



Lesson Guide

Lesson 10 – The American Experiment: Stepping Stones

Introduction

For this tour we will remain in the southwest sector of the compass long enough to examine a special sub-category of our last topic of discussion: the *design of the state*. In particular, we want to take a brief look at the question, “What should *God’s minister* on earth (Romans 13:4) look like? What is a proper form for this *agency* that is divinely appointed and commissioned to administer justice, punish evil, and encourage goodness among its citizens or subjects?” We will approach this task by considering the *American Experiment*.

Themes

From the beginning, Dr. Tackett lays down three ground rules for this study: first, we will not seek to deify America; and second, we will not seek to deify the Founding Fathers (the third ground rule will be dealt with at the end of the lesson). Having established these guidelines, he hastens to point out that there are compelling reasons for giving special attention to the subject of this tour. The American Experiment has the potential to prove unusually conducive to a deeper understanding of God’s design for the state precisely because it is *unique* in the history of the world. Here on these shores, and here alone, people with a strong Christian worldview have been afforded an unparalleled opportunity to create from scratch what they considered an ideal system of government – a system designed in careful conformity with the principles outlined in Lesson 9.

We begin by establishing the biblical character of that worldview. *The New England Primer*, the second best-selling book (after the Bible) of the colonial era, provides an intriguing window into the attitudes of early Americans. In particular, it reveals an outlook and a way of life powerfully shaped by the teachings of Scripture. The pervasiveness of this outlook is further demonstrated in statements made by America’s early political leaders, legal and social architects, and educational pioneers – people like Benjamin Rush, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Adams, Charles Carroll, Noah Webster, and the founders of Harvard, Princeton, and Columbia Universities. In spite of the fact that not *all* of them were practicing Christians, these luminaries agreed with President John Adams that the success of America’s republican form of government would prove directly dependent upon the virtue and morality of her people, and that virtue and morality are necessarily founded upon *religion* – by which all meant the *Christian* religion. All of these early thinkers were convinced that the state *must* be held accountable to the authority of a higher ethical and spiritual standard – the “Natural Law” or the “Law of Nature’s God” – if the human rights abuses they had observed in Europe and throughout history were to be hopefully avoided on this continent.

Tragically, however, America is quickly turning away from these principles. It is hard to put a finger on the exact reasons, but one clear element came as Darwinian evolutionary theory made its influence felt in the field of law. In 1869, Harvard Law School Dean Christopher Langdell advanced the view that law is *not* based upon the transcendent standard of “Nature’s God,” but is rather a fluid and constantly mutating body of “doctrine,” a set of purely human ideas that inevitably change “by slow degrees.” In other words, law and ethics, like biological species, are continually “evolving.” Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes expanded on this theme by declaring that the law is “simply an embodiment of the ends and purposes of a society at a given point in its history,” thus effectively granting to the *state* the power to establish society’s ethical norms. John Dewey implemented these ideas in the realm of public education. “There is no God,” said Dewey (nicknamed “The Architect of Modern Education”), “and there is no soul. Hence, there are no needs for the props of traditional religion.”

These statements, says Dr. Tackett, bring us to the present moment. Today, America has largely forgotten God and denied the validity of her biblically based Christian roots. As a result, we see the power of the state expanding in our time. This, too, is a manifestation of the perennial *Cosmic Battle*, which is always fought most fiercely in the *social* realm. Ultimately, we must face the fact that the American Experiment is likely to fail altogether if we do not take intentional and deliberate steps to salvage it. This is a task which falls primarily on the shoulders of Christian people. As believers, we need to remember God’s call to prayer and repentance in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14. There is nothing to be gained, says Dr. Tackett, by casting blame on non-Christians (this is the third ground rule for our study).

Points to Watch For

This last point should be kept in mind throughout the entire discussion. From beginning to end, Dr. Tackett seeks to communicate the thought that the American Experiment makes sense *only* when understood as the brainchild of Christians who operated on the basis of a biblical worldview. Just as the experiment was *instigated* by believers, so it must be *carried on* by believers – believers who care deeply and passionately about their country – if it is to survive and continue to succeed.

Discussion Questions

- 1) **What did you see on this tour? Which of these were particularly striking to you? Why?**
- 2) **It was during a re-enactment of Washington’s Farewell Address, says Dr. Tackett, that he was struck by the “sinking feeling” that he had been “lied to.” What “lies” does he have in mind, and how do they fit the pattern of the *other* lies we’ve encountered during the course of our worldview tours? Have you been subjected to such lies yourself?**

- 3) **Name some of the early sources for the idea of “the laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” referenced by Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence. Why was this concept so important to the founders of the American system of government? What risks do we run in replacing this idea with Langdell’s notion of “evolving law?”**
- 4) **What did John Adams mean when he affirmed that “... Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other”? What does this imply about the foundations of the *American Experiment* and the basic structure of the system of government it established?**
- 5) **Why, according to Dr. Tackett, is it in vogue to hate America today? To what extent is this hatred justifiable, and to what extent is it a manifestation of the *Cosmic Battle*?**
- 6) **What should we do when Adams’s assumptions no longer appear to be valid – that is, when it becomes evident that Americans can no longer be characterized as a “moral and religious people” as he understood the phrase? How do we apply the Founders’ ideas to a “multicultural” America where a flood of moral and spiritual perspectives – e.g., Buddhism, spiritism, Islam, Native American religions, and Wicca – have become part of the cultural fabric?**



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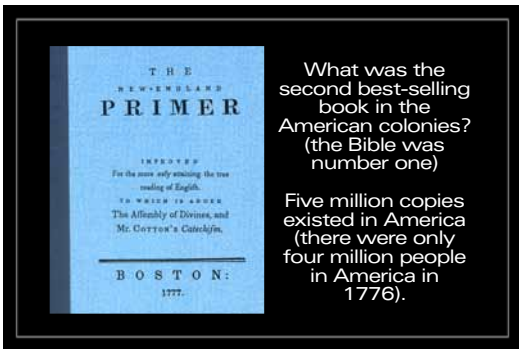
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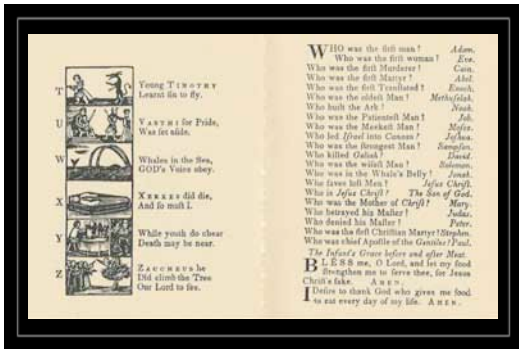


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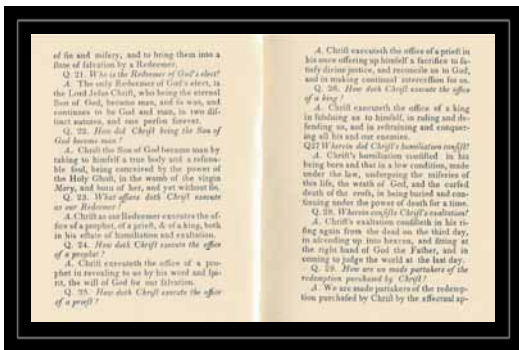
“Though the year of its first appearance is disputed, it is estimated to have sold more than five million copies.”
 Daniel S. Burt, ed., *The Chronology of American Literature: America’s Literary Achievements from the Colonial Era to Modern Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 30.



