

The Pastor's Role in Human Government: Then and Now

During this present time of cultural and political division, many, including Christians, wonder if this once great nation can survive. Because most are willfully ignorant of this nation's historical roots, the bulk of such discussions lack the historical perspective necessary for cogent debate. Regrettably, the greatest knowledge deficit relates to God's Word, the very area of expertise of our Founding Fathers, who grounded this Republic in the teaching of God's Word as accurately expounded from many Colonial pulpits. We owe our nation's very existence to these pastors of different denominational affiliations along the Atlantic coast and the frontier wilderness of the Colonies, men who understood their role in human government and were unafraid to serve publicly as God's servants and bold communicators of His Truth. Why did these men, in face of great personal danger, choose to teach the biblical principles of governance and civil disobedience and stand firm in those Truths? An understanding of history, human government, and the purpose of God's gifting to pastors is key to understanding the cause of the original greatness of our country and to regaining the spiritual stability and confidence that sustained our courageous forefathers in their battle for liberty and justice for all.

Understanding history is critical for every Bible-believing Christian because God the Holy Spirit wrote the foundation of Christian thinking, the Bible, within an historical context. From creation to Revelation, every spiritual Truth is grounded in historical reality. Furthermore, our personal histories and the history of our nation and cultural milieu try to infiltrate our thoughts and decisions. As servants of Christ, we must be aware of the danger of such influences. Early American clergyman Jonathan Edwards understood that every person must understand history, saying, "Men will trust in God no further than they know Him; and they cannot be in the exercise of faith in Him one ace further than they have a sight of His fullness and faithfulness in exercise."¹ Man can know God's "fullness and faithfulness" only if he recognizes God's hand in the events of the past.

Any Christian attempting to think biblically about history—and we all should try to do so—must live in exclusive obedience to the Scripture's epistemic authority because a "biblical theory of knowledge proclaims the absolute requirement of God's revealed truth as the tacit foundation of understanding and knowledge."² Most American Christians have abandoned this area of obedience. "Americans themselves have too often taken their history for granted, not having had to live continuously on intimate terms with it.... A pragmatic cast of mind put more emphasis on results than on antecedents. Physical separation from Europe, and repeated declarations of intellectual independence from it, ratified a sense of emancipation from the past."³ Such blind ignorance in no way mitigates the Truth that every today rests on all the yesterdays that came before. The decisions of all those in the past have consequences for those in the future. Indeed, the sin of the first man Adam continues to haunt us today!

Scripture teaches that a people's view of its own history impacts its thoughts and actions. Throughout the history of Israel, God continually reminded the Jews that their rebellion came from forgetting their history, particularly all He had done for them in the past. The unnamed prophet sent by God before the call of Gideon gave Israel an historical reminder of their God and His gracious dealings with them. Such reminders of God's grace and their disobedience came from prophets throughout the life of national Israel. Our adversary, Satan, understands that any

¹ Jonathan Edwards *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* "Religious Affectations." [www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/75887 Jonathan Edwards](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/75887_Jonathan_Edwards).

² Bahnsen, Greg L. *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2002) 37.

³ John Higham, ed. *The Reconstruction of American History* (NY: Hutchinson & Co, 1962) 9.

nation that forgets its history also forgets the One who gave it power and, thus, is destroyed for that rebellion. No wonder the Apostle Peter warned us to be on the alert regarding our formidable adversary Satan! (1 Peter 5:8) That alertness by believers and the bold presentation of God's Truth by pastor/teachers is all that separates us from destruction as a nation.

Biblical understanding and interpretation of history begins with the realization that God created the universe for His own authoritative purpose. According to the infallible Bible, God began the historical process at creation and continues to control the outcome of His entire plan for His creatures. Not only does the Bible identify the Creator of the historical process, but it also provides the model for interpreting history. "The overarching assumption for the Christian historian is a belief in the sovereignty of God in all human affairs and the decreed outworking of His purposes."⁴ Jonas Clark, the pastor hero of the Battle of Lexington, stated in the opening line of his sermon to commemorate the battle, "Next to the acknowledgement of the existence of a Deity, there is no one principle of greater importance in religion than a realizing belief of the Divine government and providence as superintending the affairs of the universe and intimately concerned in whatever happens to mankind, both as nations and kingdoms, and as individuals."⁵ The biblically knowledgeable pastors of the colonies understood the importance of history, knowing that history reveals God's actions and character; consequently, they understood that "to ignore history was to remain in heathen darkness, and to distort or delimit its fullness was self-deceiving."⁶ We know God and revere His character only as much as we recognize His grace and mercy, His power and omniscience in past and present events.

God is the Creator of all things, including time, the basis for history. As the omnipotent and omniscient Creator, He has a specific plan for human history that sinful man cannot thwart. (Psalm 33:10-11; Isaiah 14:27; 25:1) God's perfect plan involves authority. Because He is the Creator, God has absolute authority over all His creation. Because He is God, He possesses the unconditional power and complete knowledge to carry out His authoritative plan. Even though He could have kept all authority for Himself, Creator/God chose to delegate His authority to the Divine Institutions of personal responsibility, marriage, family, government, and nationalism, all of which He established in history. He holds man accountable to the specific authorities He assigned to each Divine Institutions.

A Divine Institution is an absolute social structure established by God for the stability of the entire human race.⁷ God designed these Divine Institutions for believers and unbelievers equally, unlike Christian institutions which He designed for believers only. God initiated three of the five Divine Institutions, personal responsibility, marriage and family, on the same day He created the first man and woman in His image. In the post-fall environment of Noah's flood and the tower of Babel, God established the final two of the five Divine Institutions, human government and nationalism, both needed to prevent man from destroying the human race through wide-spread rebellion against the Creator.

God established the first Divine Institution, personal responsibility, on the sixth day of creation when He assigned man responsibilities related to work (cultivate and guard) and obedience to His command to not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:15-17). When man chose to ignore these responsibilities, he immediately died spiritually, an unambiguous sign that God holds man responsible for his decisions. Immediately, sinful man

⁴ John D. Hannah, Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2001) 30.

⁵ Jonas Clark, The Battle of Lexington (Ventura, CA: Nordskog Publishing, 2007) 13.

⁶ Higham, 11.

⁷ Charlie Clough, Biblical Framework, MP3 Audio recording lesson 11.

again attempted to shirk his responsibilities as seen in the conversation God initiated with him and his sinful wife (Genesis 3:8-13). Man in rebellion against God always seeks to ignore his responsibilities and assign blame to others, especially with regard to the clear commands of the Creator. The more a nation tries to remove personal responsibility from its citizens, the greater the perversion of this first Divine Institution and the greater the need for divine judgment. A Christian historian quickly ascertains that a nation's attitude toward personal responsibility affects its prosperity and longevity. Beware: The same is true for individuals.

Later on the sixth day of creation, God established the Divine Institution of marriage by uniting the newly-created man and woman in marriage (Genesis 2:18-24). "With the words of verse 24 God instituted monogamous marriage. Like all Divine Institutions, it was established for man's good and cannot be violated with impunity."⁸ Any nation that perverts the institution of marriage between one man and one woman until death do them part suffers instability, an inevitable result of rebelling against God's mandated order for civilization. That nation will self-destruct if such perversion goes unchecked. When a biblical historian recognizes that a nation has begun denigrating marriage and that this perversion has gone unchecked, he knows to expect the beginning of its descent into loss of power if not outright oblivion.

The third Divine Institution, which God also established on the sixth day of creation, is the family. Although not a space-time reality until after the fall, God established the family with His mandate that man be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:27-28). In His command to be personally responsible to subdue and rule the earth, God included the command to be fruitful and multiply; therefore, subduing the planet in the biblical manner is connected to the family as the basic unit of society. The success of a family is predicated on its fulfillment of the Divine Institutions of personal responsibility and marriage. James Wilson, a signer of the Constitution and Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, emphasized the importance of marriage and family in his legal commentaries on the Constitution. He explained, "Whether we consult the soundest deductions of reason or resort to the best information conveyed to us by history or listen to the undoubted intelligence communicated in Holy Writ, we shall find that to the institution of marriage the true origin of society must be traced. By that institution the felicity of Paradise was consummated.... Legislators have with great propriety [correctness] ... provided as far as municipal law can provide against the violation of rights indispensably essential to the purity and harmony of the matrimonial union.... By an act of the legislature ... all marriages not forbidden by the law of God shall be encouraged.... But of causes which are light or trivial, a divorce should by no means be permitted to be the effect. When divorces can be summoned ... a state of marriage becomes frequently a state of war."⁹ A biblical historian knows that when marriage is perverted, minimalized, and dishonored, the family unit erodes, eventuating in the collapse of the society when such evil becomes its shame-less norm.

God established the fourth Divine Institution, human government, after the flood (Genesis 9:5-6) when He gave governmental authority to man. Samuel Davies, renowned pastor of the Great Awakening, said, "The appointments of Providence, and the order of the world, not only admit, but require, that there should be some civil distinctions among mankind, that some should rule and some be subject, that some should be Masters, and some Servants."¹⁰ According to God's pronouncement, the primary responsibility of human government as His ordained civil

⁸ William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997) Gen. 2:24.

⁹ Robert McCloskey, The Works of James Wilson (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967) 2:598-599.

¹⁰ Peter N. Moore, World of Toil and Strife, (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2007) 39 in www.scribd.com/doc.

authority is to express His justice, “a basic law of which is capital punishment for the murderer duly convicted of his crime.”¹¹ God gave human government its authority so it could deter sinful man and protect the first three Divine Institutions; therefore, God commands human government to protect and promote the God-given freedom of the individual, the authority structure of biblical marriage, and the parental structure of the family. These first three Divine Institutions are good and necessary because God established them, not because human government protects them. Although authorized by God, human government will always fail because sinful human beings are involved. “Government can only restrain sin and promote civil righteousness – and that with only partial success. Government cannot eradicate the sin nature or cleanse men from their sins. Only the finished work of Jesus Christ on Calvary’s cross can do that.”¹² The biblical historian knows that when man perverts his responsibility by allowing government to assume responsibilities God has not given it or to ignore those responsibilities God mandates, that nation has chosen to sanction rebellion against Him and eventually will suffer His judgment.

The Divine Institution of human government was distorted almost immediately during the tower of Babel event when government encouraged, even mandated, man’s rebellion against the Creator. As a result of this perversion of Truth, God established the final Divine Institution, nationalism (Genesis 11:1-9). The tower of Babel event displayed unified mankind’s desire to make life work independently of God. The leaders of Babel “deliberately acknowledge[d] their purpose to be contrary to God’s command: ‘Lest we be scattered abroad on the face of the whole earth.’”¹³ The governmental authorities at Babel manipulated the masses in an attempt to build a one world government in direct opposition to God’s expressed desire for national, not universal, sovereignty. God judged this evil in a manner that graphically shows His abhorrence of any abuse of the Divine Institution of nationalism. By confusing the one language used to that point in history, He prevented mankind from cooperating in forming a one world government, the goal of His adversary, Satan. When a biblical historian sees the nations of the world moving toward a one-world government, using the computer to return to one universal language, he knows Satan is hoping to establish the requisite milieu for the advent of the antichrist.

As indicated in the principles established in the Mosaic Law, the foundation of good government and political stability is personal integrity and strong families (Exodus 21-23; Deuteronomy 6:6-8). Although the Mosaic Law is not transferable from Israel to any other nation, the principle of family providing the stable force in society can be applied to all nations. “On July 4, 1793, Elias Boudinot spoke at a Fourth of July celebration in Elizabethtown, New Jersey: ‘If the moral character of a people once degenerate, their political character must soon follow. ... These considerations should lead to an attractive solicitude ... to be religiously careful in our choice of all public officers ... and judge of the tree by its fruits.’ Elias Boudinot stated: “‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself’—Let it then (as workmanship of the same Divine hand) be our peculiar constant care and vigilant attention to inculcate this sacred principle and to hand it down to posterity. ... Good government generally begins in the family, and if the moral character of a people once degenerate, their political character must soon follow.”¹⁴

Even though the Divine Institutions operate on authority orientation with God as the ultimate authority, God did not create authority expressly for man. Authority has eternally been a component of the Trinity of the Godhead. God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are under the

¹¹ Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973) 222.

¹² John Eidsmoe, God and Caesar. Biblical Faith and Political Action (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997) 4.

¹³ Henry Morris, Genesis Record (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976) 269.

¹⁴ William J. Federer, Great Quotations electronic.

authority of God the Father (John 5:22-23) while God the Holy Spirit is also under the authority of God the Son (John 16:13-15). And each is equally God. These layers of authority established by God in the Divine Institutions originated from within His own perfect character.¹⁵

All legitimate authority derives its authoritative function from God, above Whom is no greater authority (Romans 13:1). Knowing only too well the sinful nature of man, God embedded limitations on the authority granted each Divine Institution. Adam was responsible and accountable to God for his actions (Genesis 2:15-17 <> Genesis 3:8-12, 17-19). Every person since then has been personally responsible for his every thought, word, and action. All believers will be ultimately accountable to God at the Judgment Seat of Christ while unbelievers will discover the woeful inadequacy of their personal works at the Great White Throne judgment, the last judgment in human history. In marriage, God places the wife under her husband's authority, under his leadership. She is responsible to obey her husband in all things (Ephesians 5:22; Titus 2:5). In the family, parents are the authority and are accountable to God for the welfare of their family (1 Samuel 3:13). In human government, whether it be a monarchy, some form of totalitarianism, a democracy, or a republic, an individual, group of individuals, and/or a law code serves as the God-given authority (Romans 13:1ff). God possesses supreme authority and raises up governments for His authoritative purposes (Proverbs 8:15-16). In nationalism, each nation is accountable to God's authority as found in His Word (Obadiah 1ff; Nahum 3:1-7).

When the people in a culture, especially the men, understand the nature of personal responsibility and demonstrate mature behavior, the other Divine Institutions are strengthened. However, when the majority in a culture fail to understand responsibility and accountability, the other Divine Institutions are weakened, resulting in the eventual destruction of that society. God has established a domino effect in the Divine Institution structure that cannot be escaped. Understanding that reality was key in the establishment of the United States of America, the greatest defender of political and spiritual freedom in the history of the world.

THE INFLUENCE OF PURITANISM ON THE FOUNDING OF AMERICA

According to church historian Bruce Shelley, America's history commenced with the Biblical Tradition, which began in 1620 with the Puritan settling of America and extended to 1760 and the generation that founded our country.¹⁶ "Puritanism, the prevailing theological and philosophical system in most of the colonies founded during the seventeenth century, is the key which unlocks the meaning of colonial history as a whole. It pervaded not only the religious life and thought of the early colonists, but their political, social and economic life as well."¹⁷ Though none of the Founding Fathers called himself a Puritan, a denominational term rarely used by the middle of the eighteenth century, Puritan theology dominated their thinking and, therefore, dominated the founding documents of our country. In *Democracy in America*, a two volume work published in 1835 and 1840, French admirer of America Alexis de Tocqueville suggested that Puritanism provided a firm foundation for the American republic. Tocqueville recognized Puritans as "archaic survivals, not only in their piety and discipline but in their democratic practices."¹⁸ The Puritans understood the importance of history, and their worldview, based partly on that understanding, decisively impacted the Founding generation, including the pastors who disseminated divine wisdom during the colonial period. Because of influence of the

¹⁵ Dr. Robert Dean, sermon Acts 40b September 6, 2011.

¹⁶ Bruce L. Shelley, *The Gospel and the American Dream*, (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1989) 47-48.

¹⁷ Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Nutley, New Jersey: The Craig Press, 1964) 7.

¹⁸ Sheldon Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) 234.

Puritans, the colonial experience produced a culture different from England's—even though most of the Puritans were Englishmen!

To understand the history of our nation, we must first understand Puritan theology. “Puritanism was impelled by the insight that all of life is God's. The Puritans lived simultaneously in two worlds – the invisible spiritual world and the physical world of earthly existence. For the Puritans, both worlds were equally real, and there was no cleavage of life into sacred and secular. All of life was sacred.”¹⁹ The family, the church and the state were three arenas of an integrated Puritan vision of bringing about the kingdom of God in the New World. In many ways the Puritans viewed the family as the most important of the three arenas. In the words of historian Edmund S. Morgan, ‘If the family failed to teach its members properly, neither the state nor the church could be expected to accomplish much.’²⁰

The Puritans diligently read the Geneva Bible, which preceded the King James translation by 51 years and was the primary Bible of their time. While they misinterpreted the prophetic passages and were amillennialists, their study allowed them biblical insights into God's desires for mankind. Though legalistic, their goal was to serve God as He commanded in His Word.

They were equally diligent to teach their children to read and study the Word of God. Families whose children were unable to read faced a stiff \$25 fine. The Puritans adhered to the teaching of John Cotton (1585–1652), an early Puritan leader, who said, “If God made a covenant to be a God to thee and thine, then it is thy part to see to it that thy children and servants be God's people.”²¹

One reason for the domination of the biblical worldview in early America was the Puritan's education philosophy. Many of the early Puritan settlers were products of the Reformation and believed that protection from civil abuses was dependent on having a biblically literate populace. They understood that all citizens, not just the leaders, must be well-educated so they can keep a watchful eye on the civil government. Consequently, Massachusetts in 1642 and Connecticut in 1647 passed the “Old Deluder Satan Act,” which said in part, “It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former time... It is therefore ordered ... [that] after the Lord hath increased [the settlement] to the number of fifty householders, [they] shall then forthwith appoint one within their town, to teach all such children as shall resort to him, to write and read... And it is further ordered, that where any town shall increase to the number of one hundred families or householders, they shall set up a grammar school ... to instruct youths, so far as they may be fitted for the university.” In 1690, Connecticut law declared that “this [legislature] observing that ... there are many persons unable to read the English tongue and thereby incapable to read the holy Word of God or the good laws of this colony ... it is ordered that all parents and masters shall cause their respective children and servants, as they are capable, to be taught to read distinctly the English tongue.”²² These laws reflected the biblical understanding that Satan wants to separate man from the Scripture because he can enslave and oppress only those who are biblically illiterate and theologically lazy. Such people, including most believers today, are unable to correctly evaluate government operations and, therefore, eventually lose the tranquility of learning God's Word unimpeded by governmental interference.

¹⁹ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990) 208.

²⁰ Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 139.

²¹ <http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/home-family/family-worship/family-and-government-in-puritan-new-england-by-kerry-ptacek/>

²² David Barton, *Original Intent: The Courts, the Constitution, and Religion* (Aledo, TX, Wallbuilders, 2002) 81. quoting from Edward Kendall, *Kendall's Travels*, volume 1, 270-271.

Understanding that the Bible is absolute Truth, the Puritans examined all aspects of their lives in light of biblical teaching; in other words, they used a Bible-first epistemology. Epistemology is “the study of how we know things, a search to answer the questions ‘Is our knowledge reliable?’ and ‘How can we be sure?’”²³ A Bible-first epistemology means “the Bible deals with every area of life indirectly through the grid or framework that is taken directly from the Bible.”²⁴ In this sense, the believer, who was once in the world but is now in Christ, must have his thinking completely renovated by God the Holy Spirit. Human viewpoint thoughts must be eradicated and the ensuing vacuum in the thinking of his soul must be packed with the thinking of Christ as found only in His Word. Only consistent study of God’s Word while in a state of fellowship with God²⁵ allows this vital transformation. The Apostle Paul commanded Christians in Rome to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2).” That command absolutely applies to us today! We must have our thinking transformed into Christ’s thinking if we are to serve our God in any area of life.

