

“Constitution Sunday: Faith of the Framers”

Isaiah 33:22

9-17-17

The Scripture today is Isaiah 33:22 ESV and provides a parallel to the three branches of government found in the U.S. Constitution: “For the Lord is our judge; the Lord is our lawgiver; the Lord is our king; he will save us.” Let’s pray.

At what we call Independence Hall in Philadelphia, fifty-five delegates from twelve states assembled on May 25, 1787 for the purpose of revising the inadequate Articles of Confederation. However, these Delegates ended up scrapping the Articles and framing a whole new governing document: The United States Constitution, which was approved 230 years ago on September 17, 1787. The result of their work over the hot summer in Philadelphia provided the framework for the longest lasting, most successful Constitutional republic in world history.

Consider the fact that there are 193 countries recognized by the United Nations. And since 1789, look at some of these countries and compare how many constitutions they have been through compared to us, US. It is amazing. What are the results of 230 years of God’s favor by giving us Constitutional stability and freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights?

Alexis De Tocqueville was impressed enough to speak of American Exceptionalism: “The position of the Americans is therefore quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no other democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one.”¹ America is exceptional. Why is this nation, above all other nations, the most prosperous, the most technologically advanced, the most compassionate, the most free nation on earth at this time in history? Consider the fact that we represent only 4.4% of the world’s population but command 41.6% of the world’s wealth.² America is the birthplace of inventions like the telegraph, the telephone, the light-bulb, the airplane, the internet, the Global Positioning System... We have freed more people from tyranny, helped more people rebuild from the ravages of war, delivered more humanitarian aid to those who are suffering than any other nation in the world. We are not a perfect nation, but America has been a force for good in the world and America is still the wonder of the world.

Why is that? What makes America exceptional? My argument: For the most part, those who immigrated and settled here, those who founded and fought for our nation, and those who framed our Constitutional Government and Bill of Rights honored the God of the Bible. You see it in the very first charters for Jamestown and Plymouth. You see it in the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut and Massachusetts Body of Liberties, the first Constitutions in America. You see it in the fact that 12 of the 13 colonies had the Ten Commandments represented in their law code, and the one who didn’t – Rhode Island – had 6 of the 10. You see it in the multitude of colonial Proclamations for Days of Prayer and Fasting and Days for Thanksgiving. And on and on I could go.

And most secular progressive critics will, if there are intellectually honest, admit the facts as I have presented them. But with the advent of the Constitution, they argue the Framers took us in a new direction, away from our Christian beginnings. They contend that the Framers of the

Constitution gave us a “Godless Constitution,” they “created a secular state,” and actually point to that as the reason behind our success as a nation.

I. CHARACTERIZING THE DOCUMENT AS A “GODLESS CONSTITUTION?”

Many critics of Christianity’s influence in the birth and development of America like to point out the fact that the Constitution does not mention the words “God” or the “Bible.” In fact, one book is actually titled: *The Godless Constitution*.³ While this work is fatally flawed by its biased approach and failure to provide footnotes to substantiate its claims, it still begs the question: Why does the Constitution not mention God prominently as in the Declaration of Independence?

Well it was not necessary to mention “God” numerous times in the Constitution because the Declaration of Independence, with its multiple references to God, had already laid the foundation. The Constitution assumes the Declaration. In fact, the Constitution is dated in relation to the Declaration, demonstrating its place as the founding document of America. So the Constitution adds to that founding document the rules by which the new nation would be governed. It could be said that the Declaration of Independence is the “why” of American government, while the Constitution is the “how.”

To explain the relationship between the two documents, Abraham Lincoln used Proverbs 25:11: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in frames of silver.” Lincoln argues that the Declaration expresses:

“the principle of ‘Liberty to all’ ---the principle that clears the path for all---gives hope to all --- and, by consequence, enterprize, and industry to all” is a word ‘fitly spoken’ which has proved an “apple of gold” to us. The Union, and the Constitution, are the picture of silver, subsequently framed around it. The picture was made, not to conceal, or destroy the apple; but to adorn, and preserve it. The picture was made for the apple --- not the apple for the picture. So let us act, that neither picture, [n]or apple shall ever be blurred, or bruised or broken.”⁴

The Declaration lays the foundation for the Constitution, and the liberties set forth in that Declaration flow from belief in and dependence upon the Creator God described in the Bible, who operates the universe according to law, grants the inherent and self-evident rights of Life, Liberty and Pursuit of Happiness, functions as the Supreme Judge of the World, and who rules over his creation and creatures with a benevolent Providence. Every Framer of the Constitution would agree to at least that much, as they all had a Christian background, displayed varying evidence of a biblical worldview, and most expressed their faith publicly.⁵

