

One Nation Under God

☪^{*} Lost commands – lost land (vv.1-2)

✠ Guard commands by wisdom in Christ (vv.6-8)

In the name of Jesus, true Wisdom from above, dear Nation of God:

Americans who worship the God of the Bible treasure the Pledge of Allegiance that calls us: **One Nation Under God**. But look around. Wouldn't we all have to honestly admit how often we have strayed as individual citizens and as a nation. Do you know that every major conflict in American history has been preceded by a period of unbridled prosperity and wickedness? Arrogance learned little from the sinking of our unsinkable engineering marvel, the *Titanic*. Eventually we charged into "the War to End All Wars," punished the Axis powers with war reparations and ended up fighting the Germans again in WWII. What came between? The "Roaring Twenties," bootlegging Bonnie and Clyde. Morals loosened more into the '60's "free love" and Vietnam. Have we learned anything? Lately some are saying we should repay ourselves for the war in Afghanistan by taking some of their raw materials. Weren't we worried the world hated us as "Imperialists"? What's the knee jerk reaction? "There ought to be a law!"

No nation is perfect, except the one God created and nourishes with Word and sacrament. The Lord's holy Apostle Paul tells us Gentiles: *"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."* (Ephesians 2:19f) To really appreciate **One Nation Under God** read Moses' final sermons in Deuteronomy. See what happened to God's chosen nation of Israel. Look at their perfect laws from God and learn some lessons about...

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This was Israel's second try, you know? If you got this close to winning a major golf tournament, your second attempt would be much more intense, wouldn't it? They rebelled the first time when conquering Canaan looked too hard. Forty years later they're finally ready to cross the Jordan River, but Moses does not get to go. He failed to honor the LORD and their greatest Old Testament prophet was forbidden by God to enter the Promised Land. Moses' last sermons, collected in his fifth book called Deuteronomy, have him pleading with his fellow Israelites to stay focused on God's Word.

"Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. ² Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you."

A few good cooks have a taste for how God must feel. No matter how fantastic you make a major meal, someone always wants to slather your creation with ketchup. Microsoft has spent millions to give customers their own preferences and be able to move them from one computer to the next. But meals and Microsoft are man's creations. God makes His own materials and governs His world His way. He inspired His all sufficient Word perfectly clear. What fools are we to think we can improve His Word?

Let's take just one example. God commanded His holy people not to worship idols or sacrifice in the countryside. Worship the LORD only and only at His chosen location to prevent idolatry. How does man respond? You've heard it. They still say, "There are many ways to get into heaven."

But God's Holy Book, the Bible, says otherwise. Remember Jesus' own statement: *"I AM the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (John 14:6) Isaiah talks about a single highway that leads to heaven. Here again, prosperity and arrogance get in the way.

A relative travelling out West commented, "There's only one way to get there!" He was used to multiple routes all over southeastern Wisconsin. But imagine living in some totally remote area without any roads. Warm winters and rainy springtime would make life miserable trying to get around. Then finally the state builds one long, smooth highway. Someone will always complain it didn't go the right way. One day you see him out in the field digging. "What are you doing?" "I'm building a highway!" "What's wrong with the one over here?" "It doesn't go where I want?" "But your highway won't go anywhere?" "I don't care as long as it's my way." Sounds ridiculous, but this is the state of religion in the world today. Humanity has one hymn to sing with Frank Sinatra: "I Did It MY Way!" A mere fruitcake would be fine digging in the field, but what if he took his heavy equipment and started in on your only highway? That's how unhappy we ought to be at anyone pounding away at God's Word.

We need a more literal translation of God's Word through Moses. "***Do not add or subtract any Word of God, but GUARD the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.***" You guard your home and business from break-ins. Surely a brand new highway from men with wayward machines. **One Nation Under God**, His true nation of Israel trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, wants to guard God's Word as our greatest treasure. We see how the nation of Israel failed to guard, then finally **Lost** God's **commands** and was scattered from a **lost land**. Yet God in His faithfulness made sure He kept all His promises attached to that land of promises fulfilled. He sent the Christ anyway. Now we eagerly...

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Again, it's literally, "***GUARD them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'***" It's never been enough to just have the facts. That might make a person smart enough to tell you the molecular makeup of shoe strings, but not wise enough to tie them. Wisdom knows how to use the facts. And "***the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD.***" (Proverbs 9:10 TPA)

Think how confused hard core environmentalists have been. For years they fought every kind of nuclear reactor until some realized advances in technology have made it one of the cleanest forms of energy. I'm told that spent cores from nuclear submarines can be reused powering businesses and homes. The waste products don't have to be so polluting if wisdom can find a way to extract more energy.

The God of the Bible is a wise environmentalist, but not to "save the planet." God did that when He "***loved the world so much that He gave His one and only begotten Son in order that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.***" (John 3:16 TPA) But to bless His own creation the LORD God commanded His treasured Israelites to take care of His land. For instance, they could not eat fruit from new fruit trees until the fifth year. The first three crops were forbidden. The fourth was a first fruits offering of praise to God. God promised that waiting until the fifth year would increase their harvests for the life of the tree. Wisdom knows what God blesses is truly blessed. (Leviticus 19:23-25)

"What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?"⁸ And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?"

Anyone in love knows how God feels. You can see it sometimes following a pickup. What is it about pickups? Look! Is that just the driver or his sweetheart cuddled up close to him? God cuddled close to us, His heavenly bride, the Church, when He sent His Son through the womb of the virgin Mary. He became one of us, to carry our griefs and sorrows to the cross. *How else could I have known you, O my God! How else could I have loved you, O my God! How else could I embrace you, O my God! Who could but pray: Immanuel! Who could but praise: Immanuel!* (Jaroslav J. Vajda, CWS 707:4)

He forgave all our crimes against His glory and our pride bent on improving His Word. God's Peace came to earth in **Wisdom** that teaches us to **Guard His commands in Christ**. "***Come near to God and he will come near to you.***" (James 4:8) **One Nation Under God** with Christ our Savior, our Bridegroom, our King. Amen.