



# *The Biblical Foundation of American Government*

by  
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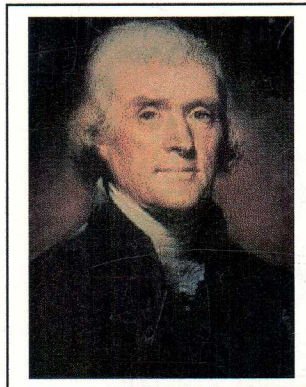
A great debate rages in our nation over this question: Was the United States founded on the principles of the Bible? Much has been written about what the Founders said, but it is fascinating to research what they actually said, in effect letting the Founders speak for themselves on this issue.

Before we embark on that discussion, however, let's first examine the religious beliefs of the Founding Fathers. Were they atheists, agnostics and deists as many claim? Or were they devout Christians who believed that the Bible was the inspired Word of God and the only authority for governmental power?

It will prove helpful to define the terms that are frequently used to describe our Founders as they are often confused or even used synonymously. An atheist is one who professes a belief that there is no God. An agnostic is one who professes that nothing can be known beyond what is visible and tangible, therefore it is impossible to know whether there is a God or not. A deist is one who believes in a God who remains aloof and is no longer involved in the affairs of mankind. Deists often proscribe to the "clock-maker theory" which states that God functions much like a celestial clock-maker who designed the universe, wound it up and now lets it run on its own.

Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration, is often called a "deist", although he called himself a Christian.

"I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus."



*Letter to Charles Thompson,  
Jan 9, 1816*

However, Jefferson did not meet the orthodox definition of a Christian since he denied the deity of Christ. Nevertheless, he considered the teachings of Jesus to contain the purest principles of

morality. He even wrote *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, which outlined the teachings of Jesus as contained in the gospels, as a moral guide for the Indians.

Some quotations from Jefferson indicate that his religious belief system was far from that of a modern day deist:

And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure if we have lost the only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath?

*Notes on the State of Virginia*

Does this sound like the words of a deist who believes God does not intervene in the affairs of men?



Again, Jefferson said:

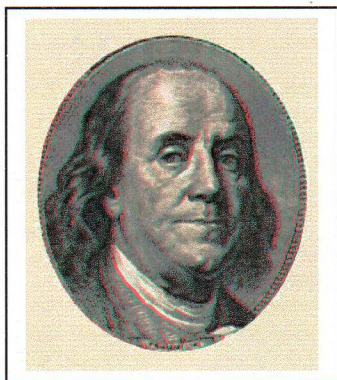
[T]he liberty to worship our Creator in the way we think most agreeable to His will [is] a liberty deemed in other countries incompatible with good government and yet proved by our experience to be its best support.

*Letter to Capt. John Thomas,  
Nov 18, 1801*

The practice of morality being necessary for the well-being of society, He [God] has taken care to impress its precepts so indelibly on our hearts that they shall not be effaced by the subtleties of our brain. We all agree in the obligation of the moral precepts of Jesus and nowhere will they be found delivered in greater purity than in his discourses.

*Letter to James Fishback,  
Sept 27, 1809*

Benjamin Franklin was perhaps the most colorful of the Founders and admittedly one of the least religious. He called himself a deist, yet rejected the clock-maker theory, advocated prayer and believed that God did intervene in the affairs of men. The following address by Franklin to the Constitutional Convention was carefully recorded by James Madison:



In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings? In the beginning of the Contest with G. Britain, when we were sensible of danger we had daily prayer in this room for the divine protection.— Our prayers, Sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a Superintending providence in our favor. To that kind providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national

felicity. And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that *God governs in the affairs of men*. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that "except the Lord build the House they labour in vain that build it." I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel: We shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and bye word down to future ages. And what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing Governments by Human Wisdom and leave it to chance, war and conquest.

I therefore beg leave to move—that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the Clergy of the City be requested to officiate in that service—

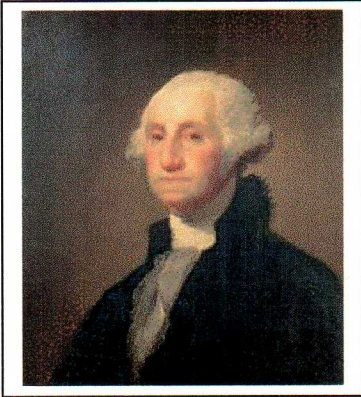
*Address to Constitutional Convention  
June 28, 1787 (emphasis added)*

George Washington was an incredibly devout Christian. His Farewell Address was required reading in America's schools for well over a century. Now it is rarely seen. He had a lot to say about religion, morality and the Bible.

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of man and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connexions with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice?