But it still begs the question, why the lack of overt references like in the Declaration? The Constitution was mostly silent on the subject of God and religion because of the principle of Federalism. In other words, the Federal Government deferred to the states on matters regarding religion. Many of the states still had religious establishments and most had religious tests/oaths for office holders. The Federal Government had no jurisdiction in matters of religion (see Art VI). The perfect illustration of this principled approach is Thomas Jefferson, who as Governor of Virginia issued a “Proclamation for a Day of Public Thanksgiving and Prayer” on November

11, 1779. However, as U.S. President, Jefferson refused to issue a national prayer Proclamation as his predecessors (Washington, Adams) had done because of the principle of Federalism: Matters of Religion are best left to the individual and to the states in which they reside.

What about the Framers? Weren't they just a bunch of Atheists, Agnostics and Deists? Honestly, they reflected the general population at the time of the Founding.

- America had a population of 3 million people in 1776.
- Estimates are that 99.8% were orthodox Christian, with some Jews, even fewer Muslims, Atheists, Agnostics, and "Deists," who are probably best described as Unitarians (didn't believe Jesus is equal to God)
- About 98% were Protestant Christians
- About 75% of those could be considered Reformed in their beliefs.⁶

Also, the Framers were born, grew up, and began their public service during the First Great Awakening, which had a profound impact on their collective (biblical) worldview and thus on their philosophy of government. Yet Progressives sniff that the Framers were elites and as such the formation of their political ideology would have been the European Enlightenment, not the Great Awakening. They owed their philosophy of government more to French Philosophes like Voltaire and Rousseau than to Moses and the Gospels.

Interestingly, political scientists Donald S. Lutz and Charles S. Hyneman conducted a ground breaking study at the University of Houston by examining some 15,000 documents (2,000 closely) written during America's founding era (1760-1805), and analyzed their political content. Included were political volumes, monographs, pamphlets, newspaper articles, and printed political sermons. There they found 3,154 citations or references to other sources. The source cited or quoted most often in these was the Bible. In fact, 34% of the citations from outside sources came from God's word. The most cited book of the Bible? Deuteronomy, the second giving of the Law. After the Bible, the top sources cited were: Baron Montesquieu at 8.3%, William Blackstone at 7.9%; and John Locke at 2.9%. Rousseau and Voltaire? Less than 1%, and many of those citations were to argue with their respective contentions.⁷

II. CHRISTIAN BACKGROUND OF THE FRAMERS

There were 55 men who were directly involved in framing the Constitution at the Convention. Every single one of them had an orthodox Christian background.⁸ Here is a breakdown:

Episcopalian/Anglican	31	56.4%
Presbyterian	16	29.1%
Congregationalist	8	14.5%
Quaker	3	5.5%
Catholic	2	3.6%
Methodist	2	3.6%
Lutheran	2	3.6%
Dutch Reformed	2	3.6%
<hr/> TOTAL	55	100%

IMPORTANT NOTE: They were all sinners! Some had open infidelities, others owned slaves, etc. By 1787 there was one of the 55 who had abandoned orthodox faith and could be considered as a Unitarian (belief in Creator God, but not belief in Jesus as an equal). Ben Franklin (PA) wrote to the Rev. Dr. Ezra Stiles of Yale on March 9, 1790:

“As to Jesus of Nazareth, my Opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the System of Morals and his Religion, as he left them to us, is the best the World ever saw, or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England [Unitarians] some doubts as to his divinity...”⁹

Yet Ben Franklin used a verse from the Parable of the Good Samaritan for a motto for his hospital, proposed a picture of God enabling the Children of Israel to triumph over the Egyptians as a National Seal with the motto “Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God, attended every kind of Christian worship, contributed to all denominations, printed sermons for and donated to the Great Awakening Preacher George Whitefield. He rented pew 70 in Christ Church (Anglican) in Philadelphia and started the fund drive for the new steeple.¹⁰ And he had a Christian funeral and is buried in the Christ Church churchyard.