The Puritan lifestyle reflected their desire to apply the thoughts of Christ to every decision, thought, word, and deed. While they misunderstood parts of the Bible by clinging to some of Calvin’s false ideas²⁶ their desire was to understand and apply God’s Word as He intends. Today, we benefit from their conviction that all Scripture must be examined in light of the rest of God’s Word, a radical departure from their predecessors who chose to accept the conclusions of others rather than examine Scripture for themselves. Through correct epistemology, theologians since then have begun to fill the holes of spiritual darkness that the Puritans didn’t see. They continue to expose the flaws of reformed thinking through the light of God’s Word. Of course, those following us will be left to fill the holes in our own spiritual darkness through that same epistemology more skillfully applied!

Not only did the Puritans employ the correct epistemology in reading and studying the Bible, they considered the Bible the ultimate authority in *every* area of life. “The Puritans rested on the Bible alone as the final authority because they believed it to be the inspired Word of God....If God is the author of Scripture, it cannot lie, and if it does not deceive, it must be inerrant and infallible.”²⁷ Their acceptance of the Word of God as the final authority in all areas of life produced a view of human government that profoundly impacted the clergy of the Great Awakening and the subsequent generation that founded the United States of America.

Lex Rex (1644), the monumental work of Scottish minister Samuel Rutherford, influenced the political philosophy of the Puritans and their descendants. Considering the Bible to be infallible, Rutherford used Deuteronomy 17:14-20 to establish that the authority of God and the law of the land are above the authority of the King. He concluded that church and state are two separate governments under God and that the only King of the Church is King Jesus. Because his book so demolished the doctrine of the divine right of kings, the king unsurprisingly passed legislation that punished all who owned a copy! “The constitutional notion of the king being accountable by the same law that governs everyone else comes directly from the Scripture. Those like Rutherford who best articulated this principle, which in turn influenced the framers,

²³ Dennis McCallum, ed The Death of Truth (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1996) 281.

²⁴ Robert Dean, Jr. and Thomas Ice, What the Bible Teaches about Spiritual Warfare, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000) 23.

²⁵ Fellowship with God is possible only if all sins have been confessed to God the Father.

²⁶ While the pastors who most influenced the Great Awakening and the battle for freedom considered themselves Calvinists, they taught salvation by grace, not works, and lived spiritual lives that reflected God’s Word rather than the Calvinistic system’s narrow interpretation of it.

²⁷ Ryken, 141.

took their primary cues from God’s Word.”²⁸

Earlier, in 1215, this understanding motivated Englishmen to stand against King John, resulting in the signing of the Magna Charta. That foundational document of English governance placed both the people and the King under the law and subject to the law. “Five hundred and sixty-one years after the meeting at Runnymede, and more than three thousand miles away, another group of rebels, fighting to establish a free and independent state in which the law would provide a lasting defense against oppression, embodied the concepts of Magna Charta, and even echoed its phrases, in their Declaration of Independence, and ultimately in the Constitution of the United States of America.”²⁹

Recognizing through their understanding of history that people cannot live civilized lives without a covenant (a contract) to govern them, the Puritans began life in the New World by writing and abiding by the Mayflower Compact, a document that also influenced our founding documents. The Puritans derived the principles for governing society from the biblical understanding that liberty is not freedom to do whatever one wants but freedom to live good, just, and honest lives. This biblical understanding of government has provided the courage for Christians throughout history to stand against tyranny—and it makes those holding to a biblical worldview rightly suspicious of government!

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND OBEDIENCE TO GOD

Some claim that the War for American Independence violated biblical principles. Usually, they base their argument on Romans 13, erroneously concluding that since all government proceeds from God, all government *must be obeyed*. The same logic brought forth the “Divine Right of Kings” philosophy (refuted in Lex Rex), which claimed that anything less than complete obedience to the King was rebellion against God. We definitely agree that Romans 13:1 commands believers to submit to governing authorities because God gives them their power. The apostle Peter wrote that obedience to governing authorities equals obedience to God (1 Peter 2:13); therefore, to resist those in power is to resist God. Certainly, we are not to be a law unto ourselves.

What, then, should be our biblical response to this misrepresentations of God’s Word? Because God delegates all power, He is the ultimate unlimited authority in the universe. In that capacity, God gives power to men but also—this is the key—He places limits on man’s authority. When government rebels against God’s limitations and abuses its God-given authority, obedience to God may demand disobedience to that anti-God human authority.

The Bible provides several clear examples of God-applauded civil disobedience. The midwives in Exodus 1:15-21 refused to adhere to the Egyptian government’s method of population control; verse 17 explains that their motivation for disobedience was respect for God. Later, in Exodus chapter two, Moses’ parents disobeyed the Egyptian government’s child-death mandate in order to preserve the life of their son. In Hebrews 11:23, God commends them for their willingness to disobey the governing authorities. Later in Israel’s history, three brave Israelites, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, refused to worship as the government demanded and faced the death penalty in a fiery furnace (Daniel 3). Interestingly, these three men respected the authority of King Nebuchadnezzar while at the same time disobeying his idolatrous decree. Even Daniel, though choosing to disobey a government mandate, maintained respect for the office of

²⁸ Andy Woods, Darwin, Evolution, and the American Constitution (Clifton, TX: Scofield Ministries, 2011) 115-116.

²⁹ Verna Hall and Rosalie Slater, Christian History of the Constitution of the United States of America: America’s Providential History (Chesapeake, VA: Foundation for American Christian Education, 2006) 13.

king (Daniel 6:10-13).

The fact that God honored the midwives, Moses' parents, Daniel, and his friends for disobeying the governing authorities He placed in power implies that human governmental authority is limited. Consequently, a tension exists for the believer who desires to obey the divine commands to submit both to God and to the governing authority. Although obedience to governing authorities is the norm for believers, we are at liberty to practice civil disobedience if the state forces disobedience to God; however, we must be ever so careful to ascertain if the government's abuses are cause for disobedience in God's eyes, not merely in our own. Yes, we must continue to pay our burdensome taxes and drive within the speed limit—even when we are late! Even as we practice civil disobedience, we must respect our government and its officials. Remember, however, that if we refuse to obey a government command, we must emulate Daniel and his friends and be willing to pay the civil consequences. We must be prepared to die for standing firm for God!

God commands us to pray on behalf of our governing authorities—even those who oppress us—so that we may live the quiet life (1 Timothy 2:1-2). We fulfill this command, knowing that God is the One who gave them authority to function within their sphere of power. However—this bears repetition—if our government commands us to act in disobedience to God's Word or prohibits us from obeying God's Word, we have divine authorization to respectfully disobey.

In the colonies, the Bible, other writings, and historical events molded a very narrow—and correct—worldview about human government. The colonists' high view of Scripture resulted in the Bible being their source of authority, leading to their accurate grasp of man's sinfulness. This low view of man led to a biblical understanding that government is necessary to restrain sinful men through laws that protect the Divine Institutions and reflect the character of God. In other words, men establish governments to recognize and protect the freedoms, the “inalienable rights,” already given to them by their Creator.

In 1749, Reverend Jonathan Mayhew of Boston declared, “It is the duty of Christian magistrates to inform themselves what it is which their religion teaches concerning the nature and design of their office. And it is equally the duty of all Christian people to inform themselves what it is which their religion teaches concerning that subjection which they owe to the higher powers.”³⁰ Mayhew eloquently explained the truth of biblical civil disobedience: “To support his argument for biblical civil disobedience, Mayhew preached, ‘Children are commanded to obey their parents, and servants their masters, in as absolute and unlimited terms as subjects are here commanded to obey their civil rulers . . . Thus, also wives are commanded to be obedient to their husbands . . . In all these cases, submission is required in terms at least as absolute and universal as are ever used with respect to rulers and subjects. But who supposes that the apostle ever intended to teach that children, servants, and wives, should, in all cases whatever, obey their parents, masters, and husbands respectively, never making any opposition to their will, even although they should require them to break the commandments of God or should causelessly make an attempt upon their lives? No one puts such a sense upon these expressions however absolute and unlimited. Why, then, should it be supposed that the apostle designed to teach universal obedience, whether active or passive to the higher powers, merely because his precepts are delivered in absolute and unlimited terms? And if this be a good argument in one case, why is it not in others also? If it be said that resistance and disobedience to the higher powers is here said positively to be a sin, so also is the disobedience of children to parents, servants to masters,

³⁰ Mark A. Beliles and Stephen K. McDowell *America's Providential History* (Charlottesville, VA: Providence Press, 1991) 375.

and wives to husbands, in other places of Scripture. But the question still remains, whether, in all these cases, there be not some exceptions. In the three latter it is allowed there are; and from hence it follows, that... the use of absolute expressions is no proof that obedience to civil rulers is in all cases a duty, or resistance in all cases is a sin.”³¹

Our country can be saved only through such understanding of God’s character and Word. “The Church needs more pastors like Jonas Clark, a preacher who taught the great doctrines of salvation in Christ alone and the Biblical right to resistance, which gave his congregation courage to stand in the face of great odds.”³² Pastor John Peter Gabriel Muhlenburg, who took the lead in standing against British tyranny, declared in his farewell sermon before joining the ranks of the Continental army, “The Bible tells us ‘there is a time for all things,’ and there is a time to preach, and a time to pray, but the time for me to preach has passed away; and there is a time to fight, and that time has now come.”³³ He became one of General Washington’s Brigadier Generals. “Other clergymen followed Muhlenburg’s example and led in battle: Rev. Robert Smith of South Carolina and Rev. John Craighead of North Carolina are examples.”³⁴

In the first election sermon preached after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Reverend William Gordon’s message to the Continental Congress showed that “patriotism is grafted on religion, and while, in obedience to the former, they strike for freedom, they do it as God-fearing men. Their duty to their country and to their Maker is so blended that they can not be separated; hence their patriotism becomes tinged with religion, while their religion embraces patriotism in its circle of obligations. With the Israelite, to serve his country was to serve his God. The same doctrine was taught everywhere throughout the New England Colonies, and accepted as truth. Resistance to oppressive laws and edicts was not merely the act of independent freemen struggling for their rights, but obedience to the high mandates of heaven.”³⁵ Such resistance falls under the category of biblical civil disobedience.

Only weeks before he signed the Declaration of Independence, John Witherspoon’s battle cry resounded from his pulpit: “If your cause is just, you may look with confidence to the Lord, and entreat him to plead it as his own. You are all my witnesses, that this is the first time of my introducing any political subject into the pulpit. At this season, however, it is not only lawful but necessary, and I willingly embrace the opportunity of declaring my opinion without any hesitation, that the cause in which America is now in arms, is the cause of justice, of liberty, and of human nature.... There is not a single instance in history, in which civil liberty was lost, and religious liberty preserved entire. If therefore we yield up our temporal property, we at the same time deliver the conscience into bondage.”³⁶

For our Founding Fathers, this understanding of government limitations came from a biblical understanding of government that was preached from the pulpits of many denominations throughout the colonies. “The concept of limited government is a fundamental principle of U.S. constitutional theory and...formed the basis for resistance to British oppression in the War of Independence.”³⁷ “There is no question that the Declaration of Independence was, to those who signed it, a religious as well as a secular act, and that the Revolutionary War had the approbation

³¹ Pastor Jonathan Mayhew quoted by John Wingate Thornton The Pulpit of the American Revolution Political Sermons of the Period of 1776, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970) 74.

³² Clark, 3.

³³ Joel T. Headley, The Forgotten Heroes of Liberty, The Chaplains and Clergy of the American Revolution (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005) 123.

³⁴ Mark A. Beliles, America’s Providential History (Charlottesville, V: Providence Press, 1989), 145.

³⁵ Headley, 40.

³⁶ Ellis Sandoz, ed, Political Sermons of the American Founding Era 1730-1805 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1990) 549.

³⁷ John Eidsmoe, Christianity and the Constitution, The Faith of Our Founding Fathers (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1987) 25.

of divine providence. They had won it with God's blessing and, afterwards, they drew up their framework of government with God's blessing, just as in the 17th century the colonists had drawn up their Compacts and Charters and Orders and Instruments, with God peering over their shoulders."³⁸

HISTORICAL EVENTS LEADING TO INDEPENDENCE

God used many events to prepare the way for victory in the War for American Independence. The War of Jenkin's Ear (1739-1748) helped harden France and Spain against England. Robert Jenkins, an English shipmaster, presented evidence to Parliament that Spanish buccaneers had stolen his cargo and cut off his ear. He shocked them by showing them the ear, which he had carefully kept pickled in a jar for just such a moment! That ear placed a barrier between England and both France and Spain that helped the colonists mightily in their fight.

The conflict between England and France and Spain thus begun intensified into the War of Austrian Succession with England and Austria opposing Spain, France, and Prussia. This little known event in history had two major implications for the American Colonies. First, Georgia's close proximity to the Spanish forts in Florida called for the organizing of the Georgia and South Carolina militias, preparing them for a much different fight in 1776. Second, Georgia Governor James Oglethorpe (1696-1785) led a number of successful raids on Spanish forts, as well as the unsuccessful Siege of St. Augustine in 1740. Because this area of Florida remained in Spanish hands, Spain sided with the colonies in the coming war for independence. Third, in 1744, three thousand New England volunteers successfully attacked Louisbourg, a French fortress and naval station on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. Later, the British returned Louisbourg to the French as part of the 1748 treaty that ended the War of Austrian Succession. Because the colonists had suffered to secure Louisbourg for the Mother Country and viewed return of it to France as a threat to their security, discontent with British rule escalated.

The next major event, the Seven Years War (1754 to 1763), more commonly known in America as the French and Indian War, was fought in Europe, India, the Philippines, and the Caribbean as well as in North America. By its end in 1763, England controlled most of North America and emerged as the undisputed world power. The British autocratically decided that the American colonists should pay the majority of the war's cost in defeating the French, thereby increasing the discontent of the colonies and heightening their realization that they were convenient sources of money for those who should have been treating them as equal citizens. Britain whetted its appetite on America's money while Americans began to realize that Britain gained way too much enjoyment from adding to their tax burden.

Interestingly, through the further providence of God, this war helped train God's chosen man, George Washington, to lead the Colonial's in the military tasks of the War for Independence. When Pastor Samuel Davies published the sermon "Religion and Patriotism, the Constituents of a Good Soldier" in 1755, he added this footnote, "As a remarkable instance...I may point out to the public, that heroic youth Col. Washington whom I cannot but hope Providence has hitherto preserved in so signal a manner for some important service to his country."³⁹ And, indeed, God had!

God continued to control history for America's benefit through circumstances in England. King George III, who reigned at the time of the War for American Independence, would not have become ruling monarch for another twenty years had his father Frederick not

³⁸ Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999) 204-205.

³⁹ Pilcher, 166.

died unexpectedly in 1751 and his grandfather, George II, who ruled next, not died unexpectedly in 1760, thereby placing an ill-equipped, twenty-two year old on the British throne. Instead of having a seasoned ruler to deal with British-American relations, an idealistic, inexperienced youth took the reins. George III was well-educated but not mentally gifted. Because he was isolated from the world, he gained much of his knowledge from books. His tutor John Stuart convinced him of palace intrigues and conspiracies against him; therefore, George III distrusted most people, deciding that those in government cared only for their personal interests. He assumed he alone acted with pure motives. The turnover in his cabinet was constant from 1761-1770, leading to further isolation and paranoia for the king.

In 1763, George Grenville was appointed Leader of the House of Commons and First Lord of the Treasury. The Stamp Act was Grenville's great policy. He thought the American colonists should pay more to reduce the government's debts and support the costs of administering the newly acquired territories. Parliament knew the act would cripple trade but decided they had to protect their right to tax the colonies. The bill passed 249 to 49. Note England's lust for increased taxes, a fixation that would burgeon in the next decade. In 1766, after a decline of one million pounds in trade, British merchants called for the repeal of the Stamp Act. Instead, the Declaratory Act was passed, proclaiming Parliament's authority to increase taxes on the colonies, thereby also increasing the bondage and discontent of the American colonists.

Because of the physical ailments of British Prime Minister William Pitt (1756-61, 1766-68), who had allied himself with the colonists during the French and Indian War and would probably have continued to treat the Colonists justly, Charles Townsend stepped into the power vacuum, becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer on May 15, 1767. Townsend persuaded Parliament to pass the Townsend Acts, which placed import duties on the colonies for glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea products and created a new bureaucracy to enforce the collection of those duties. Passions against Britain's unjust leveling of more taxes redoubled in the colonies. They rebelled peacefully by not importing as many goods, thus decreasing England's revenue even more. Because the Colonists were united in their desire to resist England by peaceful means, they went without tea or paid more for it from other countries so they would not have to buy it from Britain. During the time of the unbiblical Townsend Acts, 16,000 pounds came into the treasury through trade, but trade dropped 800,000 pounds! This economic calamity brought great public pressure to repeal the Acts; however, King George III adamantly endorsed the failing system. "I am clear that there must always be one tax to keep up the right, and as such I approve the tea duty." In order to retain the right to tax the colonies, Parliament continued the foolish and unjust American import taxes. Hostilities heated up with the Boston Massacre in 1770 and later the Boston Tea Party in 1773, prompting King George to declare the people of Boston in a state of insurrection. He stationed three thousand British soldiers in Boston, again increasing the antagonism of the colonists who resented being treated like servants rather than British citizens.

Encouraged by biblical pastors, the colonies united against British intolerance. On September 5, 1774, the first Continental Congress opened with a many hours long prayer. "Washington was kneeling there, and Henry, and Randolph and Rutledge, and Lee and Jay; and by their side there stood, bowed down in deference, the Puritan patriots of New England, who at that moment had reason to believe that an armed soldiery was wasting their humble households...they prayed fervently for America, for the Congress, for the province of Massachusetts, and especially for the town of Boston... 'It was quite enough,' said Mr. Adams,

‘to melt a heart of stone. I saw the tears gush into the eyes of the old pacific Quakers of Philadelphia.’ John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail, ‘We have appointed a continental fast. Millions will be upon their knees at once before their great Creator, imploring His forgiveness and blessing; His smiles on American councils and arms.’⁴⁰ Then they read Psalm 35. Without doubt, our country was founded on biblical principles under the highly sought guidance of Almighty God! That guidance came, not from mystic mantras of God’s love, but from their profound knowledge of and obedience to God’s Word. God is faithful to care for those who know and obey Him.

Time after time, the Colonists had petitioned the King to treat them as English citizens as decreed by British law. After the King’s continued refusals and his subsequent acts of violence in the colonies, the Colonials took action to defend their rights under God. Thus, in obedience to the laws of England and the laws of God, the Colonials resisted the tyrannical actions of the King. Had George III understood that the Colonials had obeyed him in the past because they desired to obey God’s Word, he might have relented and retained America’s allegiance. Instead, he clung obstinately to what he considered his divine right as King to rule as he wished, even in opposition to the law of the land. Because God’s Word taught against King George’s violations of his God-given authority, the colonists could not, in good conscience, continue to obey him. The King had placed his authority above God’s. The colonials obeyed God’s commands in His Word and responded with biblical civil disobedience.

As great as these events were in leading to the clash of arms for independence, they would not have had defining impact without the supporting spiritual foundation that had been laid throughout the colonies. Everywhere, pulpits rang with the Truth about the legal rights of Englishmen based on Samuel Rutherford’s scriptural understanding that men are ruled by law and not by men. The colonies waged the war for American Independence in large part because of their desire to return to the biblical use of government as the divinely ordained instrument of God-based law and justice.

