covers positive laws. These are civil laws that prohibit certain actions that are not considered to be morally wrong in and of themselves.

The fact that the Founders regard God as our ultimate Lawgiver and that we answer to Him does not make us a theocracy even though all the nations on earth, every man woman and child ultimately are all under the laws of nature and of Nature's God. We are all under the laws of God because they apply universally.

There are the laws of redemption that apply only to the followers of Christ, to the laws of Salvation and in living a Godly life and that apply strictly to the Church. Jesus says render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's. America is not under the Laws of Redemption. We are not a theocracy but we are a nation where all religions can flourish and believe what they want and practice what they want under the umbrella of Christianity. The founding fathers recognized that we have a supreme judge, that the God of the Bible, the one true God, is the Supreme judge. As a matter of fact in the last paragraph of the Declaration of Independence the founding fathers use the term Supreme judge of the world and Divine Providence.

This is extremely important. That God is our lawgiver and it's He who has endowed us with unalienable rights that's a gift given to us... we didn't deserve it we didn't ask for them... he gave us these rights. There are forces that would want to take us as far away as possible from nature and Nature's God, from the understanding of that because the further away we get from it the more secularized our nation becomes. Are you starting to see where evolution comes into play here; remember I mentioned when I was growing up and I first heard of evolution. Evolutionary theory allowed for humanism to proliferate. I will tell you this that the Constitution was never meant to be interpreted humanistically but through the objective truth of Nature and Nature's God; that God is our Lawgiver that He is the Supreme Judge; that our laws should be based on that and our Constitution and our laws interpreted accordingly.

What about our rights?

Support of liberty:

The Declaration of Independence says:

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, -- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...

The idea of equality of men came from the Bible itself and it was expressed in the pulpit, that God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34 "Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality.") and salvation is for everyone, not just certain classes of people (1 Tim. 2:4... "who God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,"). These are biblical truths that were preached from American pulpits and spread throughout the early colonies by evangelists and traveling preachers, arguably laying the groundwork and character of people that would sustain the great revolution. Man is created in the image of God and that is what makes us equal.

Our rights come from our Creator, not man, not government. If our rights came from man then man can take them away. Our government is to secure those rights, to protect our unalienable rights. Unalienable means that we cannot be alienated from those rights. The government derives its powers from the people, and it is up to the people to make sure that the government is protecting our rights through staying within the bounds of the Constitution. Liberty takes work. It is not free. No one can take a free ride when it comes to securing our rights. And the people have a right to liberty, a God-given right.

In A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law in 1765, John Adams wrote:

Liberty must at all hazards be supported. We have a right to it, derived from our Maker. But if we had not, our fathers have earned and bought it for us, at the expense of their ease, their estates, their pleasure, and their blood.

What John Adams is saying is that even if our rights did not come from our Creator, which they did, that we have a duty to secure those liberties because of the sacrifice of our Founding Fathers. It was not easy. They sacrificed their own blood, livelihoods, and creature comforts. They gave their all as did the American loving soldiers who remain as footnotes in history or not mentioned by name at all. Many gave their last full measure of devotion.

We owe it to the brave and their families, who believed in something that transcended their own lives and their current situation. They had a vision for something so great, so unique, that it stood alone in the annals of history, and was called a "grand experiment." An effort and vision so great that writers like

Montesque and others wrote about it. America was called the shining city on a hill.

These brave forefathers deserve our devotion to their vision, yet the squandering of their efforts in many sectors in America casts a shadow on her brightness. It is up to each generation to support liberty, if not because God gave us these rights, because we need to honor our forefathers, those great men and their families who gave their all. To squander what they did is to spit on their graves and in the face of the Creator who gave us the rights in the first place, that the Founding Fathers sought to secure for us.

We may not have earned those rights, and may not even deserve them, but according to John Adams, our Founders did earn them. And we owe it to them to maintain the securing of those rights through making sure our elected officials abide by the Constitution and keep their oath of office.

Our children and all future generations deserve our best. Are we the generation that finally gives up the protections in our Constitution to those who defy it, who choose to promote another agenda, who think nothing of shredding the Constitution, and care not about America's real history but revise it for their purposes, who teach our children wrongly about where our rights come from and what it cost our forefathers, and soldiers and culture warriors who have fought since then to secure them?

Liberty must be supported and that is the duty of every citizen.

I have mentioned several Latin terms. The judicial system knows them well. But do they always practice them.