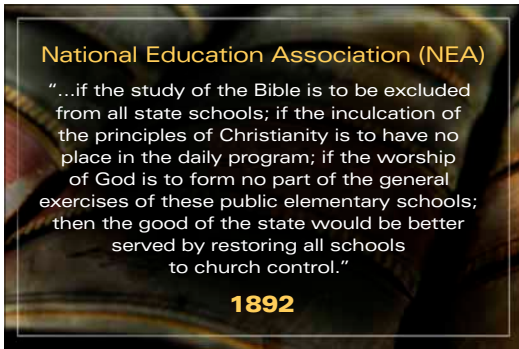
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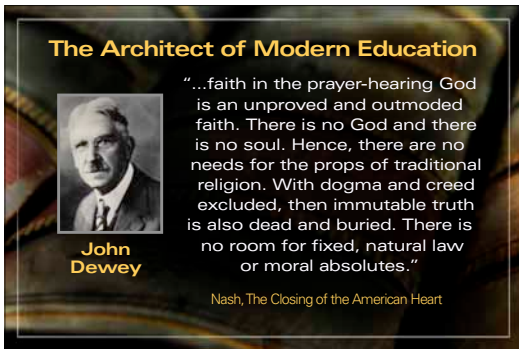


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Kansas State Historical Society, *Columbian History of Education in Kansas* (Topeka: Hamilton Printing Company, 1893), 82.

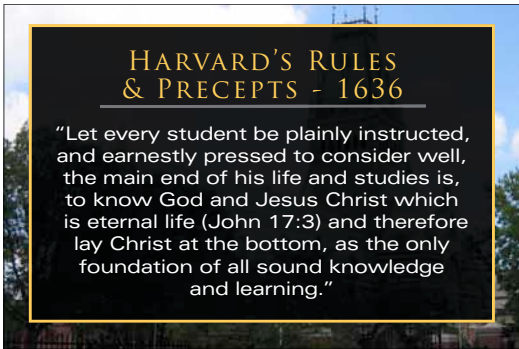


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Ronald Nash, *The Closing of the American Heart: What's Really Wrong with America's Schools* (United States of America: Probe Books, 1990), 91.

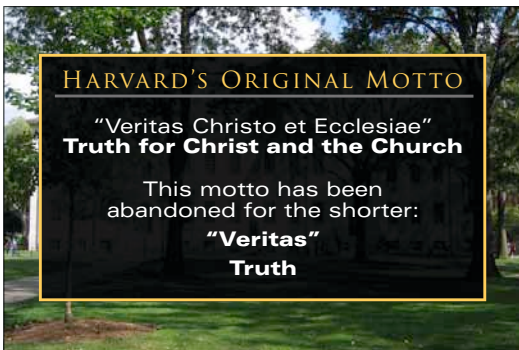


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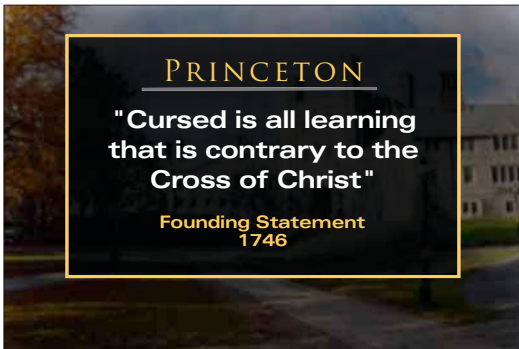
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Josiah Quincy, LL. D., *History of Harvard University* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, Lee, & Co., 1860), 515.



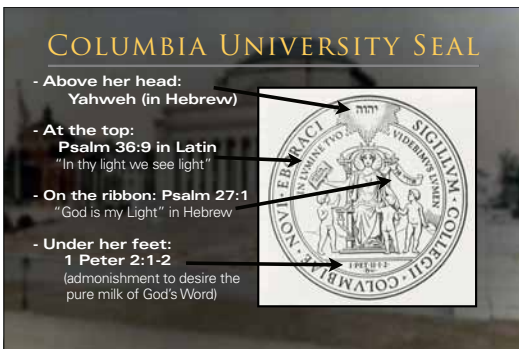
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Samuel Eliot Morison, "Harvard Seals and Arms," *The Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, September 1933, 8.



14

Mark A. Beliles & Stephen K. McDowell, *America's Providential History* (Charlottesville: Providence Foundation, 1989), 111.



15

David C. Humphrey, *From King's College to Columbia, 1746-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 107.

GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

"Religion is the only solid basis of good morals; therefore education should teach the precepts of religion, and the duties of man towards God."

Life of Gouverneur Morris, Vol III

16

Morris, Gouverneur (1832). Cited in Jared Sparks, *The life of Gouverneur Morris*. Boston, MA: Gray and Bowen, Vol. III, p. 483.

SAMUEL ADAMS

"Let divines and philosophers, statesmen and patriots, unite their endeavors to renovate the age, by impressing the minds of men with the importance of educating their little boys and girls, of inculcating in the minds of youth the fear and love of the Deity...in short of leading them in the study and practice of the exalted virtues of the Christian system."

Letter to John Adams, October 4, 1790

17

Samuel Adams, "Letter of Samuel Adams to John Adams, October 4, 1790," in *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, ed. Harry A. Cushing (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968), 4:343.

BENJAMIN RUSH

"In contemplating the political institutions of the United States, I lament that we waste so much time and money in punishing crimes, and take so little pains to prevent them. We profess to be republicans and yet we neglect the only means of establishing and perpetuating our republican forms of government. That is, the universal education of our youth in the principles of Christianity by the means of the Bible."

Benjamin Rush, "A Defense of the Use of the Bible as a School Book," 1798

18

Benjamin Rush, *Essays, Literary, Moral & Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Thomas and Samuel F. Bradford, 1798), 112.
Online Source: <http://deila.dickinson.edu/cgi-bin/docviewer.exe?CISOROOT=/ownwords&CISOPTR=19843>

An Ordinance, &c. 855

Article III. Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.

July 13, 1787

19

F.N. Thorpe, ed., *Federal and State Constitutions* (Washington: GPO, 1909), 2: 957.

Online Source: <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/5.htm>

NOAH WEBSTER

"In my view, the Christian Religion is the most important and one of the first things in which all children, under a free government, ought to be instructed...no truth is more evident to my mind than that the Christian Religion must be the basis of any government intended to secure the rights and privileges of a free people."

Reply to David McClure, Oct. 25, 1836

20

Webster, Noah (1953). Cited in Harry A. Warfel (Ed.), *Letters*. To David McClure, October 25, 1836. New York: NY: Library Publishers. pp. 453-454.



