The Declaration of Independence was always considered inseparable with the Constitution since every charter by necessity must have a set of by-laws.  However, in our day, as Americans celebrate the 242nd birth of their nation on the 4th of July, they may do so without an understanding that the truths declared in that charter is the foundation upon which our liberties rest.  We have become accustomed to selective constitutional obedience in large part because we no longer interpret it from the premises set forth in the Declaration.

The concept of a charter whose truths are secured by a civil set of by-laws is set forth in Genesis 1:28; “…be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.”  These rights and responsibilities have been understood as life, liberty and property.  We honor life and multiply.  We honor liberty and protect the individual freedom to re-fill the earth through the use of tools or technology.  We honor property by subduing (or owning) it as a steward accountable to God.  These are God-given rights given to us by our Creator.  After the great flood, God repeated these rights and also ordained the institution of civil government to secure them among humanity.  Genesis 9:6 declares, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed.”  In other words, in ordaining the ministry of civil government, God gave the stewardship of life, liberty and property into the hands of man through constitutional government.

A similar concept is set forth in the New Testament.  Colossians 2:5-6 declares “For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.  As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith…”  On a personal level, being converted and receiving Christ as Lord is our charter.  However, how we live is our by-laws.  The good “order” (literally the Greek word for constitution) secures our heart-felt steadfastness.  Put another way, our profession of Christ as Lord should be seen in how we “walk” or live.  As it is personally, so a nation declares the source of their faith through their charter, but their constitution (or by-laws) help them function consistently in protecting that profession.  Perhaps the inconsistency of Christians living out what they profess is simply reflected in our national departure of the Constitution from the Declaration of Independence!

The Charters and By-Laws of the original English colonies on the eastern seaboard illustrate the practice of our forefathers in this same regard.  The Jamestown Charters of 1606, 1609, 1612 and 1618 were finally secured in the Legislative Assembly of 1619.  The Mayflower Compact functioned as the Charter for the Plymouth Colony of Pilgrims, but their constitution of 1636 served to secure the God-given rights that had been declared in Provincetown Harbor on November 11, 1620.  The Charter declared God as the source of their rights in its opening, “In the name of God, Amen” and further explained that the Pilgrims came “for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith.”

On June 7, 1776, when Richard Henry Lee moved that the colonies “are, and of right out to be, free and independent States” the motion also included that “a plan of confederation be prepared and transmitted to the respective colonies for their consideration and approbation.”  In other words, Lee’s motion contained both the need for a charter and a set of by-laws.  The charter was the Declaration, completed on the 2nd of July, and signed by John Hancock and Charles Thomson on the 4th.  However, the set of by-laws weren’t confirmed until 1781 when our first Constitution was ratified by the States.  The second (and present) Constitution replaced this in 1789.

A charter declares the independent existence of a nation as well as its ultimate sovereign.  Clearly the Declaration fulfilled this role when it declared, “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…”  The Creator God was declared as the ultimate sovereign of our nation as well as the source of individual rights when it states, “All men are created equal…they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness… appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world….”

Not only does the Declaration declare God as the source of individual rights, but it also requires the need for a set of civil by-laws to protect them.  In fact, it anticipates this when it says, “That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men.”  In order to secure these rights, it is necessary to have a Constitution whose purpose is to protect, by due process, inalienable rights.  The Constitution states that it was “done in convention by the unanimous consent of the states present, the seventeenth day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred eighty-seven, and of the independence of the United States of America, the twelfth.”  In other words, the Constitution rests directly on the Declaration, and is inseparable from it.

Two-thirds of the text of the Declaration articulates how the King of England abused his power and violated the stated rights of the Colonies.  The Articles in 1781 and then the Constitution in 1789 were written specifically to replace an external King with the people as king.  Instead of Parliament the Constitution recognizes the separation of powers (Art. I-III; legislative, executive and judicial).  Instead of the King’s prerogative we now have State’s rights (Article IV).  There was no way to amend the English constitution, and so we now have Article V for the amendment process.  Parliamentary supremacy, or a government of men, is now replaced with a government of law or the constitution as the supreme law of the land; Article VI.  The lack of lawful appeal has been replaced with interposition (to resist the encroachment of power by another branch) aa defined in Articles IV and VII.

Throughout our history, we have had a crisis of power and it has been solved by returning to the Declaration.  Today, we are functioning as if we have no Declaration, wandering about as if God does not exist and rights can be debated away.  We are substituting government granted privileges for unalienable rights, the supremacy of judges for the higher law of God, and the loss of sovereignty in the people and states to an all-powerful national government.  Without the Declaration as our conscious foundation, we have strayed in our lawful behavior.  Just as believers must restore their walk with God before their conduct will change, so we must restore the Declaration before we can return to constitutional government.  It is time to restore our declaration that God is sovereign!

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