

What are some of the implications of the Founders' and the Declaration's Assertion that "all men are created equal"?

It cannot be denied that the equality-among-men that Thomas Jefferson, the Committee of Five, and the delegates to the Second Continental Congress promoted and upheld in the Declaration of Independence is not one achieved through societal manipulation or government intervention, but one that *already exists*. Just as the rights the Founders affirmed were innate or "unalienable" because they are rooted in divine creation, so, too, was and is human equality itself. It is an equality, not of outcomes, but of opportunity; so it is an equality government has a duty to recognize and protect. No, not all have the same opportunities; but all ought to be *equally free* to pursue the opportunities they have and the opportunities they carve out for themselves without violating the unalienable rights of others. Government can't engineer it equality, for if it did, it would create an *unequal* playing field, favoring some over others.

What about slavery? Even though the Declaration of Independence does not condemn slavery explicitly, it does *so implicitly!* The concept that "all men are created equal" became one of the most powerful ever upheld by a nation. We can be grateful for this in many ways, but a word of warning is in order.

In recent decades, Americans foolishly have rallied around the banner of equality alone when, in what is perhaps the best known statement on America's "birth certificate," the meaning of the word *equal* is informed, tempered, and shaped by the word *created*. *Created*, in turn, is linked inseparably to the divine title *Creator*. The implications of these realities, of course, are enormous.

What are some of the implications? In other words, what additional qualities or ideals does the Founders' perspective on equality affirm?

First, it emphasizes accountability. We're talking here about accountability to God as well as accountability to our dependents, those who rely on us as free and responsible individuals. Having been made by God in His image, we are to be creative, productive, and diligent as we go about managing the portion of the world God has delegated to us to manage (see Gen. 1:26-28). As we indicated, we also are accountable to work to meet our own needs and the needs of the members of our family. Meeting needs is not government's job.

Second, the Founders' perspective on equality affirms personal duty and responsibility. This overlaps with accountability, but it also merits separate consideration. Since equality means, among other things, that the government is prohibited from

hindering citizens from being creative, productive, and prosperous as long as they don't violate others' rights, the first tasks on one's list to tackle should be his or her own duties and responsibilities.

Third, the fact that humans are equal because God created them that way is a strong pillar upholding human dignity. It is on people alone, and on no other members of His creation, that God has stamped His image. Human beings — males and females of all ages — are special.

A **fourth** element of God-given equality among human beings is **purpose**. God expects members of the human family to use their gifts and abilities to engage in constructive and productive work.

Fifth and sixth, equality as the Founders viewed it affirms natural opportunities, as well as incentive and initiative to take advantage of such opportunities and to carve out even more — as long as those involved do not violate the inherent rights of their fellow citizens in the process.

A **seventh** element of God-given equality in a nation that affirms God-ordained liberty is **limited government**. Because God has created all men equal, equality is already a reality. Government is not to be tasked with "rearranging the playing field" to achieve equality. Government's job is primarily to protect the inherent rights of citizens. It does this by staying out of citizens' way itself and by punishing or penalizing those who interfere and violate the inherent rights of their fellow citizens. Government's job is described in Scripture in Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17.

Eighth, the ideal of equality-in-men as presented in the Declaration of Independence not only is an affirmation and reflection of the biblical concept of human equality; it also constitutes an affirmation of "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God."

Ninth, the recognition of equality as innate among all citizens is essential for maintaining liberty. Only if men are unequal will government and a nation's people ever have any excuse to mistreat a citizen (or citizens), denying him or her (or them) the justice that all deserve *just because they exist*. Here we are referring to biblical justice, not social justice, which by definition requires government intervention and manipulation.

Tenth, the Founders' perspective on equality echoes down through the centuries to warn 21st-century Americans that the contemporary American definition of equality, which calls on government to create and maintain it, is a deadly threat to ordered liberty.