21



22

Vanderlyn, John. *Landing of Columbus*. Architect of the Capitol. Commissioned 1836/1837, placed 1847 in United States Capitol Rotunda.



23

Chapman, John Gadsby. *The Baptism of Pocahontas*. Architect of the Capitol. Commissioned 1837, placed 1840 in United States Capitol Rotunda.



24

Weir, Robert W. *The Embarkation of the Pilgrims*. Architect of the Capitol. Commissioned 1837, placed 1844 in United States Capitol Rotunda.



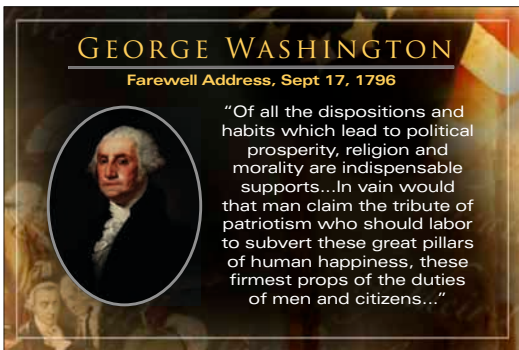
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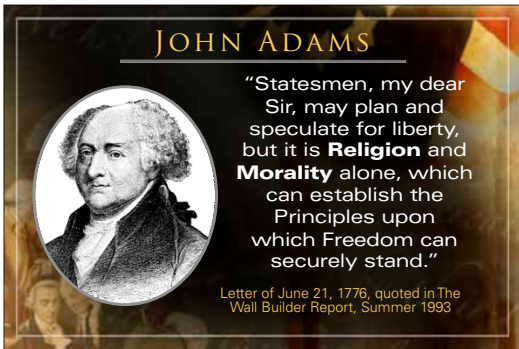


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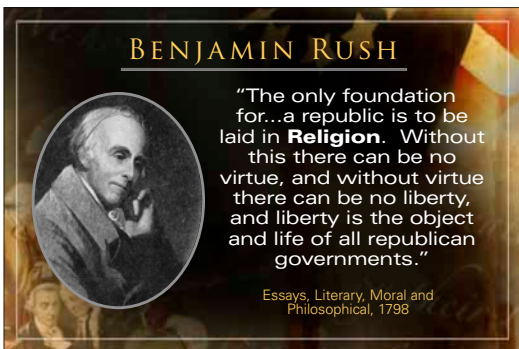
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The Will of the People: Readings in American Democracy (Chicago: Great Books Foundation, 2001), 38.
 Online Source: <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/49.htm>



29


John Adams, "Letter to Zabdiel Adams, Philadelphia, 21 June 1776," in *The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1854), 9:401.
 Online Source: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/re106.html>



30

Benjamin Rush, *Essays, Literary, Moral & Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Thomas and Samuel F. Bradford, 1798), 8.
 Online Source: <http://deila.dickinson.edu/cgi-bin/docviewer.exe?CISOROOT=/ownwords&CISOPTR=19843>

GEORGE WASHINGTON
Farewell Address, Sept 17, 1796



"...And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion...reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

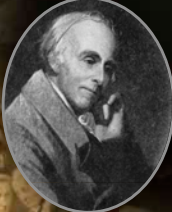
31

The Will of the People: Readings in American Democracy (Chicago: Great Books Foundation, 2001), 38.

Online Source: <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/49.htm>

BENJAMIN RUSH

"The only foundation for...a republic is to be laid in **Religion**."



"...Christianity is the only true and perfect religion; and that in proportion as mankind adopt its principles and obey its precepts they will be wise and happy."


Benjamin Rush, "A Defense of the Use of the Bible as a School Book," 1798

32

Benjamin Rush, *Essays, Literary, Moral & Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Thomas and Samuel F. Bradford, 1798), 93.

Online Source: <http://deila.dickinson.edu/cgi-bin/docviewer.exe?CISOROOT=/ownwords&CISOPTR=19843>

CHARLES CARROLL
signer of the declaration



"Without morals, a republic cannot subsist any length of time; they therefore who are decrying the Christian religion...are undermining the solid foundation of morals, the best security for the duration of free governments."

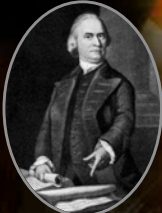
Letter to James McHenry, November 4, 1800

33

"Letter of Charles Carroll to James McHenry," dated November 4, 1800. Bernard C. Steiner, *The Life and Correspondence of James McHenry* (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers, 1907), 475.

SAMUEL ADAMS

"Religion and good morals are the only solid foundations of public liberty and happiness."




Letter to John Trumbull, October 16, 1778

34

Paul H. Smith, Gerard W. Gawalt, Rosemary Fry Plakes, et. al., *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789, volume 11, October 1 1778-January 31 1779*.

Online Source: <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=De1Vol11.xml&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=60&division=div1>

PATRICK HENRY
1736-1799



"The great pillars of all government and of social life [are] virtue, morality, and religion. This is the armor...and this alone, that renders us invincible."


Letter to Archibald Blair, January 8, 1799

35

Moses Coit Tyler, *Patrick Henry* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1898; reprint, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), 409.

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE
DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

"The Americans combine the notions of Christianity and liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to make them conceive one without the other."



36

Toqueville, Alexis de (1994). *Democracy in America*. New York, NY: Everyman's Library, a division of Knopf and Random House Publishing.

RELIGION AND POLITICS?

"The religious atmosphere of the country was the first thing that struck me upon my arrival in the U.S. In France, I had seen the spirits of religion and freedom almost always marching in opposite directions, in America, I found them intimately linked together and joined and reigned over the same land..."

Alexis de Tocqueville, "Democracy in America"

37

Toqueville, Alexis de (1994). *Democracy in America*. New York, NY: Everyman's Library, a division of Knopf and Random House Publishing.

RELIGION AND POLITICS?

Religion should therefore be considered as the first of their political institutions.
From the start, politics and religion have agreed and have not since ceased to do so."

Alexis de Tocqueville, "Democracy in America"


38

Toqueville, Alexis de (1994). *Democracy in America*. New York, NY: Everyman's Library, a division of Knopf and Random House Publishing.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

"...only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters."

Letter to Messrs. The Abbes Chalut and Arnaud, April 17, 1787




39

Letter of Benjamin Franklin to Messrs. The Abbes Chalut and Arnaud, dated April 17, 1787. Jared Sparks, ed., *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin* (Boston: Tappan, Whittemore and Mason, 1840) 10:297.

NOAH WEBSTER

History of the United States, 1833


"...the moral principles and precepts contained in the Scriptures ought to form the basis of all our civil constitutions and laws... All the miseries and evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery, and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible."



40

Noah Webster, "Advice to the Young," *History of the United States*, (New Haven: Durrie & Peck, 1832), 338-340.