THE GREAT AWAKENING

The teachings and actions of key men in the spiritual movement known as the Great Awakening (c. 1720-1750) led to the colonists’ correct application of the biblical role of government and of civil disobedience. Some estimate that the Great Awakening spiritually impacted three out of every four American colonists! What a convincing testimony to the power of God’s Word to change men’s souls and give them the courage to stand against impossible odds! “The Revolution could not have taken place without this religious background. The essential difference between the American Revolution and the French Revolution is that the American Revolution, in its origins, was a religious event, whereas the French Revolution was an anti-religious event. That fact was to shape the American Revolution from start to finish and determine the nature of the independent state it brought into being.”⁴¹

For the first 150 years of their existence, the colonies were separate and virtually out of touch with each other. Pastor George Whitefield (1714–1770), an outspoken voice of the Great Awakening, was the first to advance inter-colonial communication. As the Great Awakening progressed, the thirteen colonies united spiritually in preparation for the fight for independence. Unlike the first century of American colonization, all sections of the country now rallied together when the Mother Country acted unjustly toward one of them. A more united understanding of

⁴⁰ David Barton, *The Spirit of the American Revolution* (Aledo, TX: Wallbuilder Press, 1994.), 7.

⁴¹ Johnson, 117.

God's Word led to a more united people.

Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennent, Samuel Davies and other leaders of the Great Awakening did not attempt to establish a nation or organize a break from the Mother Country. "They were trying to reawaken the church for the sake of the church itself, to reassert the sovereignty of God's divine love in conversion, to exalt the substitutionary, penal work of Christ as God's way of reconciliation with sinners, to demonstrate the necessity of conversion as a prerequisite for truly virtuous living, and by these means to check the worldliness promoted by the era's new forms of commerce and entertainment."⁴²

If America was already dominated by Puritanism, why was a spiritual awakening necessary? The Enlightenment, which dominated European theology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, threatened to overtake America. Commenting on eighteenth century England, Steven Mansfield stated, "She was falling hard, and it is difficult to know just why. It may have started in 1662 when anti-Puritan Parliament ejected more than 2000 Puritan ministers from their pulpits. Or it may have begun when rationalism and her religious twin, deism, transformed God into an absentee landlord, Jesus into a deluded fool, and the Bible into a collection of empty myths."⁴³ Or it may have come on the wings of England's new found prosperity, with all the soul-numbing entanglements of materialism in tow. Whatever the cause, by the 1700s, England was a land of spreading spiritual darkness. Deism prevailed. Cynicism ruled. What passed for biblical faith was trotted out only on special occasions and then only to appease the unsophisticated masses."⁴⁴ Many European clergy were like the "Anglican bishop who taught that good will was enough to get a Christian into Heaven."⁴⁵ Christ sacrifice on the cross was relegated to the rubbish bin of antiquated, unpalatable ideas. François-Marie Arouet, better known as Voltaire, one of the leaders of the Enlightenment movement, "was happy to admit that while atheism is misguided and potentially dangerous, a world filled with Holbachs"⁴⁶ would be palatable, far more palatable than a world filled with Christians."⁴⁷ Bible-based Christianity was abhorred by many, especially the wealthy, privileged, and influential throughout Great Britain and Europe.

Those in the Enlightenment proclaimed that man's reason was the ultimate authority. They believed man was emerging from the age of darkness into an enlightened age in which he could solve his own problems through his ability to think. Anything that could not pass the test of reason came under suspicion and attack. Logically, faith in the Holy Scripture became the Great Enemy, the placebo of the ignorant. The Enlightenment gave birth to much modern heretical thinking, including evolution. "No child spawned by the 18th century Enlightenment has so effectively infused and, indeed, shaped modern life and thought as naturalistic evolutionism. Best known, perhaps, as the guiding principle of the life sciences, the evolutionary hypothesis has also become the framework within which virtually every other modern area of thought is

⁴² Mark A. Noll, A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans' Publishing Co., 1992) 13.

⁴³ Jonathan Edwards fought against deism through his impassioned teaching on God's glory, His authority over His creation, and His personal involvement in that creation. Samuel Davies vehemently fought the idea that Jesus was a deluded fool by inculcating the thinking of his listeners with in depth knowledge of Jesus and Him crucified. John Witherspoon fought the idea of the Bible as a book of empty myths by emphasizing its preeminence as God's infallible thinking in all areas of life, including government.

⁴⁴ Stephen Mansfield Forgotten Founding Father, The Heroic Legacy of George Whitefield (Nashville TN: Cumberland House Publishers, 2001) 34.

⁴⁵ Peter Gay The Enlightenment: the Rise of Modern Paganism (NY: WW Norton and Co., 1977) 22.

⁴⁶ Paul Henry Holbach was a philosopher, translator, and prominent social figure of the French Enlightenment.

⁴⁷ Gay, 37.

understood and articulated, including the study of religion.”⁴⁸ Those in the Enlightenment also rewrote history to fit their godless philosophy. “They freed history from the parochialism of Christian scholars and from theological presuppositions, secularized the idea of causation, and opened vast new territories for historical inquiry.”⁴⁹

Most Enlightenment thinkers considered God a reasonable concept but viewed Him as the master watchmaker, who created everything but stepped out of history so man could find his own destiny. This Deistic view removed God from acting directly in human history. Founding Father and clergyman John Witherspoon wrote of deism and the Enlightenment, “In the deistical controversy, what commonly leads the way, is the necessity of revelation in general...The first infidel writers in Europe were chiefly employed in shewing the sufficiency of reason as a guide to man in his conduct... Their way of arguing is very fallacious; for they avail themselves of that very improvement of reason, which they owe to revelation, in order to shew revelation to be unnecessary...Infidels do not now plead for Jupiter, Juno, Mars, and Apollo, but for the sufficiency of human reason. Very plain, that such is our blindness and ignorance in the things of God, that we know very little about them till they are made known by God himself; and if we were to make our own reason the previous standard of what was admissible or not in quality of revelation, it would make mad work indeed.”⁵⁰

The literal Truth of God’s Word as espoused during The Great Awakening prevented Enlightenment perversions from taking preeminence in American thought; however, some deist thinking infiltrated the founding documents. “The counteraction in England [to the Enlightenment] was the eighteenth century Wesleyan revivals, which reached millions with the gospel....In America God used the great Awakening, which evangelized multitudes through such men as George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards.”⁵¹ The Enlightenment was Satan’s attack, and the Great Awakening was God’s counter-attack. As a result, “[o]rganized religion led by strong ministers was the backbone of the communities, for without it (as later decades proved), many would simply regress into the decadence and spiritual emptiness of the wilderness. Just as important, the churches became vital centers of religious, social, and even political activity.”⁵²

Rather than passively listening to intellectual discourse, the new, more dynamic and applicational style of sermons in the Great Awakening caused many colonists to become passionate about God and His Word. They took personal responsibility to study the Bible at home, thus decentralizing and growing the influence of God’s Word in each individual throughout the colonies. “Puritanism ... and the epidemic of evangelism of the mid-eighteenth century, had created challenges to the traditional notions of social stratification by preaching that the Bible taught that all men are equal, that the true value of a man lies in his moral behavior, not his class, and that all men can be saved.”⁵³ Benjamin “Franklin, who grew up a Puritan and became an enthusiastic supporter of the evangelical movement, rejected the salvation dogma, but embraced the radical notion of egalitarian democracy.”⁵⁴ “The evangelical revivalists...were the greatest advocates of religious freedom, claiming liberty of conscience to be an ‘inalienable right

⁴⁸ Eugene Merrill, forward for Dr. Henry Morris III, The Big Three, Major Events that Changed History Forever, (Master Books: Green Forest, AR, 2009) 7.

⁴⁹ Gay, 37.

⁵⁰ The Works of John Witherspoon, vol. 4 as cited in <http://www.qideas.org/blog/john-witherspoon-the-american-founding-and-the-king-james-bible.aspx>.

⁵¹ Renald Showers, What on Earth is God Doing? (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1973) 78.

⁵² James Webb, Born Fighting, How the Scots-Irish Shaped America (New York: Broadway Books’ 2004) 156.

⁵³ Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, (Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1992) 303.

⁵⁴ Walter Isaacson, Benjamin Franklin, An American Life (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004) 110

of every rational creature.’”⁵⁵

Taking their cue from the clergy, the people worked to perpetuate the evangelical zeal sweeping the country. Not only did they personally evangelize many but they also helped biblical pastors in their dissemination of the Truth. Whitefield’s supporters in Philadelphia erected a large hall to be used as a pulpit by any Christian knowledgeable in the Truth.⁵⁶

The Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church, was the established and only acceptable church in Britain and its colonies. Its leaders routinely persecuted church leaders with conflicting doctrines, those who didn’t bow the knee to them. In Fredericksburg, Virginia, before the Revolution, deciding that the very existence of Baptist preachers challenged the Anglican Church, they arrested and tried several young Baptist preachers. The colonies were incensed over this and similar abuses of governmental religious power. Later, James Madison, who as a young lawyer had defended some of these preachers, incorporated religious freedom into the Constitution.

The spiritually strong ministers of the Great Awakening understood the role of human government in the affairs of men as well as their role as shepherding pastors and ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They understood Ephesians 4, which challenges the pastor as the shepherd of the flock to promote the unity of the truth by means of teaching the Word of God. They believed 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which reads, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” If the Word of God holds the key for every good work, and they knew it does, then they, Holy Spirit-gifted pastors, must teach the Word of God for every good work. Such preaching equipped the saints for the work of service in every field of endeavor, including human government. “The primary purpose of Christ giving gifted leaders to His Church is for the equipping (spiritually, mentally, doctrinally) of the saints so that they, the saints, might do service.”⁵⁷

Their knowledge of God’s Word impressed upon the preachers of the Great Awakening and the Founding Era a profound sense of duty in the area of human government. In fact, “the great political events of the American founding have a backdrop of resurgent religion whose calls for repentance and faith plainly complement the calls to resist tyranny and constitutional corruption so as to live virtuously as God-fearing Christians, and eventually, as responsible republican citizens.”⁵⁸

Today, many Christians who aren’t well grounded in God’s Word are hung up on the pagan idea of separation of Church and State. Opponents of God and Christianity use the first amendment to claim that God’s Word can have no part in government. The church must be removed from the affairs of state! Despite such self-righteous and arrogant declarations, the First Amendment, properly understood as the Founding Fathers intended, serves as an “excellent means of preserving the religious liberty God has given us.”⁵⁹ Sanctimoniously ripping out of context a few words in Thomas Jefferson’s letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut, these opponents of Christianity declare that Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, supported a wall of separation between church and State. Jefferson’s own words condemn that self-serving assessment: “Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his

⁵⁵ Bailyn, 249.

⁵⁶ Isaacson, 112.

⁵⁷ Ron Merryman, God’s grace provision for man’s success vol. 2 (Casa Grande, AZ: Merryman Ministries, 2011) 46.

⁵⁸ Sandoz, xvii-xviii.

⁵⁹ Eidsmoe, God and Caesar, 24.

worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church and state."⁶⁰ These opponents of Christianity deliberately misuse Jefferson's words to support their evil desire to make themselves the ultimate governmental authorities when, in fact, "Jefferson used this expression to assure them that the federal government would not interfere with the private free exercise of religion"⁶¹ by creating a government religion. Jefferson assured them that the newly-established government would not mandate or enforce a state religion as had Britain.

Tellingly, Jefferson ended his famous letter with a declaration of God's sovereignty over all men: "I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection and blessings of the common Father and Creator of man, and tender you for yourselves and your religious association, assurances of my high respect and esteem."⁶² Clearly, Jefferson was comfortable including God in all aspects of American life, including government. The battle cry of "Separation between Church and State" by the opponents of Christianity "is one of the greatest acts of fraud and deception ever to be perpetrated upon the American people."⁶³ The biblical historian knows that when God's Truth is excised from the heartbeat of a nation, national disaster, even annihilation inevitably follows.

JONATHAN EDWARDS, A FOUNDER OF THE GREAT AWAKENING

Having established both the basic backdrop of events and the biblical understanding of the Founding Era, let us now examine the monumental impact of the men in the pulpit who shaped the mentality of the colonials, giving them insight, encouragement, and strength from God's Word. "By character and education the minister was a leader in church and community, and his sermons were the main source of information and instruction on all matters of local and national, moral and spiritual concern for his congregation."⁶⁴ These faithful pastors considered themselves the watchmen on the Walls of Ezekiel 3:17-21, protecting their sheep from the pagan influence of the world as well as from the wrath of God that comes on a rebellious people.

Many colonial ministers began speaking against British tyranny long before the general populace recognized the danger. Realizing the imminent threat to freedom, pastors armed their sheep both spiritually and physically. In fact, after teaching Sunday services, minister members of the Black Regiment led local minutemen in their the military drills. During the war, many pastors led their men in battle, including Pastor Jonas Clark at Lexington, Jonathan Mayhew, Samuel West, and John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg. "That ministers should have played a role in the Revolution is not surprising, for it was customary, in most colonies, for clergymen to interest themselves in politics. Although tradition forbade them, in most places, to hold public office, in New England and elsewhere ministers regularly delivered sermons to newly elected legislators in which they commented, openly and obliquely, on the issues of the day."⁶⁵ God's Word was the standard of thinking in early America because of the vigorous teaching of many prepared and faithful pastors.

Time does not permit the examination of all the influential men before, during, and after the Great Awakening, but three notable men reflect the thinking of most ministers during those

⁶⁰ *Jefferson Writings* (New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984) 510.

⁶¹ Woods, 47.

⁶² *Jefferson's Writings*, 510.

⁶³ Woods, 64.

⁶⁴ L. Gordon Tait, *The Piety of John Witherspoon* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001) 21.

⁶⁵ James Hutson, ed *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic* (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 1998) 38.

times: Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), Samuel Davies (1723–1761), and John Witherspoon (1723–1794).

Jonathan Edwards, who has been called “America’s greatest thinker, philosopher, preacher, revivalist, and missions advocate, as well as a devoted husband and loving father,”⁶⁶ is considered by many the father of the Great Awakening. Edwards’ spiritual persuasion was evident from his birth in Connecticut in 1703 to Timothy Edwards, a Puritan-style preacher, and Esther Stoddard, daughter of Solomon Stoddard, who from 1672 to 1729 was pastor of the Congregational Church in Northampton, Massachusetts.⁶⁷ Schooled at home, Edwards “began to study Latin at age six. By the age of twelve, he was also reading Greek and a little Hebrew.”⁶⁸ Entering Yale College⁶⁹ at the age of thirteen, Edwards dedicated four years to undergraduate pursuits and two more years to the study of theology.

During those years of intense biblical training, Edwards gained an awe of the majesty of God that permeated his life and teaching. Regarding 1 Timothy 1:17, he wrote in his personal account, “There came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine Being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before... From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work or redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by Him.”⁷⁰ Edwards maintained an elevated regard for the Creator that was evident in his preaching, resolve, and commitment as minister, husband, and father. He urged his listeners to also fill themselves with an understanding of the majesty of God Almighty, saying, “But that is the nature of true grace and spiritual light, that it opens to a person’s view the infinite reason there is that he should be holy in a high degree. And the more grace he has, and the more this is opened to view, the greater sense he has of the infinite excellency and glory of the divine Being, and of the infinite dignity of the person of Christ, and the boundless length and breadth and depth and height of the love of Christ to sinners. And as grace increases, the field opens more and more to a distant view, until the soul is swallowed up with the vastness of the object, and the person is astonished to think how much it becomes him to love this God and this glorious Redeemer that has so loved man, and how little he does love. And so the more he apprehends, the more the smallness of his grace and love appears strange and wonderful: and therefore he is more ready to think that others are beyond him.”⁷¹ He further stated that “Grace is but glory begun, and glory is but grace perfected.”⁷²

Edwards set goals for himself, including “Resolution One: I will live for God. Resolution Two: If no one else does, I still will.”⁷³ He further resolved “never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.” The humility that ruled his life caused him to add, “Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God’s help, I do humbly entreat Him, by His grace, to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to His will, for Christ’s sake.”⁷⁴ His resolve to use his life in devout service to God by imparting to others the awe and reverence due to the mighty Creator and Savior, profoundly impacted the

⁶⁶ Elisabeth D. Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man* (Laurel, MS: Audubon Press: 2004) 12.

⁶⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *50 People Every Christian Should Know, Learning from Spiritual Giants of the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009) 30.

⁶⁸ Douglas Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009) 35.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 34. “The entrance exams at Harvard and Yale tested proficiency in Latin, Koine Greek and biblical Hebrew, the classical languages on which the college curriculum was based.”

⁷⁰ Wiersbe, 31.

⁷¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* at http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/75887.Jonathan_Edwards

⁷² <http://www.quote-world.org/quotes/4011>

⁷³ http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/75887.Jonathan_Edwards or <http://www.great-quotes.com/quote/2291>

⁷⁴ <http://sharperiron.org/article/resolutions-of-jonathan-edwards>

spiritual awakening of the colonies.

Edwards understood that “the happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God, by which also God is magnified and exalted”⁷⁵ and, therefore, taught his listeners to embrace that eternal happiness through a faithful walk with God. “The enjoyment of [God] is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows; but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams. But God is the ocean.”⁷⁶

After his ordination on February 15, 1727, Edwards served as his grandfather Solomon Stoddard’s ministry assistant. At the death of his grandfather in 1729, he became pastor of “the most important congregation outside Boston.”⁷⁷ Edwards carefully organized his sermons in typical Puritan fashion, which involved three main parts. “(1) The *text*, a brief section in which he described the historical setting of his chosen Scripture passage; (2) the *doctrine*, a longer section in which he identified and developed a thesis statement for his sermon, one that he took from the text itself but supported with other Scriptures; (3) the *application*, or *use*, the longest section of the sermon in which he applied his Scripture doctrine to his listeners’ daily lives.”⁷⁸ Because he did not consider the Bible a book of knowledge to be mastered for knowledge’s sake but the key to an experiential walk with God, Edwards focused his messages on the application of Scripture to the everyday experiences of those living in his parish.⁷⁹ His conviction that Scripture must impact every area of life motivated his bold sermons that grew in intensity as his convictions matured. Much to the astonishment of Edwards himself, his vigorous, Bible-based orations in the little town of Northampton struck the first lightning bolt of the Great Awakening.⁸⁰ The early stirrings of the Great Awakening had begun in the eastern colonies, and Edwards’ messages on justification by faith were a major impetus to its growth.⁸¹ Edwards’ God-centered lifestyle of “meditating on Scripture, delving deeply into its contents, reading biblical commentaries and praying fervently for the Spirit’s help interpreting and applying the Bible faithfully to life”⁸² gave him the courage, wisdom, and knowledge to declare God’s Word with conviction and without fear of what man might do to him.

Edwards understood the power of prayer and urged his sheep to make harnessing that power a daily responsibility. He taught that “prayer is as natural an expression of faith as breathing is of life.”⁸³ He connected successful prayer with knowledge of God’s Word. “Sincere friendship toward God, in all who believe him to be properly an intelligent, willing being, does most apparently, directly, and strongly incline to prayer; and it no less disposes the heart strongly to desire to have our infinitely glorious and gracious Friend expressing his mind to us by his word, that we may know it.”⁸⁴ His dependence on God in prayer translated to similar dependence by many in the colonies. History teaches that the prayers of the colonists positively affected the victorious outcome of the war.

⁷⁵ <http://chaseaftertruth.wordpress.com/category/uncategorized/>

⁷⁶ <http://www.symphonyofscripture.com/?p=941>

⁷⁷ Wiersbe, 32.

⁷⁸ Sweeney, 74.