Another some claim to have been Unitarian later in life was James Wilson (PA), who continued to pay for a pew at the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia until his death (even though he attended Christ Church [Anglican] after 1778). When the British damaged the First Presbyterian Church during their occupancy of Philadelphia in the revolution, Wilson contributed (100 Pounds) to a fund for the church's restoration, joining two of his fellow Signers of the Declaration, Thomas McKean and Benjamin Rush. James Wilson is also buried in the same church yard with Ben Franklin.¹¹

The other was Hugh Williamson (NC), who grew up Presbyterian and went to school to study for ministry, but apparently later questioned Trinitarian doctrine. Yet he was a part of a three-man congressional committee (with Abraham Clarke and James Madison) in 1788 that recommended setting aside land for the Moravian Brethren to do the mission work of “civilizing the Indians and promoting Christianity.”¹² Just before his death, he wrote his nephew:

“[H]aving now, as I think, nearly finished my course (2 Tim. 4:7) through the wilderness of life, grant, O Lord! That when my feet shall touch the cold stream of the waters of Jordan (Josh. 3:13, 15), my eyes may be steadily fixed on the heavenly Canaan (2 Cor. 4:18), so that I may say to death, 'where is thy sting?' (1 Cor. 15:55).”¹³

When he died, Williamson was buried at Trinity Church (Anglican) in New York City. However, I can find no evidence for either Wilson or Williamson being Unitarians. Bottom line: Even the Unitarians publicly supported Christianity and all three had orthodox Christian funerals and are buried in Christian churchyards.

President of the Convention: George Washington: At the outset, George Washington was unanimously elected as President of the Convention. He had resolved to take no active part in the debate, believing it improper to do so, given that he was President or chairman of the

Convention. However, George Washington was not quiet about his advocacy for the Christian faith. For example, on May 2, 1778, he had charged his soldiers at Valley Forge: “To the distinguished Character of Patriot, it should be our highest Glory to add the more distinguished Character of Christian.”¹⁴ On May 12, 1779, told the Delaware Chiefs who had presented their children for education that “above all” what he wanted them to learn was the “religion of Jesus Christ,” and to learn this would make them “greater and happier people than you are” and that “Congress will do everything they can to assist you in this wise intention.”¹⁵ Just before resigning his commission as Commander-in-Chief in 1783, he wrote a circular letter to all 13 governors of the states, reminding them that “without a humble imitation” of “the Divine Author of our blessed Religion [Heb. 12:2]” we “can never hope to be a happy nation.”¹⁶ Washington’s own adopted daughter Nelly Custis declared of Washington that you might as well question his patriotism as to question his Christianity.¹⁷

As the Convention got underway, Gouverneur Morris recalled how Washington urged the delegates to lift up and look up: “Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest can repair. The event is in the hand of God.”¹⁸ With the nation’s hero at the helm, the outcome of the debates would be taken seriously by the delegates and eventually by the citizens of America. The delegates agreed to keep the proceedings secret so that they would not feel compelled to yield to public pressure. To insure secrecy, they kept the windows shut, which made for an uncomfortable environment during the long, hot summer. With the meetings under way, it soon became apparent that instead of revising the Articles of Confederation, the real need was for a new form of government – a Federal Constitution.

Delegate Edmund Jennings Randolph of Virginia kick-started the debate by offering the Virginia Plan, which was largely the work of delegate James Madison and favored the larger states.¹⁹ It provided for a legislative branch consisting of two chambers (bicameral legislature) with population-proportional representation. Ironically, by the end of the Convention, Randolph chose not to sign the document because he disagreed with the direction it had taken. Meanwhile, delegates from the smaller states favored the rival plan offered by delegate William Patterson of New Jersey.²⁰ Patterson’s New Jersey Plan retained the Articles of Confederation which gave each state an equal vote, but added a Supreme Court. Roger Sherman of Connecticut offered a compromise, but it too failed on its first hearing. Even among these professing Christians, common ground was difficult to find when it came to what form our government should take.

III. CALL TO PRAYER PROVIDED A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

With the Convention going badly and some delegates on the verge of leaving in disgust, the elder statesman Ben Franklin rose to address the remaining delegates on June 28th.

A. Rationale: He began by talking about the fact that they had studied ancient history for models of government, and of those Republics that have gone the way of the bone yard of history for various reasons, and finally of the modern governments in Europe, but that nothing was suitable and they couldn’t find any common ground. Then Franklin, who is perhaps best described as a Unitarian in his theological beliefs, made a plea that they petition God for help:

“Mr. President: The small progress we have made after four or five weeks close attendance & continual reasonings with each other our different sentiments on almost every question, several of the last producing as many noes as ayes, is methinks a melancholy proof of the imperfection of the Human Understanding

“In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark [Job 12:25] to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights [James 1:17] to illuminate our understanding?

“In the beginning of the Contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for Divine protection. Our prayers, Sir, were heard, & they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor.

“To that kind Providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity. And have we now forgotten that powerful Friend? or do we imagine we no longer need His assistance? 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 [Dan. 4:17; 2 Chron. 20:6]. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice [Matt. 10:29; Luke 12:6], is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid [Dan. 2:21]?

