

Summary notes from a portion of the video

Our Godly Heritage

with David Barton

Our Founding Fathers expected Christian principles to be important in public life and politics.

John Quincy Adams believed that Christian principles and civil government must be linked together in an "indissoluble" bond. In 1837, at a Fourth of July celebration, he said:

"Is it not that, in the chain of human events, the birthday of the nation is indissolubly linked with the birthday of the Saviour? That it forms a leading event in the progress of the gospel dispensation. Is it not that the Declaration of Independence first organized the social compact on the foundation of the Redeemer's mission upon earth? That it laid the cornerstone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity?"

John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and one of the three men most responsible for our having the Constitution, agreed when he stated that we should elect Christians as our political leaders:

"Providence [God] has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty - as well as the privilege and interest - of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers."

George Washington's Farewell Address was, at one time, thought to be the most significant political speech ever given in the nation. It was published as a textbook for students. It was used as an example for over 150 years - but not today. The speech contained a dozen warnings to the nation, four of which are overtly religious. (Since 1990, his speech is showing up again in college textbooks, but it is missing those four religious points.) In his speech Washington states that religion and morality are necessary in politics for anyone who would call himself a patriot:

"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."

The United States is a great nation because it was a Christian nation.

The United States is the world's longest on-going constitutional republic. It has remained for 200 years under one document and one form of government. During the same 200 years, France has had seven forms of government; Italy has had 51 forms.

Why has our Constitution been so successful? A ten-year study by the University of Houston hoped to answer that question by studying 15,000 writings from the time of the Founders. The study found that 34% of the Founder's quotes came directly from the Bible, followed by a distant 8.3% from Montesquieu and 7.9% from Blackstone.

Charles Finney, while studying to become a lawyer, read the law textbooks of Blackstone. Blackstone included so much of the Bible in his textbooks that Finney was

introduced to his Savior, became a Christian, and went on to become the well-known revivalist preacher.

In 1892, the Supreme Court ruled in the case *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*:

"No purpose of action against religion can be imputed to any legislation, state or national, because this is a religious people...This is a Christian nation."

The Court provided 87 historical precedents to support its decision.

In 1844, the US Supreme Court case *Vidal v. Girard* answered a public school that wanted to teach morality without teaching religion:

"Why may not the Bible, and especially the New Testament...be read and taught as a divine revelation in the [school] - its general precepts expounded...and its glorious principles of morality inculcated?... Where can the purest principles of morality be learned so clearly or so perfectly as from the New Testament?"

The Supreme Court ruled that public schools would teach the Bible.

The Supreme Court case *People v. Ruggles* (1811) convicted a man of attacking the country because he wrote and distributed a profane attack against Jesus and the Bible.

Separation of Church and State?

The separation of church and state is thought by many to be found in the First Amendment:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Nearly a dozen iterations of the First Amendment were made before the final wording. Also, several discussions of the Amendment are found in the US Congressional Records (June 7 - Sept 25, 1789). These clearly show the intent of the Founders in the First Amendment: They did not want one denomination running the nation. This was the understanding of the Amendment for 150 years.

For example, in a 1799 case of *Runkel v. Winemiller*, the court reported:

"By our form of government, the Christian religion is the established religion; and all sects and denominations of Christians are placed on the same equal footing."

In 1853 a group petitioned Congress to separate Christian principles from government. It was referred to House and Senate Judiciary Committees. The House Report stated:

"Had the people [the Founding Fathers], during the Revolution a suspicion of any attempt to war against Christianity, that Revolution would have been strangled in its cradle...At the time of the adoption of the Constitution and its amendments, the universal sentiment was that Christianity should be encouraged, but not any one sect [denomination]."

Two months later the House Judiciary Committee also stated:

"The great vital and conservative element in our system is the belief of our people in the pure doctrines and the divine truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

The Committees would not separate Christian principles from government.

Thomas Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists assured them that government would not interfere with religious activities. Jefferson used the phrase "wall of separation between church and State" in that letter. In 1878 the Supreme Court used that letter as evidence that Christian principles could be used in government policies.

It wasn't until 1947, in *Everson v. Board of Education* where the Supreme Court took 8 words out of context from Jefferson's letter and stated:

"The First Amendment has erected 'a wall of separation between church and state.' That wall must be kept high and impregnable."

From that time on, the Court began to assert a "separation of church and state" as if it was a fact.

In 1962 the Supreme Court removed prayer from schools. It redefined the word "church" (federally-established denomination) to mean any religious activity performed in public. The Court continued in 1963 and 1967 to remove the Bible, religious instruction, and the Ten Commandments from public schools.