⁷⁹ Wiersbe, 31.

⁸⁰ Peter Marshall and David Manuel *The Light and the Glory 1492-1793* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2009) 295.

⁸¹ Wiersbe, 33.

⁸² Sweeney, 83.

⁸³ <http://liberty-vs-tyranny.com/Jonathan-Edwards-Quotes.htm>

⁸⁴ http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/j/jonathan_edwards.html#ixzz1kxgpAlzX.

Edwards preached in an era “more conducive to the ministry of words – and the Word”⁸⁵ than our own visually dominated culture. Using only words in his message “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” arguably the most famous American sermon, Edwards painted such a vivid picture on the canvas of the mind that his hearers cried as they visualized their impending doom as sinners before the majesty of a just God.⁸⁶ He declared, “And let every one that is yet out of Christ, and hanging over the pit of hell, whether they be old men and women, or middle aged, or young people, or little children, now hearken to the loud calls of God’s word and providence... Therefore, let every one that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation.”⁸⁷ He wanted all believers to bear an urgent burden that “unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering.”⁸⁸ His was a call to awaken to the salvific needs of all mankind.

People throughout the colonies recognized that Edwards’ authority to teach God’s Word came from God Himself. They warmed to his concern for their souls and embraced his Bible-based exhortations to live their lives according to the entirety of the divine Word. He fanned the flames of a spiritual fire that strengthened the souls of the patriots as they sought to form a country based on God’s high principles. Edwards encouraged them, saying, “True virtue never appears so lovely as when it is most oppressed; and the divine excellency of real Christianity is never exhibited with such advantage as when under the greatest trials; then it is that true faith appears much more precious than gold, and upon this account is ‘found to praise and honour and glory.’”⁸⁹

His observations on liberty and government paved the way for the civil disobedience of the War for Independence. “True liberty consists only in the power of doing what we ought to will, and in not being constrained to do what we ought not to will.”⁹⁰

Excessive factions in the Great Awakening accused Edwards of leading the people astray by depending on biblical epistemology rather than on emotional encouragements. In defense of the movement, Edwards wrote the “Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God” in which he condemned the excessive emotionalism of poorly educated preachers who attempted to upstage proper exegetical teaching. He wrote, “Though we deny not, that the human Mind under the Operation of the Divine Spirit, may be overborn with *Terrors* or *Joys*; yet, the many Confusions that have appeared in some Places from the Vanity of Mind and ungoverned Passions of People, either in the Excess of *Sorrow* or *Joy*, with the *disorderly Tumults* and *indecent Behaviours* of Persons, we judge to be so far from the Indication of the *special Presence* of GOD with those Preachers that have industriously excited and countenanced them, or in the Assemblies where they prevail, that they are a plain Evidence of the Weakness of human Nature.”⁹¹ “Edwards made clear the distinction between the work of the Holy Spirit warming our hearts, moving our wills, and enlightening our minds, and whipping up a crowd by an emotional appeal.”⁹² Edwards admonished those pastors who looked beyond God’s Word to find their own brand of truth, saying, “Some people actually imagine that the revelation in God’s Word is not

⁸⁵ Sweeney, 23.

⁸⁶ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995) 347.

⁸⁷ Jonathan Edwards, “On Knowing Christ,” 198-199.

⁸⁸ Edwards, “Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God.”

⁸⁹ Edwards, “Religious Affections.”

⁹⁰ <http://quotationsbook.com/quote/44408>.

⁹¹ Richard L. Bushman, *The Great Awakening, Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 128.

⁹² Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church Vol. 5 Moderatism, Pietism and Awakening* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans’ Publishing Company, 2004) 255.

enough to meet our needs. They think that God from time to time carries on an actual conversation with them, chatting with them, satisfying their doubts, testifying to His love for them, promising them support and blessings. As a result, their emotions soar; they are full of bubbling joy that is mixed with self-confidence and a high opinion of themselves. The foundation for these feelings, however, does not lie within the Bible itself, but instead rests on the sudden creations of their imaginations. These people are clearly deluded. God's Word is for all of us and each of us; He does not need to give particular messages to particular people."⁹³

Edwards was not afraid to critique the Great Awakening movement he supported nor to stand firm on the Truth of Scripture in condemning its wrong applications. He decried "how people could be manipulated into a conversion experience by an appeal to the emotions."⁹⁴ He said, "If the heart be chiefly and directly fixed on God, and the soul engaged to glorify him, some degree of religious affection will be the effect and attendant of it. But to seek after affection directly and chiefly; to have the heart principally set upon that; is to place it in the room of God and his glory. If it be sought that others may take notice of it and admire us for our spirituality and forwardness in religion, it is then damnable pride; if for the sake of feeling the pleasure of being affected, it is then idolatry and self-gratification."⁹⁵ Those in the modern church movement would do well to heed Edwards' admonitions.

Edwards' willingness to stand firm in God's Word also manifested itself in his position on the half-way covenant. In early New England, being a member of the Church of England, the state-mandated Anglican Church, had political and business advantages because no one could vote for or do business with a person not in the state-approved church. As a result, unregenerate people joined churches and participated in communion for political or business expediency. Many pastors recognized the problem and developed the half-way covenant, asserting that some members were only half-way in the Anglican Church.⁹⁶ Edwards adamantly disagreed with this apparent compromise, believing that Christians must give an account of themselves as saints before they can participate in the Church's communion service, become members of the Church, or be baptized. Edwards stated, "Tis the mind and will of God that none should be admitted to full communion in the church of Christ but such as in profession, and in the eye of a reasonable judgment, are truly saints or godly persons."⁹⁷

In 1748, Edwards took the daring step of announcing he would no longer receive new members who did not give evidence of their salvation. Opposition from some church leaders ensued.⁹⁸ In the winter of 1750, these men worked to have Edwards removed from the Northampton pulpit, and "on June 22, he was fired."⁹⁹ On July 1, 1750, in his final message to his congregation, Edwards demonstrated an integrity and kindness "that showed no animosity or bitterness, although certainly the preacher was a man with a broken heart. His text was 2 Corinthians 1:14, and his emphasis was on what would happen when ministers meet their congregations at the future judgment."¹⁰⁰ As he bade farewell to his much loved flock, Edwards humbly focused on his own accountability before the righteous Judge to teach God's Word without compromise.

⁹³ http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/75887.Jonathan_Edwards.

⁹⁴ Old, 255.

⁹⁵ Jonathan Edwards, The Life And Diary of David Brainerd http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/75887.Jonathan_Edwards.

⁹⁶ Ron Merryman lecture on the Great Awakening.

⁹⁷ Sweeney, 141.

⁹⁸ Wiersbe, 35.

⁹⁹ Sweeney, 143.

¹⁰⁰ Wiersbe, 35.

After his removal from the Northampton pulpit, Edwards was able to “focus on some major writing projects”¹⁰¹ as well as pastor a church in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Because of his burning desire that all hear the good news of the Gospel, he also served as a missionary to the Indians. In 1757, he became president of the Presbyterian College of New Jersey, which later became Princeton University. Opened in May 1747, its permanent site became Princeton, New Jersey, in 1752. “All the evangelical leaders of the Great Awakening were ardent supporters, if not trustees, of the College.”¹⁰² Edwards decided to set a good example for the community by being inoculated against smallpox, which was threatening the region. “Edwards seemed to respond well, at least at first, to his vaccine. However, several days later, while the others were recovering, he caught a terrible fever and began to feel some pustules emerging in his throat...Soon he could swallow almost nothing...His body shriveled away over the course of the next few weeks...Edwards’ soul was finally taken home to the world for which it longed.”¹⁰³

“Jonathan Edwards emerges as probably the greatest original thinker that America has ever produced.”¹⁰⁴ A theological genius, Edwards “was a theologian overwhelmed by the majesty and the splendor of the divine.”¹⁰⁵ He was “a quiet scholar, loving father, a concerned pastor, a burdened missionary, and a man who loved God and longed more than anything else to glorify him.”¹⁰⁶ As a knowledgeable and courageous pastor, he provides the example of preaching the Word of God in and out of season, standing firm on biblical convictions, and desiring to see people know and personally love God without compromising theological Truth to get those results. Jonathan Edwards helped light the spiritual fire that would eventually consume the government-mandated religion of Britain and build in its place a Christian legacy of the right of all men to freely worship their Creator/God in national tranquility.

SAMUEL DAVIES, A LEADER DURING THE GREAT AWAKENING

The Great Awakening begun by Jonathan Edwards and other zealous pastors not only brought people to the realization of their need for the Savior and a closer walk with Him, but it also produced a “new kind of preaching which was authoritative, fervent, and heart-searching, and one of its most conspicuous results was the multiplication of the number of preachers in the same mould.”¹⁰⁷ One of the most effective of these orators—if not the most effective—was Reverend Samuel Davies, possibly “the greatest all-round preacher America had produced.”¹⁰⁸ Commenting on the great preachers of the past to the students of Westminster Theological Seminary, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) said, “You people have neglected Samuel Davies; let me put in a word for him. The greatest preacher you have ever produced in this country was Samuel Davies.”¹⁰⁹

Samuel Davies helped take the fervor and biblical thinking of the Great Awakening¹¹⁰ and transform the thinking of the Nation so that the colonists understood the sacrifices necessary to end British tyranny and allow religious freedom. Although unknown by many today, Davies “was a true patriot, champion of religious and civil liberty, and contributed enormously to the

¹⁰¹ Sweeney, 145.

¹⁰² Old, 38.

¹⁰³ Sweeney, 189.

¹⁰⁴ Ron Merryman lecture.

¹⁰⁵ Noll, 97.

¹⁰⁶ Wiersbe, 30.

¹⁰⁷ Murray, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Old, 154.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Jeffery, *Preachers who Made a Difference* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2005) 37.

¹¹⁰ Barton, *Celebrate Liberty, Famous Patriotic Speeches and Sermons* (Aledo, TX: Wallbuilder Press, 2004) 227.

making of America.”¹¹¹

Born of Welsh immigrants¹¹² “in New-Castle County Pennsylvania Nov. 3, 1723....Samuel was the only son of a godly mother and his early education was under their Baptist pastor, Abel Morgan.”¹¹³ Years later, Davies would comment, “I am a son of prayer, like my namesake, *Samuel* the prophet; and my mother called me *Samuel* because, she said, I have asked him of the LORD.... This early dedication to GOD has always been a strong inducement to me to devote myself to Him by my own personal act; and the most important blessings of my life I have looked upon as immediate answers to the prayers of a pious mother.”¹¹⁴

Davies’ remarkable preaching was a product of the “log college” at Fagg’s Manor, Chester County, Pennsylvania, established by Reverend Samuel Blair, who modeled his college after the first “log college” founded by William Tennent (1673–1746), his good friend, in 1727. Graduates of Tennent’s college included early champions of God’s Word and religious liberty Charles Beatty, Samuel Blair, Samuel Finley, William Robinson, John Rowland, Charles Tennent, John Tennent, and William Tennent Jr.¹¹⁵ Ministers educated in Europe derisively nicknamed it *Log College*, rebuking Tennent for trying to educate “farm boys” they deemed unsuitable for the ministry. In literal log cabins, Tennent and Blair filled their pupils with biblical knowledge and evangelical eagerness. Many “log college” graduates became the revivalist preachers of the First Great Awakening and founded theological schools along the frontier. Princeton University is considered the successor of the Log Colleges.

Davies studied biblical theology under Samuel Blair for about six years. “He must have been there in 1740 when George Whitefield preached to twelve thousand people.”¹¹⁶

Dr. Samuel Finley, DD, president of Princeton at the time of Samuel Blair’s death, said of him in his eulogy, “Religion far from being a flashy thing with him was rational and solid manifesting itself in unreserved obedience to all God’s commandments... He was an indefatigable student, a calm and impartial searcher after truth. He thought for himself and was determined in his conclusions only by evidence. He had a very considerable store of critical knowledge and was especially conversant with the Bible in the original languages... In his last years, his thirst for knowledge sensibly increased and he greatly improved himself therein. He studied several branches of the sciences and especially geometry and astronomy nor will these seem tasteless studies to one who had such a savour of living in piety when it is that he saw the glory of God in all his studied and admired and adored Him... to see the invisible things of Him even eternal power and godhead manifested... It was edifying to him to follow the footsteps of the divine wisdom in particulars and the infinite reach of projection in the frame structure of the whole. But his critical and philosophical learning and large acquaintance with geography and history was exceeded by his knowledge in divinity. This was the business of his life and herein he made proficiency as few of his standing in the ministry have attained unto. Here he found what perfectly answered his refined spiritual taste... He was a judicious casuist and could very satisfyingly resolve dubious and perplexed cases of conscience. He was not only a proficient in systematic divinity which is comparatively a small attainment but a great textuary. He studied the sacred oracles above all other things and that it was not in vain manifestly appeared from his great ability in dividing the word of truth. He could bring out of his treasure things new and old..

¹¹¹ Bluford, Robert, Jr. *Living on the Borders of Eternity* (Mechanicsville, VA, Historic Polegreen Press, 2004) 496.

¹¹² Mark Noll, *America’s God* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002) 25.

¹¹³ Murray, 4.

¹¹⁴ George William Pilcher, *Samuel Davies, Apostle of Dissent in Colonial Virginia* (University of Tennessee Press: Knoxville, 1971) 5.

¹¹⁵ http://etcweb.princeton.edu/CampusWWW/Companion/log_college.html.

¹¹⁶ Old, 155.

How clearly and fully would he explained his subject! With what irresistible arguments he confirmed the truth! With what admirable dexterity he accommodated it to his audience! And with what solemn pungency did he impress it on the conscience! He spoke like one who knew the worth of souls and felt in himself the surest constraints of love to God and man.”¹¹⁷ This was the spiritual caliber of the man who filled Samuel Davies with not only in-depth knowledge of God’s Word in the original languages but also a passion to share his love of God and His Word with everyone in the colonies, including Indians and slaves. Years later, after returning from an extended period in England and Scotland, Davies was asked about the preachers he had heard while abroad. He replied “that there was scarce one of them who exceeded, and most came far short of his old master, the incomparable Mr. Blair, both as to the matter of their discourses, and the impression produced by their delivery.”¹¹⁸

Davies finished his training under Blair’s mentorship in the spring of 1746 “and was prepared to go forth and preach the evangelical doctrines of the New Light”¹¹⁹.¹²⁰ Along with extensive theological knowledge, Davies left with a new style of preaching that came to powerfully influence congregants, other ministers, and colonial leaders alike. “His oratorical zeal stirred the emotions of his contemporaries with a fire that lingered long after his death.”¹²¹ He upheld the mandate of Christ in Luke 4:18, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.”

“In 1746, when Davies presented himself to New Castle Presbytery for licensure, he had thoroughly imbibed the spirit of the Great Awakening.”¹²² He was “ordained as an evangelist, with a view to a mission among some of the destitute congregations in Virginia, especially Hanover County.”¹²³ In seeking a license to preach as a Presbyterian, Davies ran into problems with the Anglican Church, the established Church of Virginia. Anglican clergy were unified in their disdain for the Great Awakening and adamantly opposed Davies being allowed to preach God’s Word literally rather than according to Anglican orthodoxy. In spite of the Anglican Church’s attacks against him, after receiving the appointment to be the pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Hanover and desiring to comply with the laws of the governing authority, Davies visited the royal governor in Williamsburg and “managed to charm him so thoroughly that he won a license from him to preach. Governor William Gooch was impressed by the sincerity and orderliness of Davies’ approach. He also recognized that as a Presbyterian, he had a certain claim on the support of the Crown. If Presbyterianism was the established church of Scotland, why could it not at least be tolerated in Virginia? The Church of England was not eager to lose her position of privilege in Virginia, and Davies had a major work of diplomacy ahead of him in order to win a place for the Presbyterian congregations he spawned in the colony. Davies was a man of irenic spirit [a spirit that promotes peace], as was the governor, and it was to the credit of

¹¹⁷ Alexander, A., DD, editor, *Biographical Sketches of the Founder and Principal Alumni of the Log College Together with an Account of the Revivals of Religion under their Ministry*, (Princeton, New Jersey: JT Robinson, 1845).

¹¹⁸ Alexander, *The Log College*, pg. 147-148.

¹¹⁹ The “New Light” was an evangelical revivalism that held to an authentic spiritual awakening in the lives of believers brought on by the preaching of God’s Word. In *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737), Jonathan Edwards described his congregants’ experience, saying that grace had caused a “new light” to shine on their understanding of sin and atonement.

¹²⁰ Pilcher, 12.

¹²¹ Ibid, viii.

¹²² Old, 55.

¹²³ William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Presbyterian Pulpit, Commemorative Notices of Distinguished Clergymen of the Presbyterian Denomination in the United States* vol. 1 (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005) 140.

both that the spiritual power of the Great Awakening manifested itself so peacefully in Virginia.”¹²⁴

“In Virginia, where Davies began preaching, many people had been recently awakened under the preaching of men like George Whitefield and the Tennents. Many also immigrated with ambivalent feelings towards the Church of England. Samuel Davies came into this climate with a passion for souls, and the drive and ability to bring people together. It has been said that he ‘...had more to do with the formation of new churches and the settlement of ministers over them, than any other minister in the colony.’”¹²⁵

After the death of his pregnant first wife in late 1747, a sorrowing Davies’ lifelong physical ailments, probably including tuberculosis, worsened. Unwilling to accept a call to any congregation and having gained government approval to preach at several churches, he chose to travel from one vacant pulpit to another. According to others, thousands flocked to hear Davies in each of the areas he serviced. Davies said, “The number of those who attend my ministry at particular times is uncertain, but generally about three hundred, who give a stated attendance, and never have I been so struck with the appearance of an assembly, as when I have glanced my eye to that part of the meeting house where they usually sit, adorned, for so it has appeared to me, with so many black countenances eagerly attentive to every word they hear and frequently bathed in tears.”¹²⁶

In the spring of the next year, 1748, his physical problems began to improve. The heads of about 150 families in Hanover County, Virginia, signed a letter requesting him to pastor their church and had the petition delivered personally by one of their people. Davies agreed and moved to the backwoods of Virginia. “It is scarcely possible,” wrote historian William Henry Foote (1794-1869), “for a missionary to have gone to Virginia in circumstances better calculated to make an impression in favour of the gospel which he preached. In his domestic afflictions and bodily weakness, Davies felt the sentence of death gone out and already in execution. His soul burned with the desire of usefulness, and his tongue uttered the earnest persuasions of a spirit that would reconcile man to God, and lay some trophies at the Redeemer’s feet before his lips should be locked up in the grave. He longed to carry with him to the heavens some gems for the eternal crown.”¹²⁷ He was, indeed, the living embodiment of Puritan Richard Baxter’s (1615-1691) admonition, “To preach as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men.”¹²⁸

After taking the Hanover pulpit in 1748, Davies pursued “an active career in the pulpit, as rewarding as it was varied.”¹²⁹ Already busy before his licensure, Davies’ ill-health intensified “under the load of preaching and there were fever-ridden nights.”¹³⁰ “After being raised up almost from his grave at one time in his life, he felt anew the vital importance of preaching Christ. ‘In my sickness’, he wrote to a friend, ‘I found the unspeakable importance of a Mediator in a religion for sinners. O! I could have given you the word of a dying man for it that Jesus, that Jesus whom you preach, is indeed a necessary and an all-sufficient Saviour. Indeed he is the only support for a departing soul. *None but Christ, none but Christ!* Had I as many good works as Abraham or Paul, I would not have dared build my hopes on such a quicksand, but only on this

¹²⁴ Old, 155-156.