And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of



peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. It is substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government.

The rule, indeed, extends with more or less force to every species of free government. Who, that is a sincere friend to it, can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?

*Farewell Address - 1796*

Washington felt that, to be a patriot, you had to support religious principles. He also cautioned against the modern view that morality and religion can be kept separate and still be effective.

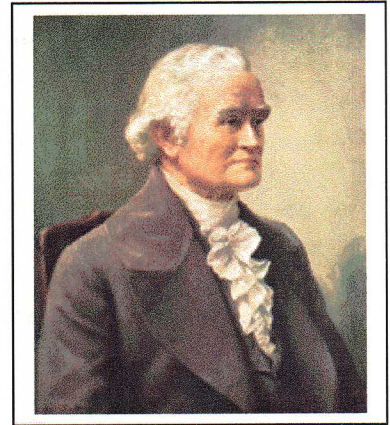
Noah Webster was another famous Founder. He wrote the first American dictionary and was instrumental in influencing government leaders in his day.

The most perfect maxims and examples for regulating your social conduct and domestic economy, as well as the best rules of morality and religion, are to be found in the Bible. . . . The moral principles and precepts found in the scriptures ought to form the *basis of all our civil constitutions and laws*. These principles and precepts have truth, immutable truth, for their foundation. . . . All the evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible. . . . For instruction then in social, religious and *civil* duties resort to the scriptures for the best precepts.

*Advice to the Young*  
(emphasis added)

Webster also stated:

The opinion that human reason left without the constant control of Divine laws and commands will ... give duration to a popular government is as chimerical [unlikely] as the most



extravagant ideas that enter the head of a maniac.... Where will you find any code of laws among civilized men in which the commands and prohibitions are not founded on Christian principles?

James Wilson was one of the select few who signed both the Declaration and the Constitution. He was also one of the original Supreme Court Justices. He wrote:

Far from being rivals or enemies, religion and law are twin sisters, friends, and mutual assistants. Indeed, these two sciences run into each other. The divine law, as discovered by reason and the moral sense, forms an essential part of both.

*Of the General Principles of Law and Obligation*

James McHenry, a signer of the Constitution, said:

[T]he Holy Scriptures ... can alone secure to society, order and peace, and to our courts of justice and constitutions of government, purity, stability, and usefulness. In vain, without the Bible, we increase penal laws and draw entrenchments [protections] around our institutions.

Robert Winthrop, Speaker of the U.S. House in the mid-1800's, said:

Men, in a word, must necessarily be controlled either by a power within them or by a power without them; either by the Word of God or by the strong arm of man; either by the Bible or by the bayonet.



Abraham Baldwin, a signer of the Constitution, said:

[A] free government ... can only be happy when the public principle and opinions are properly directed ... by religion and education. It should therefore be among the first objects of those who wish well to the national prosperity to encourage and support the principles of religion and morality.

John Witherspoon, another signer of the Declaration, said:

Those who are vested with civil authority ought ... to *promote* religion and good morals among all those under their government.  
*(emphasis added)*

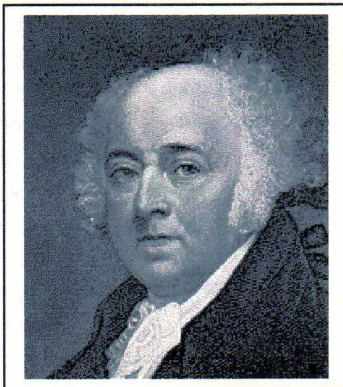
[W]hatsoever State among us shall continue to make piety [respect for God] and virtue the *standard* of public honor will enjoy the greatest inward peace, the greatest national happiness, and in every outward conflict will discover the greatest constitutional strength.  
*(emphasis added)*

Samuel Adams, who was a signer of the Declaration and considered the “Father of the American Revolution”, said:

[T]he only true basis of all government [is] the laws of God and nature. For government is an ordinance of Heaven, designed by the all benevolent Creator.

And, John Adams, a signer of the Declaration and our second President, added these words:

Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.



These are but a small sampling of quotes from the Founders regarding the important issue of America’s Biblical heritage. They had much more to say. In fact, a ten year study by the University of Houston showed that the Founders quoted the Bible more than any other

source. Thirty-four percent of the Founders’ direct quotes were from the Bible. That’s four times the number of the next most often quoted source. Interestingly, when an examination is done of the remaining 66% of the quoted sources, most of them were authors who were basing their writings on the Bible. Which means that an amazing 94% of the Founders’ quotes were either directly or indirectly from the Bible.

In regards to the question, “Was the United States founded on the principles of the Bible?” – draw your own conclusions.



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