JOHN ADAMS



“We have no government armed in power capable of contending in human passions unbridled by morality and religion... Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”


Address to the Officers of the Massachusetts Militia, 1798

41

John Adams, “Letter to Zabdiel Adams, Philadelphia, 21 June 1776,” in *The Works of John Adams – Second President of the United States*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1854), 9:401.
 Online Source: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel06.html>

DANIEL WEBSTER

“To preserve the government we must also preserve morals. Morality rests on religion; if you destroy the foundation, the superstructure must fall. When the public mind becomes vitiated and corrupt, laws are a nullity and constitutions are waste paper.”



4th of July, 1800, Oration at Hanover, N.H.

42

Daniel Webster, *Fourth of July Oration Delivered at Fryeburg, ME, in the Year 1802* (A. Williams & Co. / A.F. & C.W. Lewis, Boston, Mass. / Fryeburg, Me., 1882), 12.
 Online Source: <http://digital.library.umsystem.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=jul;cc=jul;sid=bcf0884fce38f535e4cd23d7d8513e09;rgn=full%20text;idno=jul000403;view=image;seq=1>

THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT

Built upon a deep foundation...
 deeper than the law,
 deeper than the Constitution.



43

REVISIT ROMANS 13


purpose of the Civil Magistrate?

1. Punish **evil**
2. Condone **good**

The Civil Authority **must** know the basis for calling something **good** or **evil**.

44


“...We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights...”



45

F.N. Thorpe, ed., *Federal and State Constitutions* (Washington: GPO, 1909), 1:3.
 Online source: http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/declaration_transcript.html

"...and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the **Laws of Nature** and of **Nature's God** entitles them..."




46

F.N. Thorpe, ed., *Federal and State Constitutions* (Washington: GPO, 1909), 1:3.

Online source: http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/declaration_transcript.html

**Law of Nature
Written on the Heart of Man**

"The **law of nature** is that which God at the time of creation of the nature of man infused into his heart, for his preservation and direction...the **moral law**, called also the **law of nature**."



Sir Edward Coke
1552-1634

47

Sir Edward Coke, *Calvin's Case in The Selected Writings and Speeches of Sir Edward Coke*, ed. Steve Sheppard (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003), 7:35.

Online Source: http://olddownload.libertyfund.org/Texts/LFBooks/Coke0074/PDFs/0462-01_Pt07_Reports7.pdf

WILLIAM BLACKSTONE

"...as man depends absolutely upon his Maker for everything, it is necessary that he should, in all points, conform to his Maker's will. This will of his Maker is called the **law of nature**...This law of nature...dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times; no human laws are of any validity if contrary to this; and such of them as are valid derive all their force, and all their authority...from this original."


"Commentaries on the Law" 1723-1780

48

Blackstone, William (2004). *Commentaries on the laws of England*. Union, NJ: Lawbook Exchange Ltd.

WILLIAM BLACKSTONE

"Upon these **two foundations**, the **law of nature** and the **law of revelation**, depend all human laws; that is to say, no human laws should be suffered to contradict these."



Blackstone, 1723-1780, "Commentaries", 2500 copies sold in America prior to the Rev War

49

Blackstone, William (2004). *Commentaries on the laws of England*. Union, NJ: Lawbook Exchange Ltd.

FOUNDATIONS REAPPEAR

"Human law must rest its authority ultimately upon the authority of that law which is Divine...Far from being rivals or enemies, **religion and law** are twin sisters, friends, and mutual assistants."

James Wilson
"Of the General Principles of Law and Obligation"
U.S. Supreme Court Justice
Signed U.S. Constitution

50

Wilson, James (1804). *The works of the honourable James Wilson*. Philadelphia, PA: Lorenzo Press for Bronson and Chauncey (3 Vols.).

**EVOLUTION OF
LAW IN AMERICA**

1869
Eliot arrives as
President of Harvard

1870
Langdell becomes head of
Harvard Law School

51

LANGDELL'S CASE METHOD

"Law, considered as a science, consists of certain principles or doctrines...Each of these doctrines has arrived at its present state by slow degrees; in other words, it is a growth, extending in many cases through centuries. This growth is to be traced in the main through a series of cases;..."

Preface to Langdell's 1879, *Cases on Contracts*, cited in H.W.Titus, *God, Man and Law*

52

Titus, Herbert W. (1994). *God, man, and law: The Biblical principles*. Oak Brook, IL: Institute in Basic Life Principles.

JOHN CHIPMAN GRAY

**"The law is a living thing,
with a continuous
history, sloughing off the
old, taking on the new."**

Gray was one of Langdell's colleagues
in changing the view of law
in America

H. W. Titus, *God, Man and Law*

53

Gray, John Chipman (1994). Cited in Herbert Titus, *God, man, and law: The Biblical principles*. Oak Brook, IL: Basic Life Principles, pp. 5-6.

RISE OF LEGAL POSITIVISM

"Langdell did not merely introduce a new method of teaching law, he introduced a new faith concerning law. He believed that man, led by the ablest scholars and judges, could discover and determine the laws governing human affairs. Because he believed that man did not need the aid of God and of the Holy Scripture..."

H. W. Titus, *God, Man and Law*

54

Herb Titus, *God, Man and Law: The Biblical Principles* (Oak Brook, IL: Basic Life Principles, 1994), 5.

RISE OF LEGAL POSITIVISM

"...Langdell sought to eliminate both from legal education—not by default, but by design. He, along with president Eliot, had embraced the new faith that swept the academic world in the latter 1800's—that Darwin's theory of evolution was the key to all of life, including the law."

H. W. Titus, *God, Man and Law*

55

Herb Titus, *God, Man and Law: The Biblical Principles* (Oak Brook, IL: Basic Life Principles, 1994), 5-6.

LEGAL POSITIVISM

The claim that the state is the ultimate authority for creating, interpreting and enforcing law. All legal truth is based on the decision of the state.



56

EVOLVING LAW

"The life of the law has not been logic; it has been experience...In order to know what it is, we must know what it has been, and what it tends to become."



Oliver Wendell Holmes
Supreme Court Justice,
1902-1932

57

Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Common Law* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1923), 1

EVOLVING LAW

"[Law is] simply an embodiment of the ends and purposes of a society at a given point in its history...beliefs that have triumphed and nothing more."



Oliver Wendell Holmes
Supreme Court Justice,
1902-1932

58

G. Edward White, *The American Judicial Tradition: Profiles of Leading American Judges* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 157.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Law and the Court" in *The Collected Works of Justice Holmes: Complete Public Writings and Selected Judicial Opinions of Oliver Wendell Holmes*, ed. Sheldon M. Novick (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3:506-507.

NOAH WEBSTER

"It is alleged by men of loose principles, or defective views of the subject, that religion and morality are not necessary or important qualifications for political stations. But the Scriptures teach a different doctrine. They direct that rulers should be men who rule in the fear of God, able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness..."

Value of the Bible, 1834, #302

59

Noah Webster, *Letters to a Young Gentleman Commencing His Education* (New Haven, S. Converse, 1823) 18-19.

Original Delaware Constitution

Article 22.