¹²⁵ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/26892963/Samuel-Davies-on-Slavery>

¹²⁶ Murray, 12.

¹²⁷ Samuel Davies: Apostle of Virginia by Thomas Talbot Ellis <http://www.puritansermons.com/banner/sdavies1.htm>.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Pilcher, 36.

¹³⁰ Murray, 8.

firm eternal Rock. Christ and His imputed righteousness is and always must be kept the centerpiece of all our faith and preaching.”¹³¹

In October, 1748, Davies’ license to preach was extended to three more congregations, allowing him to shepherd seven churches in five different counties, some separated by more than forty miles.¹³² He “bought up the time by reading while riding horseback between his numerous and distant charges.”¹³³ “Davies was not afraid of study. He never spent less than four days on the preparation of any sermon worthy of the name. He wrote to his brother-in-law in Williamsburg: ‘I have a peaceful study, as a refuge from the hurries and noise of the world around me; the venerable dead are waiting in my library to entertain me, and relieve me from the nonsense of surviving mortals.’”¹³⁴ In his autobiography published in 1854, William Jay of Bath made the following observation on the written sermons of Davies: “I must confess, no discourses ever appeared to me so adapted to awaken the conscience and impress the heart. In reading them, one seems always to feel that they were written by a man who never looked off from the value of a soul and the importance of eternity, or sought for anything but to bring his hearers under ‘the powers of the world to come.’ If it was so in reading, what must these sermons have been in the solemn, animated, affectionate delivery of them by Davies in flesh and blood, and with all the pathos of his Welsh soul?”¹³⁵

Davies’ congregations were comprised mainly of political and religious dissenters and non-conformists who preached the Truth rather than Anglican orthodoxy and “were frowned upon, persecuted, imprisoned, or put to death for offenses such as preaching without a license or holding prohibited gatherings.”¹³⁶ One explanation for the fervor of these dissenters in God’s service may be Davies’ ability to weave the uncertainties of frontier life into his messages while reminding his audience of their mortality and the Righteous Judge who awaited them after their departure from this life.¹³⁷ Davies preached as if death was imminent for those in his audience—and often it was on that wild frontier; therefore, he urged them to immediately begin preparing spiritually for eternity.¹³⁸ No doubt “human mortality was much more an issue out in the colonies than back in London or even Boston or Williamsburg.”¹³⁹ Understanding the short time their fellow colonists might have to hear the gospel made these brave men persevere even under the death sentence of the state church.

Davies was quick to jump to the defense of religious liberty, stating that “intolerance¹⁴⁰ has been the curse of every age and state.”¹⁴¹ At the age of twenty-seven, in championing the cause of the dissenters’ right to religious freedom, he expertly argued with the King’s Attorney General Peyton Randolph, a highly respected debater and one of the most powerful men in the colony. Davies posited that the Act of Toleration passed in England did indeed extend to the residents of the King’s colony in Virginia; therefore, Virginia’s churches had the right to teach

¹³¹ <http://www.puritansermons.com>.

¹³² Sprague, 141.

¹³³ <http://www.puritansermons.com>.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Barton, *Celebrate Liberty*, 228.

¹³⁷ Pilcher, 63.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 65.

¹³⁹ Old, 156-157.

¹⁴⁰ To the men of that time, intolerance applied to man’s unbiblical attitude toward God’s Word. Today, however, intolerance refers to obedience to the Truth of God’s Word, specifically about the one way of salvation and the biblical adherence to mandates of the spiritual life, all of which the kingdom of man abhors because they expose their sin and impotence before Almighty God.

¹⁴¹ <http://www.answers.com/topic/davies-samuel#ixzz1kyBh8Bpn>.

God's Word unimpeded by British intolerance.¹⁴² At one point, he said, "Mr. Randolph has argued vehemently for limiting the number of dissenter meetinghouses. It is generally known that the dissenters whom I serve in seven locations are so widely scattered that some families have to travel thirty or forty miles to attend worship. If the Act of Toleration was designed in part to give non-conforming citizens an opportunity to obey the Sabbath laws, why does the Attorney General wish to make it so difficult, if not impossible, for them to obey that law?"¹⁴³ "Davies continued to document the inequities that existed in the treatment of the dissenters of the colony. He proceeded to dismantle much of Randolph's argument, trading Latin phrase for phrase. In half the time it had taken Randolph to make his statement, Davies had made his defense clearly and had, in fact, showed that his adversary was out of step with practices in Great Britain."¹⁴⁴

As Davies began his short summary statement to end the legal proceedings, the previously blue sky darkened. Thunder rumbled with his first words. As had God throughout the dispensation of Israel, Davies used history to summarize his argument.

Mr. Attorney General and members of the Court, I appeal to you to remember that Virginia is a child of a motherland which has given peculiar meaning to the idea of civil and religious liberty. A century ago in England those great patriots...gave their lives for this great cause for which we now plead. Following the disastrous religious wars in Europe, England, Scotland and Ireland that caused the death of thousands and the displacement of multitudes more, those gracious monarchs, William and Mary, led England to recognize the rights of non-conformist citizens to worship as conscience dictated. The magnificent Act of Toleration of 1689 resulted and guaranteed...the right of every citizen to assemble and worship apart from the official government supported and sponsored Church of England, protected and without interference from civil or religious authorities. Virginia followed a decade later in what can be described as a pale imitation of that law. Over the years...our presence here today is but another more recent demonstration of the reality that toleration and civil and religious liberty are still an unrealized dream...The burden placed upon dissenters by this government multiplies rather than diminishes, and we may no longer...¹⁴⁵

Suddenly, a blinding flash of lightning was followed by roaring thunder. The smell of smoke seeped into the room. Was the building on fire? Frightened men rushed toward the door to escape only to find a large limb from a huge lightning-struck and smoldering oak tree fallen across the path into the building! Eventually, order restored, Davies finished his arguments. The court took little time to vote against religious freedom. On the way home after losing the court case, Davies' asked his friend John Holt about the dramatic lightning and thunder that had punctuated the unfair proceedings. "What do you think, John. Was it happenstance or more?"¹⁴⁶ Davies never doubted the presence of God in the dealings of man.

John Morton, who attended the debate, reported that the attending lawyers said among themselves, "The attorney-general has met with his match today."¹⁴⁷ Davies knew the law and used historical examples of the law to support his case. Anglican bias was all that prevented him

¹⁴² Sprague, 141.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 310-311.

¹⁴⁴ Bluford, 311.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 314-15

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 316.

¹⁴⁷ Pilcher, 121.

from winning the case. The exchange between Randolph and Davies not only makes interesting reading but also shows that the so-called ignorant clergy of the “log college” were in fact as well or better educated than those of the more traditional system. “When Davies walked out of the court someone said of him, ‘What a waste of talent. There goes a most excellent lawyer spoiled!’”¹⁴⁸

Later, because Davies “maintained his position [for religious freedom] with the utmost firmness... on his visit to England, he had an opportunity to bring the matter before the King in Council; he received a declaration, under authority, that the Act of Toleration did extend to the Colony of Virginia.”¹⁴⁹ “In reality, the dissenters acquired more freedom than they asked for, some of them being allowed to preach unmolested wherever they desired until the Revolution.”¹⁵⁰ Virginia became the lynchpin upon which national independence rested because these doctrinal pastors, led by Samuel Davies, trained the people to understand the biblical basis for civil disobedience in the face of religious tyranny.

Davies’ second marriage, to Jane Holt, in October, 1748, added stability and comfort to his life as well as an added bonus in the dissemination of his biblical teachings. Her brother John Holt worked with the printer and publisher of the *Virginia Gazette*. Holt’s “support gave Davies a ready entrance into the publishing world, and his sermons and poems regularly appeared in the *Gazette* or, under John Holt’s direction, as separate publications.”¹⁵¹ The wide circulation of his writings increased Davies spiritual influence throughout the colonies. He not only gained prominence in America, but his sermons also “gained wide acceptance among a broad spectrum of the population in Great Britain.”¹⁵² “A three volume set of his sermons was published soon after his death, and was at the time thought to be the mostly widely read series of sermons in the English language.”¹⁵³

Davies was apparently “the first resident of the American colonies to write hymns as a regular and serious endeavor and the first to have had them published.”¹⁵⁴ “Let Davies encourage us in one of his more than 100 poems and hymns:

*Great God of wonders! all thy ways
Are worthy of thyself — divine;
And the bright glories of thy grace
Among thine other wonders shine;
Who is a pard’ning God like thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?”*¹⁵⁵

Or consider his poem based on Acts 17:30, “The Universal Call of God to Repentance.”

*Hark! from the skies the great command
Sounds through the earth abroad;
“Repent, ye sons of men, repent;
“Return unto your God.”
The times of ignorance are past,
The Gospel-day now shines:*

¹⁴⁸ Bluford, 316.

¹⁴⁹ Sprague, 141.

¹⁵⁰ Pilcher, 169.

¹⁵¹ Old, 11.

¹⁵² Pilcher, 67.

¹⁵³ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/26892963/Samuel-Davies-on-Slavery>.

¹⁵⁴ Pilcher, 51.

¹⁵⁵ <http://www.puritansermons.com>.

*The sovereign Judge no more o-erlooks,
 But marks down all your crimes.
 Sinners on thrones, in cottages,
 All on this guilty ball,
 Whate'er you are, whate'er you be,
 This charge includes you all
 Come thousands then, come all mankind
 Fall at your Sovereign's feet:
 With broken hearts, and weeping eyes,
 Approach the mercy-seat.
 There sits the sin-forgiving God,
 And spreads his arms to all;
 There his free pardons deals abroad
 To each who hears his call.”¹⁵⁶*

Davies not only preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to prepare unbelievers for eternity but also to challenge believers to live the spiritual life in preparation for eternity. In his sermon *The One Thing Needful*, Davies stated regarding the present world, “The true notion therefore of the present state is that it is a state of preparation and trial for the eternal world.”¹⁵⁷ For Davies, the Christian life was based on “that thorough change of heart, usually denominated regeneration; that distressing conviction of our undone condition by sin and utter inability to relieve ourselves by virtue of that strength common to mankind in general; that humble acceptance of Christ as our only Saviour and Lord by a faith of divine operation; that humbling sense of the corruption of human nature and eager pursuit and practice of universal holiness.’ These characteristics were certainly present in his life to a very high degree.”¹⁵⁸

Davies emphasized holiness in the spiritual walk, defining it as “conformity in heart and practice to the revealed will of God.... We are holy when his image is stamped upon our hearts and reflected in our lives.”¹⁵⁹ Because such encouragement to live a lifestyle pleasing to God and according to His Word was “preached by a minister who was greatly beloved for his holiness,”¹⁶⁰ his hearers responded with spiritual joy, diligence and perseverance.

Davies’ concern for the spiritual well-being of those under his care was evidenced in his willingness to share the spiritual work with none other than Jonathan Edwards. After Edwards’ dismissal from the Northampton pulpit, Davies tried to bring him to the Virginia colony as a co-worker, even raising monetary support for him. “Despairing of ever finding a new pulpit in New England, Edwards might have joined Davies in Virginia except that the invitation arrived too late.”¹⁶¹ Edwards took the pulpit in Stockbridge before the arrival of Davies’ letter. Davies’ offer demonstrated his humble desire to send the gospel throughout the colonies by every possible means. Rather than seeking to increase his own honor, prestige, and power, he worked to augment the sharing of God’s Word with a lost and dying world. Of Davies, Edwards wrote in 1749, “I have heard lately a credible account of a remarkable work of conviction and conversion among whites and negroes at Hanover, Virginia, under the ministry of Mr. Davies, who is lately

¹⁵⁶ <http://www.scribd.com/doc/26892963/Samuel-Davies-on-Slavery>.

¹⁵⁷ Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects vol 2* (Bedford, Mass. Applewood Books) 32.

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.puritansermons.com/>

¹⁵⁹ Old, 163.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 164.

¹⁶¹ Pilcher, 95.

settled there, and has the character of a very ingenious and pious young man.”¹⁶² Though these two stalwarts of the Great Awakening seem never to have met, their influence served to unite the colonies in their understanding of God’s design for human government and emphasized the personal responsibility in living the spiritual life according to God’s Word, including procuring religious freedom.

Davies preached the whole counsel of God with a focus on aspects related to the community in which he served. He was not afraid to tackle the tough issues of his day from the pulpit. He rebuked slave owners who neglected to educate their slaves, accusing them of perpetuating the institution. In a sermon addressing the responsibilities of Christians to propagate Christianity among slaves and Indians, Davies taught that the slaveholders’ responsibility toward their slaves was the same as toward their children in regards to teaching biblical Christianity. Davies chastised their neglect of the slaves in this eternal concern, preaching, “You see swarms of prayerless families all over our land; ignorant, vicious children, unrestrained and untaught by those to whom God and nature have entrusted their souls: you see thousands of poor slaves in a Christian country, the property of Christian masters, as they will be called, almost as ignorant of Christianity as when they left the wilds of Africa...”¹⁶³ He considered the war with the French God’s punishment on Virginia for continuing slavery.¹⁶⁴

Even as he addressed the hot button topics of the day, Davies was mindful of his oratorical delivery and consciously avoided emotionalism. “‘Preachers indeed should be passionate and warm,’ he said, ‘but should beware of appearing too emotional and fanatical, for such behavior expose their beliefs to public contempt and could encourage irrational behavior by their listeners.’”¹⁶⁵ “‘It is an easy thing to make a noise in the world,’ said Davies, ‘to flourish and harangue, to dazzle the crowd and set them all agape; but deeply to imbibe the Spirit of Christianity, to maintain a secret walk with God, to be holy, as he is holy—this is the labour, this is the work.’”¹⁶⁶ Davies also challenged the idea that spontaneity was proof of a heart-felt sermon, always thoroughly preparing for the pulpit with an organized written oratory. “His sermons contain both the careful organization of thought characteristic of the written sermon and the vitality of extemporaneous speech.”¹⁶⁷

The rapid increase of numbers in the Presbyterian Church under Davies’ guidance was perceived by the established church “as a serious threat to the religious and political stability of the colony.”¹⁶⁸ The success of Davies’ zealous preaching prompted the Anglican Commissary of the colony, William Dawson, to report to the Bishop of London, “The Dissenters were but an inconsiderable number before the late arrival of certain Teachers from the Northern Colonies...[and] since Mr. Davies has been allowed to officiate in so many places...there has been a great defection from our Religious Assemblies. The generality of his followers, I believe, were born and bred in our Communion.”¹⁶⁹ Virginia Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie (1693–1770), who served as the British administrator of the colony, noted in an exchange with Davies, “I find it disturbing to have discovered more extensive disruption in the established

¹⁶² The Banner of Truth Magazine, no. 235, April 1983.

¹⁶³ Pilcher, 114.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁶⁶ Iain H. Murray, Revival and Revivalism, The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858 (Carlyle, PN: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994) 45.

¹⁶⁷ *Old*, 165.

¹⁶⁸ Pilcher, 88.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

church than I had realized before I arrived.”¹⁷⁰

In his letter to the Bishop of London in 1752, Davies explained that accusations regarding attacks against the established church from his pulpit were unfounded. “For my farther vindication, my lord, I beg leave to declare, and I defy the world to confute me, that in all the sermons I have preached in Virginia, I have not wasted one minute in exclaiming or reasoning against the peculiarities of the established church; nor so much as assigned the reasons of my own non-conformity. I have not exhausted my zeal in railing against the established clergy, in exposing their imperfections....No, my lord, I have matters of infinitely greater importance to exert my zeal and spend my time and strength upon – To preach repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ – To alarm secure impenitents; to reform the profligate; to undeceive the hypocrite; to raise up the hands that hang down, and to strengthen the feeble knees – These are the doctrines I preach.”¹⁷¹

What was Davies preaching to warrant the attention of England’s established church? Davies “saw himself as an evangelist preaching to people who had never heard the gospel.”¹⁷² Foremost, he preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, considering it the priority, a policy at odds with the Anglican Church’s abandonment of Christ’s salvation work. In teaching 1 Corinthians 1:22-24, Davies declared, “The sufferings of Christ, which had a dreadful consummation in his crucifixion, their necessity, design, and consequences, and the way of salvation thereby opened for a guilty world, these are the principal material of our preaching; to instruct mankind in these is the great object of our ministry, and the unwearied labour of our lives. We might easily choose subjects more pleasing and popular, more fit to display our learning and abilities, and set off the strong reasoner or the fine orator: but our commission, as minister of a crucified Jesus, binds us to the subject; and the necessity of the world peculiarly requires it.”¹⁷³

Unlike present preachers who serve up the Gospel as unheated leftovers, men like Davies brought the Gospel to bear on a variety of subjects. For example, Davies made the believer’s guarantee of eternal salvation the cornerstone of his remarks when he addressed Virginia’s soldiers as they prepared to fight in the French and Indian War. “Fly to Jesus on the wings of faith - all of you ... that are now about generously to risk your lives for your country. ... What can do you a lasting injury while you have a reconciled God smiling upon you from on high, a peaceful conscience animating you within, and a happy immortality just before you?”¹⁷⁴

At the conclusion of his remarks, Davies said, “We have no ground for a lazy confidence in divine Providence; nor should we content ourselves with inactive prayers; but let us rouse ourselves and be active...I have no scruple thus openly to declare that such of you whose circumstances allow of it may not only lawfully enlist and take up arms, but that your so doing is a Christian duty, and acting an honourable part worthy of a man, a freeman, a Briton, and a Christian.”¹⁷⁵ After the defeat of Braddock ten days later, “Davies made Braddock’s defeat the basis for another patriotic sermon, comparing Virginia to an ancient Israel that had become ‘sunk in security’ and had neglected to call upon God for help...As a first requisite for victory the people must ‘cry aloud to God for help,’ but they must also arm themselves and prepare for defense, for ‘Christians should be patriots. What is that religion good for that leaves men

¹⁷⁰ Bluford, 319.

¹⁷¹ Bushman, 165.

¹⁷² Old, 157.

¹⁷³ Davies, 98.

¹⁷⁴ <http://partyof1776.net/p1776/ministers/Davies%20Samuel/quotes/contents.html>.

