

# 1: We Hold These Truths

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America is rare among the nations of the world in that it was founded on moral principles, which reflect both a temporal and a spiritual order. This dual recognition is most evident in the Declaration of Independence, the document that established this nation. It states:

*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.*

This single sentence sets forth both a foundational belief and a vision for the establishment of the new nation. It is both doctrinal and political, theoretical and practical. It specifies universal truths and implies an intention to create a government that puts them into practice.



First, the sentence recognizes a Creator, that is, a Being above man who created all men as equals. As equals in God's sight with the King and those who governed them in Great Britain, the American colonists were entitled to "separate station" in the world. Not receiving it, they could dissolve the political bonds that tied them to England.

Their Creator also endowed them, and us, with certain "unalienable Rights." Those rights may be abridged by other men who are more powerful at a certain point in time, but they still are rights that all men possess. These rights are unalienable and cannot be revoked, surrendered, or even freely given away.

The first right mentioned is Life. Human life is sacred because it involves the creative action of God. It is an essential aspect of the covenant our Creator formed with man, providing us with the capability to acquire knowledge of Him so that we can share in His love. Since God has given us life for a purpose, only God has the right to remove it. For man, the right to life is unalienable, and even the one who possesses it is not entitled to surrender it.

The second right is Liberty. Without freedom of thought and action, a person cannot fully pursue the purpose for which he was created. He cannot use his reason and free will to guide his actions toward an eternal end. But in a "nation under God", liberty was not meant to be unfettered. Man must abide by the laws of the Creator and, in turn, by the laws of the state that was founded on and adheres to God's principles. Thus, freedom must be an ordered relationship between governed and governors, between the individual and the state. Order in society should not be imposed from above, but should result from an individual's free obedience to the restraints and imperatives that stem from

inwardly possessed moral principles. As Lord Acton wrote, freedom is “not the power of doing what we like, but the right of being able to do what we ought.”

The third right is the pursuit of Happiness. Happiness involves more than the pleasures of this life. Man was created not only to know, love and serve God, but to be happy with Him in the next life. The pursuit of happiness, therefore, has a spiritual end, one established by God, and thus it too is unalienable.

The belief in an Almighty Being and unalienable rights flows from the Christian backgrounds of the Founding Fathers. They believed that men are created in the image and likeness of God, given free will, and have an eternal purpose to be attained through one’s actions in this life. The political principles that govern this nation – popular sovereignty, consent of the governed, separation of powers, limited government, equality under law – all stem from those beliefs. Today, there is widespread dissent from these beliefs, which gives rise to the question as to whether a national consensus on fundamental principles can continue to exist and be vigorous enough to maintain America’s body politic.