“We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred Writings, that “except the Lord build the House, they labor in vain that build it.” [Psalm 127:1a] 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 [Gen. 11:1-9]. We shall be divided by our partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and bye word down to future ages [Deut. 28:37; Jer. 24:9].

“And what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing Governments by Human wisdom and leave it to I chance, war and conquest. “I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven [Neh. 2:4], and its blessing on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service.”²¹

Here was probably the least theologically orthodox of the Framers calling for prayer and alluding to Scripture. After Franklin spoke, Roger Sherman of Connecticut seconded his motion for prayer.

B. Response: Many were deeply moved. New Jersey delegate Jonathan Dayton reported:

The Doctor sat down; and never did I behold a countenance at once so dignified and delighted as was that of Washington at the close of the address; nor were the members of the convention generally less affected. The words of the venerable Franklin fell upon our ears

with a weight and authority, even greater that we may suppose an oracle to have had in a Roman senate!"²²

Yet some delegates who opposed to the motion to appoint chaplains to begin each day with prayer. Led by Alexander Hamilton of New York, some of the more politically conscious thought they should have done it at the beginning, doing it now would have a negative reflection on Convention. Franklin countered that "past omission of a duty could not justify a further omission," and that not doing it now would make the political optics even worse going forward. Delegate Hugh Williamson from North Carolina was more pragmatic in his opposition: "The Convention had no funds" to pay a chaplain.

Delegate Edmund Jennings Randolph of Virginia proposed his compromise measure: "that a sermon be preached at the request of the convention on 4th of July, the anniversary of Independence,--& thenceforward prayers be used in ye Convention every morning."²³ Ben Franklin himself seconded this substitute motion. However, the Convention voted to adjourn without the motion being acted upon. While Franklin's initial motion did not pass, ultimately it became a reality. Now Congress begins each day with prayer by a paid chaplain.

What is important to note is that Dr. Franklin's passionate plea for prayer and a recess for Independence Day seemed to break the impasse. George Washington and a number of delegates followed Randolph's advice, went to Reformed Calvinist Church in Philadelphia on the Fourth and heard a patriotic speech and a prayer for their deliberations led by Rev. William Rogers.²⁴ Afterward, there was a change in the atmosphere of the Convention and led to a breakthrough in the debates. Delegate Dayton of New Jersey reported that: "We assembled again; and ... every unfriendly feeling had been expelled, and a spirit of conciliation had been cultivated." While some difficulties continued to arise before the conclusion of the Convention's business in September, the delegates apparently never returned to the fruitless bickering that had existed prior to June 28th.

It is an exaggeration to say that our Constitutional government was the result of a prayer meeting in Philadelphia, but Dr. Franklin's call for prayer did play a critical role in reminding the delegates at a vital point that without God's help, all their efforts would be in vain.

C. Results: Following this plea for prayer and a worship service on Independence Day, Roger Sherman of Connecticut's compromise was reconsidered. His plan provided for a three-branch government:

1. The Legislative Branch would make laws, treaties, and collect taxes and have the power to override an executive veto with a 2/3 majority and if necessary impeach the executive or the judiciary. It would include a two-chambered legislature, with the House of Representatives having proportional representation based on a state's population and elected by the people and the Senate containing an equal number of Senators from each state and chosen by the respective state legislature. Thus the large states would benefit from the House, and the small states from the Senate.

2. *The Executive Branch* would include a President who would serve as Commander-In-Chief of the armed forces, nominate Judges, and have the power to veto legislation. The President would be chosen by an electoral college composed of men chosen by the voters of each state. The candidate with the second highest vote total would become Vice-President. If no one received a majority of votes, the House of Representatives would declare the next President.

3. *The Judicial Branch* would be nominated by the President and approved by the Senate. The Court would have the power to decide whether a law is constitutional. Supreme Court members were appointed for life, but Congress could vote to impeach and remove them. Lower Courts could be created and vacated by Congress. According to Alexander Hamilton, the third branch was intended to be the weakest. In a footnote of Federalist # 78, Hamilton contends: "The celebrated Montesquieu, speaking of them [the three branches of government], says: 'Of the three powers above mentioned, the JUDICIARY is next to nothing.'"²⁵ The Founder's never intended for America to be ruled by a Judicial Oligarchy.

This three-branch government with its system of checks and balances promised to avoid the tyrannical type of government the colonies had suffered under the monarchy of King George and his puppets in Parliament. The Articles demanded unanimity, and getting the states to agree on anything was nearly an impossible proposition. However, the Constitution required 2/3 majority of the states to approve it and also change it.