¹⁷⁵ Pilcher, 164.

cowards upon the appearance of danger?’”¹⁷⁶

Davies used God's Word to prepare the people in the colonies to fight for religious freedom. In speaking to recruits in 1755, “Davies preached a sermon titled ‘Religion and Patriotism, the Constituents of a Good Soldier,’ calling for courage in battle and picturing the recruits as the flames of the martial fire that God sought to kindle throughout America.”¹⁷⁷

These few examples do not give justice to the fantastic preaching of Samuel Davies, who wove theological depth with practical application and delivered God’s Truth in a grace manner that made his preaching appeal to many. “Davies entered the following record in his private diary: ‘Preached a sermon in the morning from Isaiah 66.1, 2 “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word,” and through the great mercy of God my heart was passionately affected with the neglect; and what tended not a little to increase my affection was my observing the venerable Mr. Tennent weeping beside me in the pulpit. Spiritual poverty and humility appeared very amiable and pleasing to me.””¹⁷⁸

The Light shining in the daily activities of those who absorbed his preaching was visible to others. “A correspondent in nearby Richmond County wrote in 1755: ‘When I go amongst Mr. Davies’ people, religion seems to flourish; it is like the suburbs of heaven: it is very agreeable to see the gentlemen at their morning and evening prayers, with their slaves devoutly joining with them.””¹⁷⁹

Davies’ legacy also comes from his spiritual influence on one particular young man whose mother brought him to church every Sunday. This young man, who would later inspire the entire country with an heroic speech, was none other than Patrick Henry. “At the age of 12, Patrick first began to sit under the masterful preaching of the Rev. Samuel Davies, ‘the prince of American preachers.’”¹⁸⁰ Henry “claimed he was first taught what an orator should be by listening to Davies preach.”¹⁸¹ “Davies spoke with uncommon artistry, and Patrick sat in church transfixed. The sermons had a seamless unity, with emotion and reason flowing simultaneously to a series of excited climaxes. The man could modulate his voice into a great variety of tones, booming and hushed, lyrical, penitent, frightened. He could enact, right before the congregation’s eyes, the majestic scenes of resurrection and judgment so that his listeners could see and feel the cosmic drama unfold. He would put them in the immense crowd gathered at the Judgment Seat, warn them that the Judge’s eye ‘will be as particularly fixed on every one of us as though there were but one before him,’ and portray the piteous scene as the Judge divided the multitude upon his right and left hands.”¹⁸² Henry’s attitude toward the War may have been influenced by Davies’ words, “Human laws extend only to outward actions, but these laws reach the heart, and the principle of action within...But Jesus is the Lord of souls; he makes his subjects bow their hearts as well as the knee to him.”¹⁸³

“The solemn and dignified sermons of Davies surely made a profound and lasting impact on the young and impressionable Patrick. Under Davies’ eloquent and spell-binding preaching, he observed an exalted model of oratory worthy of imitation in his later political discourses.”¹⁸⁴ One might legitimately argue that without Patrick Henry’s stirring speech, “Give Me Liberty or

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 165.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 166.

¹⁷⁸ <http://www.puritansermons.com>.

¹⁷⁹ Old, 13.

¹⁸⁰ David J. Vaughn, *Give Me Liberty* (Elkton, MD: Highland Books, 1997) 31.

¹⁸¹ Pilcher, 83.

¹⁸² Henry Mayer, *Son of Thunder, Patrick Henry and the American Republic* (NY: Grove Press, 1991) 37.

¹⁸³ <http://www.christianworldviewofhistoryandculture.com/samuel-daviesquotes>.

¹⁸⁴ Vaughn, 31.

Give Me Death,” Virginia might not have acted at the right time to procure freedom for the entire land. And without the influence of Samuel Davies, Patrick Henry would not have had the oratorical skills to deliver that most famous speech that still stirs the heart of every lover of freedom! As Henry spoke, “the convention sat in stunned silence....Failure to move forward in preparation would be more than cowardice. It would be treason against God Himself, the author of those liberties now under attack....By the convention’s end Henry was reelected to the next Continental Congress and Virginia was preparing to arm itself for war.”¹⁸⁵

Davies also influenced the founding of America as the promoter and later president (1759-1761) of the Presbyterian College of New Jersey, today known as Princeton University. Recognizing the need to train pastors in the unity of the faith so they could properly and skillfully teach others the Truth of God’s Word, even before his presidency Davies worked to make the college a training center for those chosen by God to shepherd His sheep.¹⁸⁶ In 1753 in the company of Gilbert Tennent, son of William Tennent, founder of the “Log College,” Davies traveled to England to raise money for the school.¹⁸⁷ Their hard work in furtherance of the accurate preaching of God’s Word raised more than three thousand pounds, which would be in the millions of dollars today,¹⁸⁸ and helped make the college financially strong. At the same time, Davies did not neglect his duties to his family or congregation. He agreed to the trip only after the college agreed to finance a minister to fill his pulpit, continue his current salary to support his family, and allow him to return home if his wife became seriously ill.¹⁸⁹

In 1759, when the College of New Jersey needed a new president to succeed Jonathan Edwards, the leader of the Great Awakening, Davies left Virginia to take up those responsibilities.¹⁹⁰ In the two short years of his presidency, “Davies left his mark as scholar and patriot on his students, particularly the eleven members of the Class of 1760 whom he taught as seniors. ‘Whatever be your Place,’ he told them in his baccalaureate address, ‘imbibe and cherish a public spirit. Serve your generation.’ This they did. Among the eleven were a member of the Continental Congress, chaplains in the Continental Army, judges in Maine and Pennsylvania, the founder of a college in North Carolina, a member of the United States House of Representatives, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence.”¹⁹¹

Remarkably, Davies “accomplished more in his brief life of thirty-seven years than most people do in twice the number. Multitudes are in his debt who do not know his name, yet he was a man of humble background who rose to prominence in his lifetime, known and appreciated on two continents for his intellectual brilliance and his unsurpassed pulpit oratory.”¹⁹² “Samuel Davies is remembered for his oratory, his academic leadership as college president, his championship of the rights to freedom to worship of Dissenting congregations, his support for pioneer missionary work among the North American Indians and especially for his loving pastoral concern for the spiritual welfare of all those among whom he ministered. But first and foremost he was a preacher of God’s Word.”¹⁹³ Davies’ knowledge of God’s Word and eloquence in preaching it prepared the spiritual thinking of the Christians who bravely led the biblical civil disobedience that procured freedom from religious persecution for an entire nation.

¹⁸⁵ Vaughn, 85.

¹⁸⁶ Pilcher, 106.

¹⁸⁷ Jeffery, 41

¹⁸⁸ Nick Willborn Great Men of Faith lecture, www.youtube/watch?v=pEt6kKwqRHo

¹⁸⁹ Pilcher, 139.

¹⁹⁰ Old, 167.

¹⁹¹ Alexander Leitch, *A Princeton Companion*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).

¹⁹² Bluford, 496.

¹⁹³ Samuel Davies, “A Declaration of Love,” 5-6.

Today, that freedom is rapidly disappearing under the heavy hand of a government that abuses its God-given power. Will we need to lift up the banner of civil disobedience in this generation so that religious freedom can once again flourish? If so, will one of us be prepared to be today's Samuel Davies, a spiritual soldier boldly and unequivocally wielding the sword of the Spirit in the face of persecution and personal adversity? If we zealously pursue God's Word, obedience to it, and dissemination of it, we *will* be prepared if God chooses to use us in that service of worship.

JOHN WITHERSPOON, A LEADER IN THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

John Witherspoon (1723–1794), the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence,¹⁹⁴ can perhaps be “best described as the man who shaped the men who shaped America.”¹⁹⁵ He “typified the Colonial Clergy who literally disciplined the nation.”¹⁹⁶ During the War for American Independence, the preaching of Witherspoon and other brave and biblically knowledgeable clergymen influenced many in the colonies to stand firm in the Truth. In spite of his substantial contributions to our freedom, “of all the founders Dr. John Witherspoon was probably the most overtly religious and, possibly for that reason, one of the least noticed in modern times.”¹⁹⁷ In fact, Jeffery Morrison, in his biography on Witherspoon, entitled the first chapter “Forgotten Founder.”¹⁹⁸ Perhaps one reason for Witherspoon's neglect is that most of his personal correspondence were destroyed during the British's destruction of his farm and library during the War for American Independence, of which he was an indispensable fount of biblical wisdom and encouragement. For Americans to neglect studying this man of God is to willfully misunderstand the spiritual impetus crucial to victory in the war against Britain.

John Witherspoon was born at Gifford, a parish of Yester, East Lothian, Scotland, the eldest child of the Reverend James Alexander Witherspoon, a Presbyterian minister, and Anna Walker, a minister's daughter.¹⁹⁹ Like Davies, he credited “his ‘pious mother’ for his early religious instruction, observing that with her help he was able to begin reading the Bible at the age of four.”²⁰⁰ This early immersion in God's Word led to a life of dedication to his Lord and Savior that began in Scotland and extended through the founding of the United States of America, his adopted and much loved home. We saw a similar familial pattern in the early lives of Edwards and Davies; the influence of their spiritually mature and God-centered families led them all to lives firmly grounded in God's Word and totally dependent on their Creator.

At the age of thirteen, Witherspoon enrolled at the University of Edinburgh. “In three years he earned his Master of Arts degree and spent four more years in Edinburgh preparing for the ministry.”²⁰¹ Soon, Witherspoon was licensed to preach and was offered an assistant position in the parish of Yester; however, “having, in 1744, received a presentation from the Earl of Eglinton to the parish of Beith in the West of Scotland, he, with the unanimous consent of the people, was ordained in the early part of the following year as minister of that populous parish.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁴ David C. Gibbs and Jerry Newcombe One Nation Under God, Ten Things Every Christian Should Know about the Founding of America (Seminole, FL; Christian Law Association, 2006) 287.

¹⁹⁵ Eidsmoe pg 81.

¹⁹⁶ Beliles, 119.

¹⁹⁷ Spivey, pg. 47.

¹⁹⁸ Jeffery H. Morrison John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005) 1.

¹⁹⁹ Sprague, 36.

²⁰⁰ Tait, 2.

²⁰¹ Eidsmoe, 82.

²⁰² Sprague, 289.

Shortly after beginning his tenure at Beith (1745–1758), “the Pretender to the British throne [Charles Edward Stuart] landed in the North of Scotland, and was speedily joined by a devoted band of Highlanders, who espoused his cause; and a general alarm was spread throughout the country.”²⁰³ Witherspoon, “a staunch Protestant, nationalist, and supporter of republicanism,”²⁰⁴ opposed the Roman Catholic uprising (1745-1746) and raised a corps of militia to oppose the British invasion. Following the Stuart victory at the battle of Falkirk in 1746, he was captured and remained confined in the castle of Donne until Stuart was overthrown at the battle of Culloden later in 1746. Many think Witherspoon’s body, which was already damaged from intense study, “received a shock from the confinement” from which he never fully recovered.²⁰⁵ Though his body was weak, his love of the Lord and zeal to serve Him was, as so often happens, strengthened through suffering so that he continued to stand firm for the Word of God and to even more thoroughly immerse himself in it.

Returning to his parish after his release, Witherspoon faithfully discharged his duty before God, attending to the spiritual need of his flock and feeding them a steady diet from the Word of God. There, he married Elizabeth Montgomery of Craighouse, and they had ten children, five of whom survived to adulthood. An early biographer of Reverend Witherspoon noted of his attitude toward family, “His known punctuality and exactness were most sacredly observed in the devotional exercises of the Christian life: besides the daily devotions of the closet and the family, it was his established practice to observe the last day of every year with his family, as a day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer: and he was also accustomed to set apart days for secret fasting and prayer, as occasion suggested. He maintained that family religion and the careful discharge of relative duties were an excellent incentive to the growth of religion in a man’s own soul. ‘How,’ said he, ‘can any person bend his knees in prayer every day with his family without its being a powerful restraint upon him from the indulgence of any sin which is visible to them? Will such a one, think you, dare to indulge himself in anger or choose to be seen by them when he comes home staggering with drunkenness, unfit to perform any duty, or ready to sin still more by the manner of performance? But besides being a restraint from gross crimes, I cannot help saying, that speaking of the things of God with the concern of a parent or the humanity of a master must give a solemnity of spirit and a sense of their moment, even greater than before. Let me, therefore, earnestly recommend the faithful discharge and careful management of family duties, as you regard the glory of God, the interest of His church, the advantage of posterity, and your own final acceptance in the day of judgment.’”²⁰⁶

“In 1756, he published, at Glasgow, his admirable essay on the “Connexion between the Doctrine of Justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, and holiness of life.”²⁰⁷ As with Edwards, Davies, and all other great teachers of God's Word, he made sure his listeners had a clear, in depth understanding of their eternal salvation so that they would not be plagued with doubt and would be filled with an urgent desire to explain that eternal confidence to others.

Witherspoon took the task of preaching seriously for he knew “he was speaking for God as he preached from the Bible, God’s very own revelation. Thus, the preacher had no call to be tentative or hesitant as long as he remained faithful to the Word of God written.”²⁰⁸ He was not a flamboyant preacher, instead delivering his sermons with carefully ordered precision, choosing

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Headley, 280-281.

²⁰⁵ Sprague, 289.

²⁰⁶ Marilyn Boyer, *For You They Signed* (Master Books, Green Forest, AR, 2010) 136.

²⁰⁷ <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/other/witherspoon.htm>.

²⁰⁸ Tait, 24.

to spend hours in study to prepare an hour message from one passage of Scripture. Unwilling to give into allegory, he stood firm on the text of Scripture, avoiding wooden literalism and proof-texting. His illustrations usually came from Scripture because he understood that the Bible presents enough persons and situations to shed application light on every biblical truth and principle. “The story is told of a visitor who, observing that Witherspoon’s enthusiasm for gardening was confined to growing vegetables, remarked, ‘Doctor, I see no flowers in your garden,’ to which came the reply, ‘No, nor in my discourses either.’”²⁰⁹

According to Benjamin Rush (1746-1813), a Founding Father, Witherspoon’s manner in the pulpit was “solemn and graceful,” his voice melodious, and his sermons “loaded with good sense and adorned” with “elegance and beauty” of expression.²¹⁰ Rush was most impressed that Witherspoon used no notes, “in sharp contrast with the ‘too common practice of reading sermons in America.’”²¹¹

In July of 1766, Samuel Finley, president of the College of New Jersey after Jonathan Edwards’ and Samuel Davies’ tenures, died, leaving the presidency again vacant. “Princeton had lost four presidents in under nine years, and obvious choices for a successor in the Thirteen Colonies had come to an end.”²¹² Looking abroad, the trustees of the college saw in Witherspoon a minister whose theology reflected the biblical thinking of the Great Awakening. Witherspoon had led the way for Bible-centered sermons, local control of the church, and the understanding of salvation by grace. That, combined with his zeal and piety, made him a prime choice to fill the vacant office.²¹³

At the urging of Benjamin Rush and Richard Stockton, whom he met while pastoring a church in Paisley, Scotland (1758-1768), Witherspoon agreed to become President and head professor of the small Presbyterian college. The title of his last sermon in Scotland, “Ministerial Fidelity in Declaring the Whole Counsel of God,” indicates his focus on correctly preaching God’s Word in its entirety, a message he continued to expound in the New World. In 1768, at the age of 45, he and his wife, three sons, and two daughters emigrated to New Jersey. “Witherspoon wrote that he became an American within three months of his arrival.”²¹⁴ In his first sermon at Princeton, which was in keeping with his last sermon in Scotland, Witherspoon stated dogmatically that ‘true religion in the heart is of far greater importance to the success and efficacy of the ministry than eminence or gifts.’²¹⁵ Witherspoon chose to abandon the celebrity and reputation he had attained in England to follow God’s leading and go to the untamed wilderness of the New World to share his biblical understanding and zeal for his Lord.

Witherspoon taught “Eloquence, Chronology [history], Divinity, and Moral Philosophy (a required course).”²¹⁶ Of history, Edwards wrote, “Unless men may come to a reasonable, solid persuasion and conviction of the truth of the gospel, by the internal evidences of it, . . . by a sight of its glory; it is impossible that those who are illiterate and unacquainted with history should have any thorough and effectual conviction of it at all.” He understood the limitations of history, which only knowledge of God can fulfill. “To have a conviction so clear and evident and assuring as to be sufficient to induce them with boldness to sell all, confidently and fearlessly to

²⁰⁹ Robert G. Ferris, ed, Signers of the Declaration: Historic Places Commemorating the Signing of the Declaration of Independence, (Washington, D.C.: the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1975) 149-151.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 149-151.

²¹¹ Ibid, 149-151.

²¹² Old, 41.

²¹³ Eidsmoe, 82-83.

²¹⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th edition, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1911) electronic version.

²¹⁵ <http://pastorandpeople.wordpress.com/category/john-witherspoon>.

²¹⁶ Old, 47.

run the venture of the loss of all things and of enduring the most exquisite and long continued torments and to trample the world under foot and count all things but dung for Christ, the evidence they can have from history cannot be sufficient.”²¹⁷

As President, he advocated Natural Law within a Christian and republican Cosmology, a Moral Philosophy he considered vital for ministers, lawyers, and those in government.²¹⁸ This emphasis “gave men a heightened view of the importance of the Word of God.”²¹⁹ His constant advice to the young men he was preparing for the ministry was to “never enter the pulpit without the most careful preparation; and it was his ambition and his hope, to render the sacred ministry the most learned as well as the most pious and exemplary body of men in the republic.”²²⁰ During Witherspoon’s tenure, the school’s motto was “*Cursed be all learning that is contrary to the cross of Christ.*” James Madison, who primarily authored the Constitution, was one of the early beneficiaries of Witherspoon’s union of biblical seriousness and common-sense application. Madison graduated after two years at Princeton but stayed another six months to study elementary Hebrew and theology with Witherspoon.²²¹

Under the lingering influence of the Great Awakening and Witherspoon’s impassioned expositions of God’s Word, a ‘remarkable revival’ occurred at Princeton in ‘the third and fourth years’ of his presidency.²²² Many of those believers became the stalwarts of the coming war.

In 1772, Witherspoon wrote to a member of the British Aristocracy, saying, “There are now under my care, many who in a very short time will be at the head of affairs in their several provinces, and I have already and shall continue to temper the spirit of liberty, which breathes high in their country, with just sentiments, not only of loyalty to our excellent sovereign, in which they do not seem to be defective, but with a love of order and an aversion to that outrage and sedition into which the spirit of liberty when not reined is sometimes apt to degenerate.”²²³ His leadership did indeed bring those results. During Witherspoon’s twenty-six years at Princeton (1768-1794), “478 young men graduated – about eighteen students per year. Of those 478 graduates, 114 became ministers; 13 were state governors; 3 were U.S. Supreme Court judges; 20 were United States Senators; 33 were U.S. Congressmen; Aaron Burr, Jr. became Vice-President; and James Madison became President. Of the 55 delegates to the Constitutional Convention, 9 (one-sixth) were College of New Jersey graduates, and 6 graduated while Witherspoon was president.”²²⁴

As had Edwards and Davies, Witherspoon battled the European Enlightenment oozing into the colonies, warning against mixing philosophy and the gospel. He argued that God’s Word must always rule over Reason, stating, “Let not human understanding be put in the balance with divine wisdom...Hence the unnatural mixture often seen of modern philosophy with ancient Christianity. Hence the fundamental doctrines of the gospel are softened, concealed, or denied; [such] as, the lost and guilty state of man by nature, his liableness to everlasting misery, and the ransom which was paid by our Redeemer when he died on the cross.”²²⁵ Witherspoon preached, “Men are not generally sufficiently aware of the distinction between the law of God and his

²¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, Part 3, v.

²¹⁸ Old, 47.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 43.

²²⁰ Boyer, 136.

²²¹ Morrison, 1.

²²² Old, 47.

²²³ Varum Lansing Collins, Introduction to *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, by John Witherspoon, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1912), 141.

²²⁴ Eidsmoe, 83.