Every person who shall be chosen a member of either house, or appointed to any office or place of trust...shall...make and subscribe the following declaration, to wit:

60

F.N. Thorpe, ed., *Federal and State Constitutions* (Washington: GPO, 1909), 1:566.

Online Source: <http://www.nhinet.org/ccs/docs/del-1776.htm>

Original Delaware Constitution

"I, _____, do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ his only Son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God, blessed for evermore; And I do acknowledge the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by Divine Inspiration."

F.N. Thorpe, ed., *Federal and State Constitutions* (Washington: GPO, 1909), 1:566.
 Online Source: <http://www.nhinet.org/ccs/docs/del-1776.htm>

61

the Larger story

62



Ferris, J.L.G. (1907). *Return of the Mayflower*.

63

constitution of the New England Confederation
 May 19, 1643

"Whereas we all came to these parts of America with the same end and aim, namely, to advance the kingdome of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to enjoy the liberties of the Gospell thereof with purities and peace, and for preserving and propagating the truth and liberties of the gospell..."

Articles of Confederation of the United Colonies of New England, The (Online). (1643, May 19). The Avalon Project at Yale Law School.

64

STEPPING STONES

"As one candle may light a thousand, so the light kindled here has shown unto many, yea in some sort to our whole nation...We have noted these things so that you might see their worth and **not negligently lose** what your fathers have obtained with so much hardship."

William Bradford

William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647* (New York: Modern Library, 1981), 262.
 William Bradford, *A Dialogue, or Third Conference Between Some Young Men Born in New England, and Some Ancient Men Which Came Out of Holland and Old England: Concerning the Church and Government Thereof* (Boston: Press of J. Wilson, 1870), 57.

65

BISHOP PAUL P. O'BRIEN

"The United States was started by men we today would call pagans. They wrote a constitution without one word about God or Jesus in it. And in the amendments they said there should be no laws respecting the establishment of religion. This too is excluding God... Jefferson, Madison, Washington, John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Paine, Patrick Henry and most of our Founding Fathers were deists."

Bishop, Universal Life Church

66

D. James Kennedy, "The Bishop, the Bible, and the Constitution," *Impact*, July 2005.

Online Source: <http://www.coralridge.org/imp/impact070513.aspx>

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

"...how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly appealing to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings? In the beginning of the contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible to danger, we had daily prayers in this room for Divine protection. Our prayers, Sir, were heard and they were graciously answered... And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? or do we imagine that we no longer need his assistance?..."

67

James Madison, *Notes on the Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 Reported by James Madison* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966), 209-210.

Online Source: <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/debates/628.htm>

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

"...I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that 'except the Lord build the House, they labor in vain that build it.' I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better, than the Builders of Babel..."

68

James Madison, *Notes on the Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 Reported by James Madison* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966), 209-210.

Online Source: <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/debates/628.htm>

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

"We shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and by word down to future ages...I therefore beg leave to move—that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business..."

Constitutional Convention, June 28, 1787

69

James Madison, *Notes on the Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787 Reported by James Madison* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966), 209-210.

Online Source: <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/debates/628.htm>

what has Happened?

70

ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN

"More than half a century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: **'Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.'**"

Templeton Address, 1983

71

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Templeton Lecture, May 10, 1983," in *The Solzhenitsyn Reader: New and Essential Writings, 1947-2005*, eds. Edward E. Ericson, Jr. and Daniel J. Mahoney (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2006), 577.

ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN

"Since then I have spent well-nigh fifty years working on the history of our Revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval..."

Templeton Address, 1983

72

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Templeton Lecture, May 10, 1983," in *The Solzhenitsyn Reader: New and Essential Writings, 1947-2005*, eds. Edward E. Ericson, Jr. and Daniel J. Mahoney (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2006), 577.

ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN

...But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous Revolution that swallowed up some sixty million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: **"Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened."**

Templeton Address, 1983

73

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Templeton Lecture, May 10, 1983," in *The Solzhenitsyn Reader: New and Essential Writings, 1947-2005*, eds. Edward E. Ericson, Jr. and Daniel J. Mahoney (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2006), 577.

the path to Forgetting God

When I fed them,
they were **satisfied**;
when they were satisfied,
they became **proud**;
then they **forgot** me.

Hosea 13:6

74

the Cycle of Nations

Revelation 2:5 Blessings

Return Satisfied Humility, Thankfulness & Righteousness

Repent Proud Heart

Remember Forget God

Destruction Judgement Deuteronomy 8:10-20
Hosea 13:6

75

2 CHRONICLES 7:13-14

"When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will

- **humble themselves** and
- **pray** and
- **seek my face** and
- **turn from their wicked ways,**

then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

76

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. **But we have forgotten God...**

Proclamation for a National Day of Fasting, Humiliation & Prayer, April 30, 1863

77

Abraham Lincoln, "Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day" in *Collected Works. The Abraham Lincoln Association, Springfield, Illinois*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 6:155-157.
 Online Source: <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=lincoln;iel=4;view=text;idno=lincoln6;rgn=div1;cc=lincoln;node=lincoln6%3A336>

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

...We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us...and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own...

Proclamation for a National Day of Fasting, Humiliation & Prayer, April 30, 1863

78

Abraham Lincoln, "Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day" in *Collected Works. The Abraham Lincoln Association, Springfield, Illinois*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 6:155-157.
 Online Source: <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=lincoln;iel=4;view=text;idno=lincoln6;rgn=div1;cc=lincoln;node=lincoln6%3A336>

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

...Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us! It behooves us, then to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness."

Proclamation for a National Day of Fasting, Humiliation & Prayer, April 30, 1863

79

Abraham Lincoln, "Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day" in *Collected Works. The Abraham Lincoln Association, Springfield, Illinois*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 6:155-157.
 Online Source: <http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=lincoln;iel=4;view=text;idno=lincoln6;rgn=div1;cc=lincoln;node=lincoln6%3A336>

Why has all of this happened?

If the enemy can destroy the Christian's passion for America, then he has won the major battle for the soul of this nation.

Great Missionary: Hudson Taylor

80

Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

Revelation 2:5

81

AMERICAN EXPERIMENT
stepping **Stones**

The graphic features a collage of historical and contemporary American scenes, including a ship, a flag, and various figures, with a central red box containing the text 'AMERICAN EXPERIMENT' and 'stepping Stones'.

