THE CHRISTIAN AND THE
Pledge of Allegiance
TO THE FLAG

Lester Burkholder
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How does a conservative, nonresistant Christian respond when asked to pledge allegiance to the United States flag? Don’t they represent another country?

Should a Christian participate in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag? This article gives some directive on this matter. It is questionable if a Christian should be present at some of the places where they recite the Pledge of Allegiance, such as sporting events and gatherings with military involvements. However, Christians at times do need to attend township or county meetings where the Pledge of Allegiance is recited by the group.

History

The Pledge of Allegiance was written by Francis Bellamy. It was published in the Youth’s Companion, a child’s magazine, on September 8, 1892. President Benjamin Harrison issued a proclamation on October 12, 1892, (Presidential proclamation 355) in remembrance of the 400th year of Columbus discovering the Americas, that public schools recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The purpose was to increase patriotism and patriotic education focusing on school children.

The original wording was as follows: I pledge allegiance to my flag and the Republic for which it stands: one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice to all.

The Pledge of Allegiance was amended by substituting the words of “my flag” with the words “the flag of the United States of America.” They officially adopted the change on Flag day, June 14, 1924. The words “under God” were added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 by President Dwight Eisenhower and a joint resolution of Congress. During that time the United States was portraying the Soviet Union as a “godless communistic nation.” The motive was to portray the United States as a protector of religion.

The current Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag is as follows: I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and the Republic for which it stands: one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice to all.

In 1943, a decision was made by the Supreme Court that states, no one may require public school students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. All States except five, (Hawaii, Iowa, Oklahoma, Vermont, and Wyoming) allow time for the pledge to be recited. Nevertheless, it is at
the discretion of the local school board and the individual teacher.

The code of conduct when reciting the Pledge of Allegiance is that civilians shall stand at attention and face the flag, with their hands over their hearts. The men are to have uncovered heads. Armed Service personnel in uniform face the flag and give a military salute.

**The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag Defined**

What is a pledger (a person who pledges) actually saying when he recites the Pledge of Allegiance?

Webster’s dictionary explains the meaning of the word pledge as: *a strong promise or agreement.* A pledge is similar to an oath, but with the reference of God removed. A pledge is stronger than a promise, but not considered as binding as an oath.

Allegiance means: *a formal declaration of a citizen to support and be loyal to 1: a person’s ruler, government, or country. 2: loyalty to the cause of a citizen’s government or leader.* A pledger is not only professing allegiance to the United States of America, he is also agreeing with and supporting all its programs and agendas as well. While United States has many benefits which we greatly appreciate, there are also many things tolerated which are clearly contrary to Biblical principles. By reciting the Pledge of Allegiance a person is pledging his affirmation to all the workings, projects and laws of the country represented by the flag.

**Biblical Guidance**

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation. James 5:12

A pledge is a type of oath with the reference to God removed. Looking at James 5:12, we notice two types of oaths which *brethren* (Christians) are instructed to refrain from using. The first is described as *neither by heaven* which is referring to an oath using the Name of God as an assurance of sincerity.

The second is described as *neither by the earth.* They translate the word earth from the Greek language (GE Strong’s 1093) which means: a region of the solid part of terrain, a country. The Bible instructs Christians not to make an oath to an earthly region of the world.
“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil” Matthew 5:33-37. These are the words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount. The people before the time of Jesus had a practice of making oaths to strengthen their word before man and God. In Verse 33 Jesus is telling them to fulfill their former oaths, not to foreswear themselves (perjury) but from this day forward not to take any oaths. Neither by God, by the earth, nor by Jerusalem. For a Christian, our word is to be sufficient. Our country gives us the privilege of affirming instead of using God’s name in an oath when we testify our sincerity at public meetings.

No man can serve two masters. We cannot pledge our loyalty to two masters and be pleasing to both. When the choice is God or the government, our first priority is God. Jesus said, “My Kingdom is not of this world.” We are to be loyal to the kingdom of Jesus. If we have pledged our loyalty to the kingdom of Jesus, now and forever, how can we pledge our loyalty to the flag of the United States of America. The flag is simply an outward symbol representing the United States of America. This is acknowledged in the pledge itself. The Biblical word idolatry has many different definitions. One definition of the word idolatry is giving homage or worship to a symbol or image of the real thing. The flag is a bit of cloth representing our nation. Honoring the flag is not the proper way to give our respect and thanksgiving for the land in which we physically live. The proper way to express our thankfulness for the many blessings of our nation and the religious freedom we are privileged to have is by obeying its laws and precepts as far as we can. We need to be good honest citizens, and pay our taxes as the government requires. We also should remember our leaders and nation in prayer as commanded by the Scriptures.

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour” 1Timothy 2:1-3.

There is a lesson recorded in Daniel 3 that also gives us some direction on this subject. May we be challenged by the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Because these young men’s hearts were wholly devoted to God, they were willing to sacrifice their lives rather than bowing to the golden image.
In Conclusion

We live in the world, but are not to be of the world. Our goal and focus is a heavenly kingdom. Our heart is fixed on the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ. We live in the United States of America. We are called to be good citizens, pay our taxes, and obey its laws if they do not violate Biblical principles. We are not required by law to Pledge Allegiance to the Flag. When we are present where the Pledge of Allegiance is recited we need to show respect to our nation and its leaders. We may chose to stand with our hands to our side, or remain seated with folded hands, bow our head, and offer a silent prayer of thankfulness for the land we live in, and also ask the Lord to direct and guide our leader’s thoughts and actions. By directing our prayers heavenward we are contributing more to the well-being of the United States of America than an individual's Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

In our grandparents’ school years when everyone went to public schools, the school day started with prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. Over the years they discontinued prayer in the public schools, but the Pledge of Allegiance remained. Today with our Christian schools or home schools we have a tremendous opportunity. We can teach our children proper respect and separation between our Christian life and the secular government. Let us be consistent in our testimony, not only to refrain from reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in our schools, but also at any public function.

-Lester K. Burkholder

The Christian’s Pledge of Allegiance

I pledge allegiance to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and to the Kingdom of God the Father, and to the filling of the Holy Spirit, that my hands, my heart, my eyes, ears and mind, will be controlled by Him and not by the world. I make this commitment to go where He calls me, walk as He leads me and yield my hopes and ambitions to do His will and extend His Kingdom, for His glory forever. Amen. -Author unknown

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.
Matthew 6:33a