²²⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica.

purpose; they are apt to suppose, that as the temper of the sinner is contrary to the one so the outrages of the sinner are able to defeat the other; than which nothing can be more false.”²²⁶

Witherspoon’s renown as a biblical scholar, ardent preacher, and promoter of freedom spread throughout the colonies. “The clergy of the country were found not only in the pulpit and field upholding the cause of the American Colonies, and in the ranks fighting for it, but also in the counsels of the nation lending both the sanction of their office and the ripened fruit of long years of study to promote its success. Foremost among these was Dr. Witherspoon, a Scotchman by birth, but in every other respect an American patriot.”²²⁷ When John Adams stopped over in Princeton on his way to the first meeting of the Continental Congress in 1774, he met Witherspoon and pronounced him ‘as high a Son of Liberty, as any Man in America.’”²²⁸ “Adams was notoriously stingy with praise (Hamilton he called ‘the bastard son of a Scotch peddler,’ Washington ‘old mutton-head’), but Witherspoon emerged in his estimation ‘an animated son of Liberty.’ Jefferson was always going on about the ‘irritable tribe of priests’ and castigated Presbyterians as ‘the loudest most intolerant of sects,’ but he was cordiality itself when it came to the great Dr. Witherspoon. The fact that today his work goes unread and the name ‘Witherspoon’ is more broadly associated with his direct descendant, the actress Reese Witherspoon, tells us something about the fragility of fame. No wonder Morrison calls his first chapter ‘Forgotten Founder.’”²²⁹

Because God’s Word impressed on Witherspoon his civic responsibilities, he was an early advocate for independence and “gave himself totally to the cause of American independence; he lost two sons in the war.”²³⁰ In 1774, in his essay “Thoughts on American Liberty,” he boldly proclaimed that “we are firmly determined never to submit to, and do deliberately prefer war with all its horrors and even extermination itself, to slavery riveted upon us and our posterity.”²³¹ He encouraged all patriots, saying, “The frugal and moderate person, who guides his affairs with discretion, is able to assist in public counsels by a free and unbiased judgment, to supply the wants of his poor brethren, and sometimes, by his estates and substance to give important aid to a sinking country.”²³² His was a call to all in the colonies to help bear the burden in the fight for religious and political freedom.

This love for liberty came from his understanding of the Word of God and his conviction that love must be balanced with order.²³³ During a Princeton baccalaureate sermon in 1775, Witherspoon warned of the sin nature trends that man too often uses to compromise the Truth of God’s Word. He urged those future pastors and leaders to guard against egocentric ideas that bastardize God’s meaning. Only the hard work of discarding preconceived ideas while humbly and carefully studying His Word in the power of God the Holy Spirit can glorify God. “The pride of unsanctified knowledge [can] do great injury to religion; and on the other hand, we find some persons of real piety, despising human learning, and disgracing the most glorious truths by a meanness and indecency hardly sufferable in their manner of handling them...Persons of the greatest ability have generally been lovers of order. Neither is there any instance to be found, of a man’s arriving at great reputation or usefulness, be his capacity what it might,

²²⁶ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/search?q=john+witherspoon&commit=Search>.

²²⁷ Headley, 280.

²²⁸ http://etcweb.princeton.edu/CampusWWW/Companion/witherspoon_john.html.

²²⁹ <http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/The-forgotten-founder--John-Witherspoon-2437>.

²³⁰ Eidsmoe, 86.

²³¹ <http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/The-forgotten-founder--John-Witherspoon-2437>.

²³² <http://www.christianworldviewofhistoryandculture.com/johnwitherspoonquotes2>.

²³³ Eidsmoe, pg. 84

without industry and application... True religion should furnish you with a higher and nobler principle to govern your conduct, than the desire of applause from men. Yet, in subordination to what ought to be the great purpose of life, there is a just and laudable ambition to do what is praiseworthy among men. This ought not to be extinguished in the minds of youth; being a powerful spur and incitement to virtuous or illustrious actions... A man's real character in point of ability, is never mistaken, and but seldom in point of morals. That there are many malicious and censorious persons, I agree ; but lies are not half so durable as truth. Therefore reverence the judgment of mankind without idolizing it."²³⁴ With such words, Witherspoon helped build a foundation based solely on God's Word for those who would lead in the independence movement and write its documents.

Witherspoon unequivocally promoted the independence movement from the pulpit, saying, "Shun, as a contagious pestilence, ... those especially whom you perceive to be infected with the principles of infidelity or enemies to the power of religion. Whoever is an avowed enemy of God, I scruple not to call him an enemy to his country."²³⁵

About the establishment of his beloved nation, he said to those concerned that the price of transient liberty would be too great, "Shall we establish nothing good because we know it cannot be eternal? Shall we live without government because every constitution has its old age and its period? Because we know that we shall die, shall we take no pains to preserve or lengthen our life? Far from it, Sir: it only requires the more watchful attention to settle government upon the best principles and in the wisest manner that it may last as long as the nature of things will admit."²³⁶ Because he knew that God's Word provides the only lasting foundation, his focus remained on preparing good leaders by filling their souls with God's Word.

When the British captured his friend Richard Stockton and brutally persecuted him, the following resolution, believed to have been authored by Witherspoon, was passed in Congress: "While the shadow of hope remained that our enemies could be taught by our example to respect those laws which are held sacred among civilized nations, and to comply with the dictates of a religion which they pretend, in common with us, to believe and revere, they have been left to the influence of that religion and that example. But since their incorrigible dispositions cannot be touched by kindness and compassion, it becomes our duty, by other means, to vindicate the rights of humanity. We, therefore, the congress of the United States of America, do solemnly declare and proclaim, that if our enemies presume to execute their threats or persist in their present career of barbarity, we will take such exemplary vengeance as shall deter others from a like conduct. We appeal to that God who searcheth the hearts of men, for the rectitude of our intentions, and in his holy presence declare that as we are not moved by any light and hasty suggestions of anger or revenge, so, through every possible change of fortune, we will adhere to this our determination."²³⁷ Witherspoon and the leaders of the cause of liberty respected the office of king but knew that he had rebelled against the limitations God had placed on him that and they were justified in overthrowing his tyranny. Their resolution focused on the desire of their hearts, to do God's will regardless of the cost.

"Witherspoon's most important contribution to the American Revolution came after hostilities had begun, when...members of the Continental Congress were assembling in Philadelphia to take the first formal steps toward separation from Great Britain."²³⁸ On May 17,

²³⁴ David Walker Woods, Jr, M.A. [John Witherspoon](#)

²³⁵ John Witherspoon, [The Works of John Witherspoon](#) Vol. IX "The Druid", Number III (Edinburgh: J. Ogle, 1815) 250.

²³⁶ Thomas Miller, ed. [The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon](#) (Southern Illinois University Press, 1990) 150.

²³⁷ Boyer, 136.

²³⁸ Miller, 140.

1776, the day the Continental Congress declared a National Day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer for God's guidance in the war, Witherspoon delivered a sermon in Princeton's chapel based on Psalm 76, entitled "The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men." He began his teaching with an historical summary of the "role of God's Providence in world history—of how, as the Psalms put it, 'not a sparrow falls but God knows it.' This was because, as Witherspoon explained, God ultimately knows and wills everything that happens in His creation, especially the fate of His chosen people. His benevolence defended the Jews, then the early Christians; it guided the Reformation, and extended it to the shores of America.²³⁹ Now God was guiding the turbulent events in the colonies. Witherspoon made the issue clear: 'I am satisfied that the confederacy of the colonies has not been the effect of pride, resentment, or sedition, but of a deep and general conviction that our civil and religious liberties, and consequently in a great measure the temporal and eternal happiness of us and our posterity, depended on the issue.'²⁴⁰

In this pivotal sermon, Witherspoon declared, "While we give praise to God, the Supreme Disposer of all events, for His interposition on our behalf, let us guard against the dangerous error of trusting in, or boasting of, an arm of flesh. ...If your cause is just, if your principles are pure, and if your conduct is prudent, you need not fear the multitude of opposing hosts. What follows from this? That he is the best friend to American liberty who is most sincere and active in promoting true and undefiled religion, and who sets himself with the greatest firmness to bear down profanity and immorality of every kind. Whoever is an avowed enemy of God, I scruple not to call him an enemy of his country."²⁴¹ He emphasized the need to trust God only for the solution to the tyranny that so oppressed them. "Upon the whole, I beseech you to make a wise improvement of the present threatening aspect of public affairs and to remember that your duty to God, to your country, to your families, and to yourselves is the same. True religion is nothing else but an inward temper and outward conduct suited to your state and circumstance in Providence at any time...God grant that in America true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable, and the unjust attempts to destroy the one, may in the issue tend to the support and establishment of both...If your cause is just, you may look with confidence to the Lord, and entreat him to plead it as his own. ...the cause in which America is now in arms, is the cause of justice, of liberty, and of human nature. So far as we have hitherto proceeded, I am satisfied that the confederacy of the colonies has not been the effect of pride, resentment, or sedition, but of a deep and general conviction that our civil and religious liberties, and consequently in a great measure the temporal and eternal happiness of us and our posterity, depended on the issue. ...There is not a single instance in history, in which civil liberty was lost, and religious liberty preserved entire. If therefore we yield up our temporal property, we at the same time deliver the conscience into bondage."²⁴²

Witherspoon, like Daniel and his friends, respected the office of king even as he labored to end his tyranny. "On the part of America, there was not the most distant thought of subverting the government or of hurting the interest of the people of Great Britain; but of defending their own privileges from unjust encroachment; there was not the least desire of withdrawing their allegiance from the common sovereign till it became absolutely necessary - and indeed, it was his [King George III] own choice."²⁴³

Witherspoon published this sermon in its entirety in Philadelphia, London, and Glasgow,

²³⁹ Note Witherspoon's continued reiteration of the importance of understanding history.

²⁴⁰ Miller, 140.

²⁴¹ Sandoz, 547.

²⁴² Ibid, 557-558.

²⁴³ Witherspoon, "The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men" Vol. III. 42.

and it eventually went through nine editions. “The Edinburgh editors of the *Scots Magazine* condemned it, and concluded that ‘the unhappy commotions in our American colonies’ were due almost entirely to ‘clerical influence.’ Of that influence, ‘none had a greater share than Doctor Witherspoon.’ Some equated his influence over the American revolutionary cause with that of George Washington himself. Horace Walpole, son of the former prime minister, rose in Parliament to address his colleagues. ‘There is no use crying about it,’ he said, ‘Cousin America has run off with a Presbyterian parson, and that is the end of it.’ Everyone knew whom he meant.”²⁴⁴

Recognizing Witherspoon’s influence in the colonies, Britain’s desire to end his life was “quite evident from the treatment of another clergyman, whom the British mistook for Witherspoon. Coming upon Rev. Mr. Rosborough near Washington’s crossing they ‘pierced him through and through with their bayonets and mangled him in the most shocking manner,’ although he had denied the identity and ‘fell upon his knees and begged for his life.’ So Witherspoon wrote to his son. ‘Some of the people of Princeton,’ he added, ‘say they thought they were killing me and boasted that they had done it when they came back.’”²⁴⁵ The Founding Fathers’ pledge to sacrifice their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor for the cause of liberty was not an idle promise but a solemn oath based on the surety that everything they held dear was hostage to the English sword.

“What was at stake was not just taxes or the rights of freeborn Englishmen, but the principle of a Christian commonwealth dedicated to God. In fact, for Witherspoon the political and religious issues were inseparable: ‘There is not a single instance in history in which civil liberty was lost and religious liberty [kept] entire.’ The final proof, in Witherspoon’s mind, that this rebellion was part of God’s divine plan was that so many different religious denominations--Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Episcopalians--had come together to support it. ‘He is the best friend to American liberty,’ Witherspoon asserted, who combined commitment to political freedom with a commitment to God. If American could do this, he said, ‘there will be the greatest reason to hope, by the blessing of God, for prosperity and success.’”²⁴⁶

On June 22, 1776, Dr. Witherspoon was elected to lead the representatives from New Jersey in the Continental Congress, where he served from 1776-1782 “wearing full clerical garb the entire period,”²⁴⁷ as a reminder of the only One who watched over them and deserved the highest esteem. He had already been politically active by serving on the Committee of Correspondence in Somerset County and as a delegate to the New Jersey provincial congress from 1774 to 1776. “Sometime during the debates on July 1 and 2, 1776, a member of the conservative faction ... argued that the country at large was not yet ripe for independence. Witherspoon shot back that in his judgment the colonies were not only ripe for independence but also ‘in danger of becoming rotten for the want of it.’ By so replying, he helped prod Congress toward passing Richard Henry Lee’s Resolution for Independence on July 2, and the Declaration of Independence two days later.”²⁴⁸

On that momentous day, July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence lay on the table of Independence Hall in Philadelphia, ready to be signed. If their fight for freedom failed, those who signed knew they would be the first to feel the British sword. Witherspoon rose and declared, “There is a tide in the affairs of men, a nick of time. We perceive it now before us. To

²⁴⁴ Miller, 83-84.

²⁴⁵ <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/witherspoon/chapter7.htm>.

²⁴⁶ Miller, 144.

²⁴⁷ Eidsmoe, 86

²⁴⁸ Morrison, 3-4.

hesitate is to consent to our own slavery. That noble instrument upon your table, which ensures immortality to its author, should be subscribed this very morning by every pen in this house. He that will not respond to its accents and strain every nerve to carry into effect its provisions is unworthy the name of freeman. For my own part, of property I have some, of reputation more. That reputation is staked, that property is pledged, on the issue of this contest; and although these gray hairs must soon descend into the sepulcher, I would infinitely rather that they descend thither by the hand of the executioner than desert at this crisis the sacred cause of my country.”

The Reverend Samuel West seconded Witherspoon’s call to action, saying, “The love of our country, the tender affection that we have for our wives and children, and the regard that we ought to have for unborn posterity – yea, every thing that is dear and sacred – do now loudly call on us to use our best endeavors to save our country. We must turn our plowshares into swords, and our pruning hooks into spears, and learn the art of self-defense against our enemies. To be careless and remiss, or to neglect the cause of our country through the base motives of avarice or self-interest, will expose us, not only to the resentments of our fellow-creatures, but to the displeasure of God Almighty.”²⁴⁹

Following their exhortations, the assembled patriots rose and signed their names to the Declaration. “It has often been said that the present is likely to be an important era to America,” Witherspoon told his colleagues. “I think, we may safely say, it is likely to be an important era in the history of mankind... We have the opportunity of forming plans of government upon rational, just, and equal principles.”²⁵⁰ “It was something that had never happened before in history; if they failed, he told them, it might never happen again.”²⁵¹

These men were not fighting for a political theory but for their lives and property, now threatened by British arrogance and injustice. They believed so devoutly in their God-endowed right to be governed by the rules of a just law that they were willing to risk said life and property in the resistance of tyranny.²⁵² Where did they learn such values and principles? They learned them from prepared pastors throughout Colonial America. The spiritual impact of Witherspoon on the preaching of that generation was so great that “if the pulpit of American had given only this one man [John Witherspoon] to the Revolution, it would deserve to be held in everlasting remembrance for the service it rendered the country.”²⁵³ Joining Witherspoon were the voices of pastors throughout the land, many of them influenced by Edwards, Davies, and the theocentric teaching of Princeton. The desire for God-oriented freedom stirred in the minds of many in the land because they understood God’s commands for civil disobedience when in the throes of religious and political oppression and were willing to make commensurate sacrifices.

Witherspoon’s influence extended beyond the pulpit and college into the civil arena. During the War for American Independence, Witherspoon served on “126 committees in six years of service (said to be more than any delegate at his time), including two crucial standing committees, the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Board of War.”²⁵⁴ President John Hancock appointed him Congressional Chaplain from which position he encouraged, comforted, strengthened, and exhorted his colleagues.

Ever mindful of the spiritual battle that waged around this bold bid for freedom, Witherspoon exhorted the soldiers who would fight the physical war for their country’s freedom,

²⁴⁹ Headley, 45.

²⁵⁰ <http://www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=WT03K02>.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Morrison, 119.

²⁵³ Headley, 286.

²⁵⁴ Morrison, 3.

declaring, “There is no soldier so undaunted as the pious man - no army so formidable as those who are superior to the fear of death. There is nothing more awful to think of than that those whose trade is war should ... expose themselves to the imminent danger of being [sent] to the blaspheming rage and despairing horror of the infernal pit. Let therefore everyone who ... offers himself as a champion in his country’s cause be persuaded to reverence the name and walk in the fear of the Prince of the kings of the earth and then he may with the most unshaken firmness expect [God’s protection] either in victory or death.” He reminded them of the power of their walk with God. “As peace with God and conformity to him adds to sweetness of created comforts while we possess them, so in times of difficulty and trial, it is in the man of piety and inward principle that we may expect to find the uncorrupted patriot, the useful citizen, and the invincible soldier.”²⁵⁵

Witherspoon encouraged his fellow patriots to vigorously support George Washington, whose leadership was under constant attack, much of it petty and self-serving. “To be a brave man or skillful commander is common to him [Washington] with many others; but this country stood in need of a comprehensive and penetrating mind, which understood the effect of particular measures in bringing the general cause to an issue. When we contrast his character and conduct with those of the various leaders that have been opposed to him, when we consider their attempts to blast each other’s reputation and the short duration of their command, we must say that Providence has fitted him for the charge and called him to the service.”²⁵⁶

In his philosophy of freedom, Witherspoon was one of the most consistent of the Founding Fathers. He adjured the colonists to submit every thought, every decision to God’s Word, looking to it only for understanding. Leaving no realm of thought untouched by his Scriptural insights, he discussed politics, economics, philosophy, family, social standards, and education. His ideas on money contributed to making the Constitution a “hard-money document” based on the gold standard. His understanding of both Scripture and history led him to fight against making the new country a democracy rather than a republic. “Pure democracy cannot subsist long nor be carried far into the departments of state— it is very subject to caprice and the madness of popular rage.”²⁵⁷ Current popular belief to the contrary, Witherspoon’s insights against a democratic form of government, along with the wisdom of others, led to the founding of our nation as a republic dedicated to the principles of law, not the whims of the populace. Witherspoon exhorted, “Let us endeavour to bring into and keep in credit and reputation everything that may serve to give vigour to an equal republican constitution. Let us cherish a love of piety, order, industry, frugality. Let us check every disposition to luxury, effeminacy, and the pleasures of a dissipated life. Let us in public measures put honour upon modesty and self-denial, which is the index of real merit.”²⁵⁸ In other words, let us base the government of this new nation on God’s unchanging standard as found only in His Word.

In “The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men,” among others, he boldly preached about the need for a God-centered spiritual walk, saying, “Nothing is more certain than that a general profligacy and corruption of manners make a people ripe for destruction. A good form of government may hold the rotten materials together for some time, but beyond a certain pitch, even the best constitution will be ineffectual, and slavery must ensue. On the other hand, when the manners of a nation are pure, when true religion and internal principles maintain their

²⁵⁵ Witherspoon, “Pastoral Letter . . . to be read from the Pulpits on Thursday, June 29, 1775, being the day of the General Fast.” Vol. IV. 170.

²⁵⁶ Woods 278-279. www.archive.org/stream/johnwitherspoon00woodiala/johnwitherspoon00woodiala_djvu.txt

²⁵⁷ Witherspoon, “Civil Society”, Lecture XII, Vol. VII, 101.

²⁵⁸ Woods, 281.

vigour, the attempts of the most powerful enemies to oppress them are commonly baffled and disappointed.” History, including that of our own country, emphatically shows that all nations fail when the people reject their personal responsibility by replacing God’s righteous standard with a self-inspired subjective standard of behavior.

Witherspoon also understood that a republic can survive only if its people are educated spiritually because righteous people are the product of careful, in depth biblical preaching. He preached the need for leaders to be devout men of God so that the people could follow their example. He urged that every law passed by these leaders be based on God's Word. “To promote true religion is the best and most effectual way of making a virtuous and regular people. Love to God and love to man is the substance of religion; when these prevail, civil laws will have little to do. ... The magistrate (or ruling part of any society) ought to encourage piety ... [and] make it an object of public esteem. Those who are vested with civil authority ought ... to promote religion and good morals among all their government... Those who wish well to the State ought to choose to places of trust men of inward principle, justified by exemplary conversation. Is it reasonable to expect wisdom from the ignorant? fidelity from the profligate? assiduity and application to public business from men of a dissipated life? Is it reasonable to commit the management of public revenue to one who hath wasted his own patrimony? Those, therefore, who pay no regard to religion and sobriety in the persons whom they send to the legislature of any State are guilty of the greatest absurdity and will soon pay dear for their folly.”²⁵⁹ That dear payment is loss of prosperity and then freedom.