82



Outline

Lesson 10 - The American Experiment: Stepping Stones

- I. Introduction – God's design for the state – How close was the American Experiment?
 - A. Three rules: Won't deify America; won't deify Founders; won't cast stones
 - B. Basis for the three branches - Isaiah 33 – Lawgiver, Judge, and King
 - C. Early educational system – Instilling principles of Biblical Christianity
 1. Primer and NEA – Biblical doctrine and prayer were essential to education
 2. Founding and original mottos of Harvard, Princeton, and Columbia
- II. Foundations of Religion and Morality – Basis for Freedom and Liberty
 - A. Dr. Tackett's personal journey – America 101
 1. Murals in Capital rotunda
 2. Revelation 2:5 - Remember, Repent and Return
 3. Washington's Farwell address
 - B. Foundations of this country - Religion and Morality
 1. Consistent theme in virtually all of the Founder's writings
 2. They saw a strong connection between virtue and liberty
 - C. Purpose of Civil Magistrate - Punish evil and condone good – Romans 13
- III. Foundations of Law
 - A. Blackstone – Valid human laws must be based upon God's laws
 - B. Influence of Darwin radically changed law in America – Case study methodology
 1. Legal Positivism – The state is the authority for determining right and wrong
- IV. The Larger Story
 - A. Original charters and constitutions – Acknowledgment of God's authority and recognition that the state was subject to and accountable to God

- B. Pilgrims intent – "preserving and propagating the truth and liberties of the gospel"
 - C. Historical revisionism – Founders depicted as Deists and secularists; stripping God and Christianity from all historical accounts; pursuing a secular basis for law
- V. Conclusion – How has this happened?
- A. Men have forgotten God
 - B. Cycle of Nations – Hosea 13:6 – Judgment and destruction upon proud nations
 - C. Jesus removing the lamp stand – Our hope: Light always overtakes darkness



Key Terms

Lesson 10 – The American Experiment: Stepping Stones

Affront: An open insult or offense to somebody.

Agent/Agency: Dr. Tackett uses this term to describe the authority position within the Sphere of the State. This lesson examines the biblical design of that agency, and how the Founding Fathers attempted to base the American experiment on biblical foundations.

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-59): French political thinker who wrote *Democracy in America*. He was a major observer and philosopher of democracy, which he saw as an equation that balanced liberty and equality.

Benjamin Franklin (1706-90): Drafter and signer of the Declaration of Independence, Postmaster General of the Continental Congress, newspaper editor and publisher of *Poor Richard's Almanac*. He formed the first library and first fire department. His interest in science and technology made him famous for his electricity experiments and invention of the lightning rod, Franklin stove and bifocals.

Benjamin Rush (1745-1813): Signer of the Declaration of Independence, attendee of the Continental Congress, physician and first Surgeon General, he had a major influence on the development of American governmental structure. (Rush believed that Americans should have the right to medical freedom in their Constitution, much as the right to freedom of religion is expressly guaranteed in that document).

Bill of Rights: Term that refers to the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution ratified in 1791 and drafted by James Madison. These amendments explicitly limit the Federal government's powers, protecting the rights of the people by preventing Congress from abridging freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of religious worship, and the right to bear arms, preventing unreasonable search and seizure, cruel and unusual punishment, and self-incrimination, and guaranteeing due process of law and a speedy public trial with an impartial jury.

Case Study Method: Method of studying law first proposed by Langdell, "Law, considered a science, consists of certain principles or doctrines...Each of these doctrines has arrived at its present state by slow degrees; in other words, it is a growth, extending in many cases through centuries." This reflected Langdell's belief that law was not based on absolutes but must be viewed as an evolutionary process in which one looks at how law has evolved and what it must next become.

Charles Carroll (1737-1832): A lawyer, member of the Continental Congress, member of the first United States Senate, and signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Charles Eliot (1834-1926): American educator selected as the President of Harvard in 1869. Under Eliot's 40-year administration, Harvard developed from a small college into a modern university. Consequently Eliot was a proponent of Darwin's evolutionary theories and began to implement the teaching of them throughout his school. He hired Christopher Columbus Langdell to introduce this new understanding of law into the Harvard Law School.

Christopher Columbus Langdell (1826-1906): American jurist who taught at Harvard and introduced the new case study method of instruction. His curriculum was first adopted at Harvard, then Columbia law school, and remains today as the standard first-year curriculum at nearly all American law schools. Based on an evolutionary view of life.

Cycle of Nations: Biblical outline of attitudes and resulting events that a nation commonly experiences during its existence. God blesses a nation, that nation becomes satisfied and develops pride, the nation begins to forget God, and God brings judgment upon the nation in order that they might remember, repent and return to God. If they do not remember God, He will bring destruction.

Daniel Webster (1782-1852): United States Senator and Secretary of State. Notable lawyer and one of the greatest orators of his time. His passionate patriotic devotion to preserving the Union led him to find compromises between the northern and southern factions of the country.

Declaration of Independence: The document in which the Thirteen Colonies in North America declared themselves independent of the Kingdom of Great Britain and explained their justifications for doing so. It was ratified by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776.

Federalist Papers: Series of 85 political essays written 1787-88 with the intention of persuading New York to approve the Federalist Constitution. Primary writers were Alexander Hamilton (51 essays) and James Madison (14 essays). The essays are still considered a classic work of political theory.

George Washington (1732-99): Often labeled "The Father of America." Commander and Chief of the Continental Army in the American Revolutionary War, overseer of the Constitutional Convention, and first President of the United States.

Gouverneur Morris (1752-1816): As chairman of the committee of style during the Constitutional Convention, he was the author of large sections of the Constitution. He is widely known for his words in the Preamble: "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union..."

James Wilson (1742-98): American jurist, member of the Continental Congress, and signer of the Declaration of Independence. Wilson is most well known for his part (with James Madison) in drafting of the United States Constitution. He also proposed the Three-Fifths Compromise at

the convention, which made slaves count as three-fifths of a person for representation in the House and Electoral College. This proposal is greatly misunderstood today. Wilson and the non-slave states wanted to limit slavery and the power of the slave-states. They didn't want the slave-states to count slaves thus gaining more representatives. The slave-states wanted to count slaves fully. The compromise was the non-slave states attempt to limit slave-state power, NOT to indicate slaves were only 3/5 of a person.

John Adams (1735-1826) : Member of the Continental Congress, drafter (with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson) and signer of the Declaration of Independence, considered "Father of the Navy" because of his efforts to establish and strengthen the American Navy, and Second President of the United States.

Natural Law/Law of Nature/Moral Law: Theory that laws exist independently of political legislation, a society or a nation-state because they are fundamental to human behavior. Natural law is opposed to positive law, which is human-made, conditioned by history, and subject to continuous change. The phrase "all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain rights" expresses a natural law philosophy.

New England Primer: Small textbook, first printed in 1690 and used through the 19th century to teach children the alphabet and how to read. It was the intent of the colonists that all children should learn to read because they believed that an inability to read was Satan's attempt to keep people from the Scriptures.

Noah Webster (1758-1843): Often called "The Father of American Education". He wrote the *Blue Back Speller (Elementary Spelling Book)* which help standardize American spelling and was used by pioneer families and schools to teach children to read. Webster has become a household name since he first published *The American Dictionary of the English Language* in 1828.

Patrick Henry (1736-99): First governor of Virginia and member of the Continental Congress. Patrick Henry, Samuel Adams, and Thomas Paine were influential advocates of the American Revolution. He was an eloquent orator and instrumental in the adoption of the Bill of Rights.

Positive Law/Legal Positivism: The claim that the state is the ultimate authority for creating, interpreting and enforcing law. The position that believes that all legal truth is based on the decision of the state.