Regarding rights there is another Latin phrase and this is very important. The founding fathers understood this. It is: **Jus Ex Injuria Non Oritur**: "A right cannot arise from a wrong." This is basic to our legal system. The founding fathers studied Cicero, Montesquieu Toqueville, Locke and many others. These were philosophers and writers who wrote about Christian principles based on the Bible. This is what the founding fathers took out of their writings and put into our founding documents. Genesis chapter 1 verse 1 "in the beginning God"... that is

where this started and takes us back to. Look at rights today. There are special groups and special behaviors that the Supreme Court and our legislatures rule on favorably. Do they come from a wrong? Let's take the most obvious... a woman's right to choose or rather a woman's right to take the life of her baby in her womb. Slavery was another one and was corrected with Amendments to the Constitution, in our laws, and SCOTUS decision. Back to a mother's right to take the life of the baby in her womb.

How can this be; is it a true right or is it a fake right, a concocted man-made right. This right as they call it comes from taking the life of an innocent human being. If that baby in the mother's womb was literally taking the life of the mother and there was no other option no other choice but to remove that baby before it was viable then it's life for life. We have the knowledge these days where we understand when life begins... because we have that increase of knowledge God is holding us accountable for the knowledge that we have. Back in the time of the founding fathers they understood that life began when the mother could feel the baby stir in her womb. And an abortion back then was considered a crime.

If a woman was injured or attacked by someone and the baby died in her womb that was considered a crime. It was a more serious misdemeanor akin to murder. But we have more knowledge now we know that life begins at conception. Life is going on before the mother can feel the baby move in her womb. How can this be a right if it takes the life of an innocent human being? It has to be a fake right. It's not a true right because it arises from a wrong. This so-called right was slipped in as a "privacy right" which in itself is questionable. It is included in privacy rights along with other perverse behaviors. This so-called right is **malum in se** as well as some other behaviors included in privacy rights.

You might want to ask yourself how can a Supreme Court justice who is aware of this important principle from nature and nature's law consider taking the life of an innocent human being in the mother's womb a legitimate right as they decided in Roe versus Wade. And to have some justices say well it's settled law or it's precedent. What if that precedent is wrong. What if that precedent is unconstitutional and the law is unconstitutional? You just keep making more

decisions based on that bad precedent or bad law? Some of these justices even claim to be religious yet they throw God's Laws out the window... you can't do that.

The Constitution was never meant to be interpreted humanistically. This is what evolutionary theory has given us; this is how dangerous it is. This is what has happened to our legal system in this country where justices and lawmakers take God out of it ... when people get rid of God in the Public Square... where they ignore the objective truth that we are created by God... where they get rid of the truth that nature is a witness to our Creator and that we can know God through His creation and His word ... through the Laws' of nature and of Nature's God.

Humanistic and evolutionary thinking gives the idea that the Constitution is a living breathing document and that it is always evolving. The founding fathers allowed for the amendment process so we can make changes but never to change the essence of who we are and where we came from; we need to leave the root of our government intact as it is in the Declaration. How dangerous to have justices who even claim to be religious yet throw out God Laws... they don't even have a basic understanding of this or they don't think it's important... how can you dismiss those laws and make a humanistic decision and claim to be religious at the same time. But definitely abortion is one of the really big examples of a fake right because of humanistic interpretation.

This is why it's important for the American people to understand what is meant by nature and Nature's God and where our rights come from. We need to know when we have elected officials or when justices and lawmakers who don't understand it and are given to humanistic interpretation. Our Constitution must be interpreted by the Declaration of Independence... the laws of nature and of Nature's God... the laws of Creation and the Word of God. God sent forth laws at the time of creation so we would know how to live and govern ourselves. He sustains His creation through His laws. They are unchanging. We can't escape the ramifications from ignoring His laws either.

Francis Schaeffer says that the media doesn't even have to lie to get their agenda through because they see things through the humanistic perspective so they think

they are ethical and right in the agenda they are promoting. Where we think are they crazy or we question are they seeing the same things we are seeing? We find that it is hard to even reason with them. They are seeing things through a lens that has suppressed the truth and to them they are righteous in their cause. The objective reality is God as our Creator yet people deny that. What does that say about their ability to reason and make sound judgments? Schaeffer says regarding humanism that we need to fight the battle on every front but primarily on the front of Truth; that God is our Creator.

Applying this to the battle for our rights and the Constitution... yes, we fight for the first and second amendment and every other right but basically it has to start with that one Truth that God is our Creator and His Laws govern all of nature and all of mankind. His Laws of Creation and of Revelation is what all of our laws should align with. It is those laws that give validity and authority to our civil laws but only those civil laws that align with them. God wants us to know Him and He made that possible. He wants us to live good and happy lives and demonstrates in His creation and written Word how to do that. The Founding Fathers understood that and expressed it in the Declaration of Independence and built our Republic on the immutable laws of God.