“The following anecdote presents a specimen of [Witherspoon’s] pleasantry. On the surrender of the British army to General Gates, at Saratoga, that officer dispatched one of his aids to convey the news to congress. The interesting character of the intelligence would have prompted most men to have made as expeditions a journey as possible; but the aid proceeded so leisurely, that the intelligence reached Philadelphia three days before his arrival. It was usual for Congress, on such occasions, to bestow some mark of their esteem upon the person who was the bearer of intelligence so grateful; and it was proposed, in this case, to best upon the messenger an elegant sword. During the conversation on this subject in the hall, Dr. Witherspoon rose, and begged leave to amend the motion, by substituting for an elegant sword, a pair of golden spurs.”²⁶⁰

As his newly organized country sought to codify God’s Word as the rule of the land, Witherspoon reminded them of their solemn position before a just and righteous Creator. “As the gospel is allowed on all hands to be a doctrine according to godliness, when differences arise, and each opposite side pretends to have the letter of the law in its favour, the great rule of decision is, which doth most immediately and most certainly, promote piety and holiness in all manner of conversation.”²⁶¹ He urged leaders to use the Bible as their guide in forming all parts of the government. “The political law of the Jews contains many noble principles of equity and excellent examples to future lawgivers; yet it was so local and peculiar that certainly it was never intended to be immutable and universal. It would be more just and useful to say that all simple and original discoveries have been the production of Providence, and not the invention of man.”²⁶²

He urged those who would elect the country’s leaders to remember that they “ought to

²⁵⁹ Witherspoon, “Sermon Delivered at Public Thanksgiving After Peace” Vol. IV, 265.

²⁶⁰ <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/other/witherspoon.htm>.

²⁶¹ Woods, 59.

²⁶² James McAllister, “John Witherspoon: An Academic Advocate for Religious Freedom” in *A Miscellany of American Christianity*, ed. Stuart Henry (Durham: Duke University Press, 1963), 218.

have regard to the moral character of those whom they invest with authority either in the legislative, executive, or judicial branches.”²⁶³ He urged the country’s newly elected leaders to remember that “an oath is an appeal to God, the Searcher of hearts, for the truth of what we say and always expresses or supposes an imprecation of His judgment upon us if we prevaricate. An oath, therefore, implies a belief in God and His Providence and indeed is an act of worship. ... Persons entering on public offices are also often obliged to make oath that they will faithfully execute their trust. ... In vows, there is no party but God and the person himself who makes the vow.”²⁶⁴

In his position on 126 committees during the War, as a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and as a congressman, “Witherspoon remained true to a single principle: the importance of religious belief and faith in God to the moral life of the nation, that faith in God opens a window onto the world and onto our own destiny. There was no more important apostle of the principle of religious freedom in this country--religious freedom conceived as inseparable from political freedom. Indeed, if there is a notion of America as “one nation under God,” we owe it to John Witherspoon.”²⁶⁵ And while from the pulpit Witherspoon spoke of the need for total reliance on God in everything and total reverence for God, he also made corresponding actions from Congress, writing many of the Congressional proclamations for thanksgivings, fast-days, and days of prayer.²⁶⁶ He resigned from Congress in 1782 after the freedom that had cost his sons’ lives seemed secure.

Later, Witherspoon edited two American editions of the Bible based on the King James Version, including the first family Bible distributed in the United States of America (1791). Witherspoon was reluctant to print the name ‘King James’ on the Bibles, saying that Christ is the only King.

In 1792, Witherspoon lost his eye-sight but continued encouraging, admonishing, and teaching his sheep. His secretary said that his “descent to the grave was gradual and comparatively easy, free from any severe pain, and contemplated by himself with the calmness of a philosopher and the cheering hope of a Christian.”²⁶⁷ On his tombstone was engraved the following words:

Beneath this marble lie interred
the mortal remains of
JOHN WITHERSPOON, D.D. LL.D.
a venerable and beloved President of the College of New-Jersey.
He was born in the parish of Yester, in Scotland,
on the 5th of February, 1722, O. S.
And was liberally educated in the University of Edinburgh;
invested with holy orders in the year 1743,
he faithfully performed the duties of his pastoral charge,
during five and twenty years, first at Beith, and then at Paisley.
Elected president of Nassau Hall,
he assumed the duties of that office on the 13th of August, 1768,
with the elevated expectations of the public.

²⁶³ Witherspoon, “A Sermon Delivered at a Public Thanksgiving after Peace” Vol. IV, 266-267.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, “Lectures on Moral Philosophy”, Lecture 16 on “Oaths and Vows,”139-140, 142.

²⁶⁵ Tait.

²⁶⁶ Collins, *xvi*.

²⁶⁷ Martha Lou Lemmon Stohlman, John Witherspoon Parson, Politician, Patriot, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1976) 167.

Excelling in every mental gift,
 he was a man of pre-eminent piety and virtue
 and deeply versed in the various branches
 of literature and the liberal arts.
 A grave and solemn preacher,
 his sermons abounded in the most excellent doctrines and precepts
 and in lucid expositions of the Holy Scriptures.
 Affable, pleasant, and courteous in familiar conversation,
 he was eminently distinguished
 in concerns and deliberations of the church,
 and endowed with the greatest prudence
 in the management and instruction of youth.
 He exalted the reputation of the college amongst foreigners,
 and greatly promoted the advancement
 of its literary character and taste.
 He was, for a long time, conspicuous
 among the most brilliant luminaries of learning and of the Church.
 At length, universally venerated, beloved, and lamented,
 he departed this life on the fifteenth of November, MDCCXCIV.
 aged LXXIII years.²⁶⁸

“As a theological writer, Doctor Witherspoon had few superiors, and as a statesman he held the first rank. In him were centered the social elements of an upright citizen, a fond parent, a just tutor, and humble Christian; and when, on the tenth of November 1794, at the age of nearly seventy-three years, his useful life closed, it was widely felt that a ‘great man had fallen in Israel.’”²⁶⁹ For every Jefferson who re-wrote the Bible by deleting all mentions of miracles²⁷⁰, the preponderance of Founding Fathers revered God and, like Madison, wrote commentaries on the Bible. “Witherspoon believed that religion was ‘absolutely essential to the existence and welfare of every political combination of men in society.’ Madison agreed, as did even the more skeptical Washington, who in his Farewell Address observed that ‘of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports... And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion.’ For many, perhaps most of the Founders, Morrison observed, the chain of reasoning ran thus: “No republic without liberty, no liberty without virtue, and no virtue without religion.” John Witherspoon did as much as anyone to nurture that understanding, which is perhaps yet another reason he is less known today than other figures from the period. Whether that is a sign of our maturity and sophistication or only, as Witherspoon might put it, our pride and natural depravity is a question we might do well to ponder.”²⁷¹

LEARNING FROM HISTORY: THE PASTOR’S ROLE

As the longest ongoing Constitutional Republic in human history, America serves as an historical anomaly. Today’s panic about the future of our nation results from ignorance of the

²⁶⁸ Rev. Charles A. Goodrich Lives of the Signers to the Declaration of Independence (New York: William Reed & Co., 1856) 141-142. (Some minor spelling changes may have been made.)

²⁶⁹ <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+forgotten+founder%3a+John+Witherspoon.-a0147477046>

²⁷⁰ A miracle is a sign of God’s hand directing human history.

²⁷¹ <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+forgotten+founder%3a+John+Witherspoon.-a0147477046>

historical Truth that stability is abnormal in this post-“Age of Revolution.” America’s stability comes solely from its foundation upon the infallible, unchanging Word of God. Perfect, unchanging law finds its source in perfect, unchanging God. When we remove God from our nation, we remove the only stable and just standard for law. Since those in power on all levels have systematically and almost completely removed the Word of God from the market place of ideas, our once stable nation is poised over the dust bin of history that already contains Assyria, Persia, the Greek empire, the Roman empire, Nazi Germany, and countless other once-mighty nations. The biblical historian knows that as a nation removes God from its culture, the law becomes relative with situational ethics replacing the absolute ethics of God. Such is the plight of our world-focused nation.

According to history, America became a bastion for freedom and a light in a lost and dying world because of the in-depth, zealous teaching of the Word of God by faithful men such as Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Davies, and John Witherspoon. From deep drinking of the water of the Word proclaimed by these men and many others, most in the colonies knew the divine role of human government and their duty before God to be faithful doers and witnesses of His Word. The courage to perform that duty regardless of personal cost flowed directly from their reliance on God, the Savior of righteous men who call upon Him. Again, according to history, a return to such resolve by the people of a nation is impossible if pastors do not fulfill their responsibility as called men before God to accurately preach the entirety of God’s Word (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

Edwards, Davies, and Witherspoon lived during a unique time in human history when “pastors worked as theologians....People expected ordained clergy to spend the bulk of their time in study, preparing to minister the Word to them in depth and rich detail. They wanted their pastors to be learned more than flashy, therapeutic, businesslike or even approachable. They paid attention to words, biblical words most of all. Many knew their Bibles well, believing their lives depended upon it.”²⁷² Sadly, believers in today’s ear-tickling society desire much less of their pastors. We may well live in the apostate time of Christian persecution the Apostle Paul described in 2 Timothy 4:3-4. Even so, God expects today’s pastors to fulfill the ministry of the Word and to persevere in the good fight of faith as did Paul (2 Timothy 4:5, 7). They must follow the example of Edwards, Davies, and Witherspoon who persevered in the right teaching of God’s Word even as they and their loved ones faced imminent danger, even death. We must become equally bold in presenting God’s Word, including the gospel, to everyone, not just those few eager to hear it.

Our nation is in desperate need of a spiritual awakening, another Great Awakening, but the current endemic pastoral failure to teach God’s Word, including that man is a sinner and can be saved in only one way, can’t produce it. The Great Awakening that prepared people to stand for freedom in the face of tyrannical persecution “was the result of solid doctrinal preaching....It was preaching that dared to expose the sin of the church.”²⁷³ Do we dare take the challenge to shine the light of Truth on the apostate thinking that dominates the churches of this age? Do we dare preach the Word of Truth in season and out, trusting God for the results that best glorify Him?

As God’s shepherds, we must understand the spiritual history of our country if we hope to bring freedom back to it. Just as faithful shepherds during the Great Awakening boldly declared the Truth of God’s Word, so must we take every opportunity to inculcate the sheep with the power and comfort of God only available through complete knowledge of His Word and its

²⁷² Sweeney, 30.

²⁷³ Wiersbe, 37.

application to every thought. We must encourage the saints with the Truth that the Creator oversees every event in human history, either directly or indirectly. Most of the Founding Fathers were greatly comforted and strengthened by this Truth. Of the role of divine Providence in winning independence, John Witherspoon said, “Upon the whole nothing appears to me more manifest than that the separation of this country from Britain, has been of God; for every step the British took to prevent, served to accelerate it, which has generally been the case when men have undertaken to go in opposition to the course of Providence, and to make war with the nature of things.”²⁷⁴ We must have that same confidence that God controls history and is faithful to care for His own.

As did Jonathan Edwards, we must maintain a high respect for the glory of God. Our reverence for Creator/God can only reach as high as our knowledge of Him, His character, and His Word. And how our awe of His person grows as we meditate on the visible evidence of His hand directing history to His desired end!

As did Samuel Davies, we must preach the Word of God with the boldness that comes from conscientious, thorough preparation. Confident preaching that is faithful to the Truth of God’s infallible, sufficient Word eternally changes the souls of men and women, not because power is inherent in us as gifted preachers, but because God’s Word itself is powerful (Hebrews 12:4).²⁷⁵ An understanding of God’s expectations and the power He gives each of us pastors to fulfill His desires should fill us with fear that we might disrespect God’s character through mishandling His Truth. We can never overdose by gaining too much knowledge of God’s thinking and person. We can, however, extinguish the light of His Word in our listeners by having too little knowledge—or refusing to teach the whole counsel of God.

We must recognize our dependence on the Holy Spirit. “The preaching of the Word of God is a daunting task, and were it not for our involvement in partnership with the Holy Spirit, we could only despair.”²⁷⁶ In the words of Davies, “Hence it appears, the Spirit of God is the most important blessing, both to our *country*—and our *souls*, both with regard to *time*—and *eternity*; and without it, both our country and our souls will be lost in the outcome.”²⁷⁷ Preaching from Isaiah 32:13-19, Davies argued that “the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the great and only remedy for a ruined country – the only effectual preventative of national calamities and desolation, and the only sure cause of a lasting and well-established peace.”²⁷⁸ We will fail in all endeavors, including regaining freedom for our nation, if we allow unconfessed sin to fester in our souls, thereby denying us access to the power of God the Holy Spirit and His Word. To preserve the spiritual health of our sheep, we must emphasize the confession of individual sins to God the Father as essential to the success of their spiritual lives and to the continued tranquility of their nation.

As did John Witherspoon, we must bring Biblical thinking into all sectors of the public arena. We can begin with prayer for our leaders (1 Timothy 2:2), that they make wise decisions in both domestic and foreign policy. To be effective, such prayers require knowledge of current events. Part of our responsibility to our sheep is to keep them informed of the biblical implications of important topics both at home and in the world. We should follow the model of colonial pastors. “In colonial America, the sermon was probably the most significant form of

²⁷⁴ Dean C. Coddington and Richard L. Chapman God Bless America (Lincoln, Nebraska: i Universe, 2007) 148.

²⁷⁵ “The expository preacher opens the Bible before God’s people and dares to say, ‘I will explain to you what this passage means.’” Bryan Chappell Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005) 30.

²⁷⁶ David L. Larsen Telling the Old, Old Story. The Art of Narrative Preaching (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1995) 273.

²⁷⁷ Samuel Davies, “The Happy Effects of the Pouring out of the Spirit” October 16, 1757.

²⁷⁸ Old, 21.

communication. In addition to receiving religious instruction, congregations were accustomed to hearing the latest news of all types from the pulpit.”²⁷⁹ Such news allows the saints to apply biblical discernment to the personalities and events of their time.

As did Witherspoon, we must view involvement in politics not as a departure from ministerial work but as an opportunity to operate as ambassadors for Christ and His church. We should be like Davies who played a major role in Virginia on behalf of the Dissenters by arguing in the law court for their right to preach the entirety of God's Word as God commands. If we are not equally prepared and bold to step into the political arena, we will be passive acquiescers as we watch the right to preach God's Word in freedom disappear under the weight of our apathetic attitude toward God. Our Bibles will be absconded, burned, because our service to God lacks the purifying fire God demands. Because the last several generations of American pastors have chosen the wide path of the world and compromised the Truth of God's Word with philosophies comfortable to a sinner's ears, the persecution of the true church in this country is imminent. Every one of us must accept responsibility to prepare our sheep for every vicissitude in life, including the possibility of horrific persecutions from government, religion, and individuals.

That Edwards, Davies, and Witherspoon became dynamic servants of God can be traced to the spiritual foundation laid by their devout and faithful parents. Our country's precipitous slide into the abyss of history can be traced to Christian parents who have abrogated their responsibility to diligently teach spiritual truths to their sons and daughters and talk of them when they sit in their house and when they walk by the way and when they lie down and when they rise up (Deuteronomy 6:7). The application of God's Word in every area of life is seldom taught to young Christians because few older Christians recognize the need. No wonder men who hold to the Truth of God's Word are seldom seen fighting for that Truth in our political, cultural, and economic arenas! We bear the brunt of this failure because we too often neglect to pound the biblical principles of marriage and family into our sheep. We fail to emphasize the role of Christians in government. We fail to instill the spiritual confidence to stand firm for the Truth in a hostile world. Our failures have led to an apathetic, cowardly, ignorant, lazy Christian majority.

Edwards, Davies, and Witherspoon understood that the perpetuation of a nation based on biblical principles depends on properly training men for the pulpit. Intimate knowledge of God's Word leads to a bold clergy. “The preachers of the Great Awakening may have studied at some log college on the frontier and may well have lacked the patina of the leading academic institutions, but they had studied the Scriptures, and they had even studied them in the classical languages. They had read the great theologians of the past as well. They had studied and studied hard, but somehow one detected more than the patina of learning...The preachers of the Great Awakening clearly knew God.”²⁸⁰ How many men in pulpits today are experts in the languages God chose for His inspired Word? Where is that awe of God that demands the sacrifice of many hours each day in intense study of His Word? Such laziness toward and ignorance of God and His Word by most clergy today must be reversed if we are to once again glorify God in this nation.

We need to raise up men who will promote and lead biblical training centers. Large institutions are not necessary. If God prepared this nation for religious freedom through small “log colleges,” He can preserve it today through similar small but dedicated biblical training centers. We need to immerse future pastors in the *pleroma* of God's Word so that their lives won't be tossed to and fro by every false doctrine, so that they will persevere until death in

²⁷⁹ Pilcher, 83.

²⁸⁰ Old, 156.

disseminating God's Word accurately without fear.

We must use God's Word to inspire young men in our congregations to go into training for the ministry, their minds focused on learning God's Word fully, a training they understand must continue the rest of their lives. We need men like Edwards, Davies, and Witherspoon, men willing to devote their time to instilling the principles of Scripture into young men who then use those Truths to impact the nation for God. The 2 Timothy 2:1-2²⁸¹ model of pastors training men to teach God's Word applies not just to pastors but to believers in all areas of life. Such reinvigoration of our country can come only from the faithful exposition of God's Word, which God designed to transform the thinking of every believer in Christ (Romans 12:2). Apart from the pure milk of the Word, the Church cannot be ready to give an account of its confidence in Christ. Without prepared men to equip the saints for the work of service, Christians will continue to use the world's methods and gravitate toward the world's agenda rather than standing firm for the faith that God entrusted to the Bride of Christ.

Certainly, the recovery of our political and spiritual freedom is beyond our mortal powers. Just as God is the only Savior of fallen mankind, so only God can save our nation! As God's messengers, we pastors must step forward and emulate those who birthed our nation in God's Word. The need is great because "America is perishing for the need of preachers who apply God's holy Word to every area of life including personal, civil, and religious liberty."²⁸² The Colonists understood that this same threat was engulfing their religious freedom. They "considered that the greatest and most dreaded curse was for them to someday have impotent preachers who through ignorance of God's Word knew not how to make it relevant to any situation."²⁸³

As God's gifted pastors, we must fulfill our God-given responsibility to boldly without compromise teach the entirety of the Word of God so that the Church is equipped for the work of service in every area of life, including in human government. We must encourage other men to join our ranks, helping them learn and understand God's Word so well that they also can educate their flocks in biblical principles. Only that knowledge can preserve our hard-won liberties. We must populate small reservoirs of biblical training with men whose eyes are focused on eternity so that their time is spent in understanding, obeying, and testifying about our awesome, living Lord.

The challenge is difficult and the hour is late, but the Word of God is alive and powerful. To regain national stability, we must wield that marrow-splitting sword and trust the results to God. "Every American needs to realize that true security lies in something beyond military power, police protection, health insurance, and social security. Our founding fathers reach out over the centuries to remind us that security lies ultimately in the strength of character, purpose, and peace of mind that the individual American can find only in God."²⁸⁴ Dependence on God through application of His Word is the only solution to every problem.

²⁸¹ 2 Timothy 2:1-2 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

²⁸² Clark, 3.

²⁸³ Beliles, 116.

²⁸⁴ Spivey, 249.

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