Samuel Adams (1722-1803): Governor of Massachusetts, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and organizer of the Boston Tea Party; he was an American Patriot who played a major role in starting the American Revolution.

Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634): An English jurist whose writings on the English common law were definitive legal texts for more than 300 years. He was a Member of the Parliament, Speaker of the House of Commons, and England's Attorney General. Every lawyer in early America was trained from Coke's books, and both John Adams and Patrick Henry argued from Coke's treatises to support their revolutionary position against England.

The American Experiment: An experiment conducted by the founding forefathers of the United States to establish a nation built on biblical principles reflecting God's design for government.

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826): Governor of Virginia, first Secretary of State, principle author of the Declaration of Independence, and third President of the United States. Jefferson is often attributed for the concept of "Separation of Church and State" because of the phrase "wall of separation between church and state" in a letter he wrote to the Danbury Baptist Association in 1802. Jefferson believed the First Amendment had to be enacted in order to prevent the federal establishment of a national denomination; he had no intention of limiting, restricting or regulating public religious practices.

United States Constitution: The founding political document which detailed the structure, roles and responsibilities of the American republic. It was drafted at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and ratified by nine states in 1788. It created a federal union of sovereign states, and a federal government to operate that union. The preamble begins, "We the people..."

William Blackstone (1723-80): An English jurist and professor who wrote *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. First published in four volumes from 1765-69, this historical treatise on common law still remains the most thorough treatment of the English law ever produced by one man. Every lawyer in early America studied from Blackstone's *Commentaries* and this work served the basis of our legal profession.

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY'S



Scripture References

Lesson 10 – The American Experiment: Stepping Stones

Isa 33:22

Rev 2:5

Rom 13:1-6

Hosea 13:6

Deut 8:10-20



Recommended Reading

Lesson 10 – The American Experiment: Stepping Stones

Please note that not everything in these suggested resources should be considered endorsed by Focus on the Family. Nevertheless, Dr. Tackett has found this material helpful. Scripture should be your first and primary resource.

- Amos, Gary and Richard Gardiner. 1998. *Never Before in History: America's Inspired Birth*. Richardson, TX: Foundation for Thought and Ethics.
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Historical Figure: Benjamin Franklin

I have lived, sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of men ... I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business ...

-- Benjamin Franklin, U. S. Constitutional Convention, June 28, 1787

"Well done is better than well said," wrote Benjamin Franklin in the 1737 edition of *Poor Richard's Almanack*. He might have been summing up the story of his life. For Franklin was, above all else, a man who attempted to distinguish himself by *doing well*. An accomplished polymath and thoroughgoing pragmatist, he had a keen desire to understand the inner mechanics of things – printing presses, stoves, musical instruments, eyeglasses, electricity, government – and to apply this hard-won knowledge to the advancement of efficiency and progress in the affairs of mankind. In the final analysis, it was precisely his utilitarian viewpoint that motivated him to "implore the assistance of heaven" at the 1787 Constitutional Convention. Whatever else Franklin may have believed about prayer, he clearly believed that it brought results. And that, with him, was always the essential point.

Born January 17, 1706, Benjamin Franklin was the tenth and youngest son of Josiah Franklin, a Boston soap-and candle-maker, and Abiah Folger Franklin, Josiah's second wife. His father meant to bring the boy up for a career in the church; but when it became clear that the cost of a clergyman's education was beyond the family's means, Ben was withdrawn from school (after only two years of study) and put to work making candles.

Proving ill-disposed to the trade, he was apprenticed to his older brother James, printer and publisher of *The New England Courant*, America's second newspaper. It was in James's print shop that the self-education of Benjamin Franklin began in earnest. Easy access to reading material led to a love for books, and the adolescent Franklin devoured the works of Bunyan, Defoe, Mather, Addison, Locke, and Steele. He trained himself as a writer, too, secretly composing a series of pointed social commentaries for the *Courant* under the pseudonym of *Silence Dogood*. When his barbed pen earned him the enmity of the authorities, the seventeen-year-old Franklin was obliged to flee Boston under suspicion of being an "atheist and infidel."

Finding no work for a printer in New York, Ben set out on foot for Philadelphia, the city that was to become his personal Promised Land. There he met his future wife, Deborah Read (they were married in 1730), and there, through hard work, auspicious connections, and plenty of hands-on training (including a two-year sojourn in the best print houses of London), he achieved such

proficiency in his trade that he eventually became master of Philadelphia's principal printing office and a respected community leader.

Turning his attention to public affairs, Franklin poured his energies into a series of community projects, convening an influential debating club ("the Junto") and playing a key role in the establishment of America's first subscription library. He was also instrumental in founding a philosophical society, a hospital, a firefighting company, and two institutions of higher education (later to become the University of Pennsylvania and the Franklin and Marshall College). Publication of his much loved and broadly influential *Poor Richard's Almanack* began in 1732. He was chosen to the Pennsylvania legislature in 1736 and appointed Postmaster General in 1737. By expanding his printing concerns into an inter-colonial franchise he became so prosperous that by age forty-two he was able to retire from business and devote himself full-time to politics, writing, inventing, and scientific pursuits. Of the latter, his experiments with electricity, including his famous scheme to "draw lightning from the clouds" by flying a kite in a thunderstorm, brought him international fame as an eminent "natural philosopher."

In 1757 the legislature sent Franklin to London to represent the people of Pennsylvania in a dispute with the Proprietors of the colony. So effectively did he acquit himself in this capacity that he was asked to serve as colonial agent for Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Georgia as well. While living in England he emerged as the colonists' leading spokesman in the debates over the Stamp Act (1765) and the subsequent chain of controversial legislation leading to the American Revolution. As relations between his homeland and the Mother Country grew more difficult, Franklin became increasingly convinced that the final solution lay in independence for the American colonies.

Returning to Philadelphia a month before Lexington and Concord, he was appointed by the second Continental Congress to serve as a member of the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence. Once the Revolution had begun in earnest, Congress dispatched him to France where he remained until the end of the war, negotiating an alliance with the government of Louis XVI. In 1783 he played a major role in finalizing the details of the Treaty of Paris between the United States and Great Britain. In diplomacy, as in everything else he attempted, Franklin proved himself a savant of deft ability and brilliant insight.

At the age of eighty-one, Benjamin Franklin performed his final service to the new nation by taking part in the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. There his influence proved crucial to the difficult task of hammering out a compromise acceptable to the representatives of all thirteen states. This climactic conclusion to Franklin's public career, characterized as it was by his clarion call to prayer and faith in God, is all the more remarkable in light of the unorthodox theological views he held at the time. Though a self-styled Deist and sometime polytheist who doubted the divinity of Jesus and rejected other essentials of the Christian creed, he could not fail to see the *utilitarian* value of the Bible's moral and spiritual teachings. As a man of business and practical affairs he was compelled to admit that Christianity, whether he accepted its doctrines or not, actually *worked* – that it was in fact more conducive to social welfare than the worldview of freethinking rationalists. In this, as in every other aspect of his life, Franklin found the appeal of the *pragmatic* absolutely irresistible.

