

IN THE MARGINS: A patriot's faith

By Tony Martin

Editor

As the sun rises on another July Fourth, our hearts swell with pride. Fireworks light up the sky, and flags flutter in the breeze, reminding us of the freedoms we cherish. But amid the celebrations, there's a deeper reflection to be had – what does it mean to be a Christian first and a patriot next?

Our world and its systems are broken. Everywhere we look, we see evidence of this. Wars rage, injustices persist, and divisions deepen. It's easy to get swept up in the tide of current events, to become overly concerned with the political, social, and economic upheavals that seem to define our times. As Christians, however, our first allegiance is not to any country or ideology but to God.

Being a patriot is not a sin, nor is it something to be ashamed of. In fact, being concerned for your country, caring about its future, and being passionate about its values can be commendable. But our passion and concern must be rightly ordered. Colossians 3:1-4 (ESV) reminds us, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

This scripture calls us to lift our gaze above the earthly realm and focus on the eternal. It's a challenge to prioritize our heavenly citizenship over our earthly one. Our identity in Christ should shape every other aspect of our lives, including

how we engage with our nation.

Be concerned. Yes, it's important to be aware of what's happening in the world and to care about justice, peace, and the well-being of others. But let's not allow these concerns to eclipse our faith. It's easy to get caught up in the news cycle, social media debates, and the latest controversies. However, we must remember that our ultimate hope does not lie in any human institution or leader but in God.

Be patriotic. Love your country, pray for its leaders, and strive to make it a better place. But remember, our earthly nations are temporary. They rise and fall, but the Kingdom of God endures forever. As believers, we are called to be salt and light in the world, reflecting God's love and truth in every sphere of influence we have.

Be passionate. It's okay to have strong opinions and to advocate for what you believe is right. But let's do so with grace and humility. In a world that often values winning arguments over winning hearts, let's choose a different path. Let's engage in conversations that build bridges rather than walls, that seek understanding rather than division.

But above all, be God's. Our primary allegiance is to our Heavenly Father. When we keep our eyes on the eternal, we gain perspective on the temporal. We are reminded that our true home is not here but in heaven, and our ultimate goal is not to build a perfect society but to bring glory to God.

In these turbulent times, it's easy to lose sight of this. We may find ourselves entangled in debates where no one wins and relationships are lost. It's important to remember that our witness is often more about how we handle disagreements than the opinions we hold. Let's strive to reflect Christ in our interactions, showing love and respect even when we disagree.

As we celebrate our nation's independence, let's also celebrate our dependence on God. Let's remember that our true

freedom comes from Christ and that our highest calling is to follow Him. By keeping our eyes on the eternal, we can navigate the complexities of our world with wisdom and grace.

Being a Christian and a patriot are not mutually exclusive. We can be both, but our faith must always come first. Let's be concerned, patriotic, and passionate, but above all, let's be God's. By doing so, we can make a difference in our world while keeping our hearts anchored in eternity. Happy Independence Day, and may God bless you and your loved ones!