In old age Franklin became a staunch abolitionist, freeing his own slaves and serving a term as president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. He was released from public affairs in 1788 and spent a significant portion of his final years attempting to complete his *Autobiography*, a work begun in 1771 (for the benefit of his son) and taken up again in 1784 at the behest of a friend who had urged him to "invite all wise men to become like yourself, and other men to become wise."¹ He died in Philadelphia on April 17, 1790 at the age of eighty-four.

¹ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings* (New York: Signet Classics, 1961), 85.



Historical Figure: Noah Webster

Most evenings, when the field work was done and the loom rested silent, the common room of Noah and Mercy Webster's small Connecticut farmhouse was filled with music. Not just the music of the flute, which Mercy played expertly, or the hymns of Isaac Watts, which were vital to the family's daily devotions, but the music of *words*: the words of prayer, the words of the catechism, the flowing, rhythmic words of the King James Bible. It was only natural that the Webster children should become avid readers and strong writers.

Nor is it surprising, given the tenor of his childhood home, that Noah Jr. (born October 16, 1758), the most precocious of the Webster siblings, should grow up to make a living out of words. During a long and productive lifetime Webster put together an astonishing resume, meriting such epithets as "Forgotten Founding Father," "America's first great social reformer," and "the Father of American Scholarship and Education." But the theme running through the extensive list of his remarkable achievements is the *power of language*. Words were Webster's driving passion – the tools of his trade, the weapons of his warfare, and the means of realizing his most dearly cherished hopes for the new republic.

It was this love of language that sent him to Yale at the age of sixteen. Seeing his middle son immersed in a Latin grammar under an apple tree, the elder Webster decided that the boy's natural inclinations could only be brought to fruition in a college setting. He mortgaged the farm to finance Noah's education.

At Yale it was the words of Rousseau, Locke, and Paine that stirred his soul and fired his adolescent imagination. In the autumn of 1777, between academic terms, Webster served with the Connecticut militia in the War of Independence, witnessing firsthand the burning of Kingston and the muster of the colonial troops along the Hudson River. He would be a firm and zealous patriot for the rest of his life.

As a college graduate, a self-tutored law student, and a struggling school teacher, Webster found ways to turn words into a financial asset *and* a means of promoting patriotism. Appalled at the primitive conditions and lack of materials in the Connecticut Common Schools, he founded a private academy and devised a system of public education based upon books of his own composition and design, *The Grammatical Institute of the English Language*. His "Blue-backed Speller" (so-called because of its blue paper binding) became the nation's best-selling book next to the Bible and the basis of elementary language instruction in the United States for a hundred years. Its aim was as simple as it was lofty and ambitious: the unification of the country through the creation of a common, standardized, "federal language."

But Webster's attempts to foster national unity through the power of words were not limited to the classroom. As a public lecturer, an attorney, a journalist, and a political essayist he hammered away at the forces of disunion in post-war America, wielding his pen as a formidable weapon in the fight for strong central government. He was the unseen mover and shaker at the Constitutional Convention of 1787, where he cultivated friendships with two-thirds of the constitutional delegates and expounded his theories on politics, literacy, and the importance of a common tongue to anyone who would listen. Washington, Franklin, and Madison were among those who took a keen interest in his views.

As a result of these efforts, a piece of Webster's own writing, *Sketches of American Policy*, became the unofficial prototype of the United States Constitution. It was only natural that he should also be conscripted to act as the document's official publicist when it came time to campaign for state ratification. Many historians now believe that his clearly written and widely disseminated *Examination into the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution* was at least as influential as the better known *Federalist Papers* in gaining support for the Constitution among ordinary Americans.

In 1793, when the fledgling United States government was faced with a deadly threat in the person of rabble-rousing French ambassador Edmond-Charles-Edouard Genet, it was Webster who came to the rescue with his pen, exposing the Genet's secret revolutionary plot through a series of powerfully written articles and editorials in *The American Minerva*. Thanks to the clarity and persuasiveness of his writing, the Jacobin scheme to undermine President Washington's administration and extend French hegemony into the western hemisphere was foiled before it had a chance to get off the ground.

This list of goals attained and victories won through the impact of Webster's linguistic skills could be expanded at great length. It was largely with the help of words, for instance, that he carried on a tireless battle against the evils of slavery. With words he pleaded the cause of the needy, set up charitable societies, established an early system of social security, and advanced the medical community's understanding of infectious diseases. But the greatest and most widely remembered of his many language-related exploits is the one for which we know him best: his magnum opus, the great *American Dictionary of the English Language* – a work so profound in its scholarship, so far-reaching in scope, and of such enduring value that the name *Webster* has now become all but synonymous with the word *dictionary*.

In its earliest conception, the dictionary was intended as a companion to the *Institute* – a relatively small collection of words designed to reinforce Webster's spelling standardizations and provide a vocabulary for young readers of his school anthology. But once the seed of the project was planted in his mind, it began to grow of its own accord. Even before the school dictionary (*A Compendious Dictionary of the American Language*, 1806) had come off the presses, Webster was already planning to expand this modest volume (408 pages, 40,600 words) into a much larger work.

He prepared for this massive undertaking by firming up his college Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, perfecting his French and German, and then moving on to tackle Danish, Italian, Anglo-Saxon, Welsh, Old Irish, Chaldaic, Syrian, Arabic, Armorican, and Persian. By the time he was finished,

Webster had acquired a knowledge of more than twenty languages and alphabets, exhausted the resources of every library in America, scoured the shelves of the massive *Bibliothèque du Roi* in Paris, and consulted with the finest linguistic scholars in Oxford and Cambridge. When released in November 1828, his *American Dictionary*, the fruit of twenty years' labor, contained more than 70,000 words with extensive definitions and etymological origins. In the preface, Webster, a lifelong Congregationalist and a born again Christian who had experienced a dramatic resurgence of personal faith at a revival meeting in 1808, dedicated the volume to God and offered it as a gift to the American people.

"No author before or since has ever written a dictionary with so broad a purpose," says biographer Harlow Giles Unger:

It was not just a list of words and definitions. It was a wellspring of truths that promised his countrymen an increase in 'the wealth, learning, moral and religious elevation of character, and glory' of their country – a self-contained educative institution designed to serve as a secular companion to the Bible.¹

It was also, of course, the last and greatest testimonial to its author's deep faith in the power of words – a power which, according to Webster's biblical worldview, is ultimately rooted in the "divine origin" of language.² For Webster was above all a man who believed that the universe had been *spoken* into existence by the Word of God,³ – the same Word that became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.⁴

Noah Webster spent his final years revising his lexicographical studies, transcribing the Bible into the language of his speller and dictionary (the last component of his "American system of education"), and enjoying the company of his wife, children, and grandchildren. He died on May 28, 1843 at the age of eighty-five.

¹ Harlow Giles Unger, *Noah Webster: The Life and Times of an American Patriot* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998), 307.

² *Ibid.*, 306.

³ Genesis 1:3.

⁴ John 1:1-14.