IV. COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TEXT OF THE CONSTITUTION

On Sept. 8, 1787, the Convention chose a committee of five "to revise the stile of and arrange the articles which had been agreed to by the House."²⁶ They were all Anglicans (Episcopalians) by faith background: William Samuel Johnson (CT), Rufus King (MA), Gouverneur Morris (PA), Alexander Hamilton (NY), and James Madison (VA). Here is a brief accounting of their public faith:

Chair of the committee was William Samuel Johnson, son of an Anglican minister, and he became president of Columbia (formerly King's) College. Dr. Johnson made these remarks to the first class graduating after the War for Independence:

"You have, by the favor of Providence... received a public education, the purpose whereof hath been to qualify you the better to serve your Creator and your country... Remember, too, that you are the redeemed of the Lord, that you are bought with a price, even the inestimable price of the precious blood of the Son of God. Adore Jehovah, therefore, as your God and your Judge. Love, fear, and serve Him as your Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Acquaint yourselves with Him in His word and holy ordinances. Make Him your friend and protector and your felicity is secured both here and hereafter."²⁷

Delegate Rufus King of Massachusetts was a graduate of Harvard and one of the youngest delegates. He was a faithful member of and warden for Grace Church, which adjoined his property. When they outgrew their building, King helped design the new facility, helped raise money and donated his own to the building fund. During debates over a new state constitution in

New York in 1821, King argued that Christianity deserved special protection under the law, while still favoring religious toleration of other faiths:

“Our laws constantly refer to this revelation and by the oath which they prescribe, we appeal to the Supreme Being so as to deal with us hereafter as we observe the obligation of our oaths. The Pagan world were, and are, without the mighty influence of this principle, which is proclaimed in the Christian system-their morals were destitute of its powerful sanction, while their oaths neither awakened the hopes nor fears which a belief in Christianity inspires.”²⁸

Delegate Gouverneur Morris of Pennsylvania, the penman of the Constitution, once declared:

“Divine Providence exalts or depresses states and kingdoms [Dan. 2:21]... Not by a tyrannous and despotic mandate. But in proportion to their obedience or disobedience of His just and holy laws. It is He who commands us that we abstain from wrong. It is He who tells you, "do unto others as ye would that they would do unto you [Matt. 7:12].”²⁹

Delegate Alexander Hamilton of New York had a questionable past and a very public moral failure later in his life. Yet, he also had a commitment to Christ. Hamilton wrote to his friend, James Bayard:

“Let an association be formed to be denominated ‘The Christian Constitutional Society,’ its object to be first: The support of the Christian religion. Second: The support of the United States.”³⁰

Unfortunately, Hamilton was never able to see that vision fulfilled. After being fatally wounded in the duel with Aaron Burr, he asked two ministers to administer communion. The first was Rev. John M. Mason, the Pastor of the Scotch Presbyterian Church near Hamilton's home. However, Mason refused, citing church protocol of never administering the Lord Supper privately to any person under any circumstances. Hamilton told Mason: “I am a sinner. I look to His mercy.” Mason told how Christ's blood would wash away his sins, and Hamilton replied fervently: “I have a tender reliance on the mercy of the Almighty, through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The second minister, Bishop Benjamin Moore, Anglican rector of Trinity Church, was called in later and he administered communion to Hamilton before he died.

Finally, there was James Madison, often referred to as the “Father” or the “Architect” of the Federal Constitution. Instead of studying at the Anglican College of William and Mary, Madison chose instead to the Presbyterian College of New Jersey (now called Princeton), where he sat under the Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon, the eminent Presbyterian patriot who was the only ordained full-time minister among the delegates who signed the Declaration of Independence. James Madison wrote to fellow alumnus William Bradford on November 9, 1772:

“A watchful eye must be kept on ourselves lest while we are building ideal monuments of Renown and Bliss here we neglect to have our names enrolled in the Annals of Heaven [Luke 10:20b]...”³¹

He wrote Bradford again on September 25, 1773:

“I have sometimes thought there could not be a stronger testimony in favor of Religion or against temporal Enjoyments... than for men who occupy the most honorable and gainful departments and are rising in reputation and wealth, publicly to declare their unsatisfactoriness by becoming fervent Advocates in the cause of Christ, & I wish you may give in your Evidence in this way.”³²

Little wonder that Bishop Meade commented that his opponents thought that “Mr. Madison... was better suited to the pulpit than to the legislative hall.”³³ Young Madison stayed after graduation to be personally tutored by Dr. Witherspoon in Hebrew, Law, and principles of Government in the Old Testament. So Witherspoon molded and shaped James Madison for the critical role he would play in the development of our U.S. Constitution, and the tool he mostly used was the Bible. In fact, Witherspoon educated a number of the Founding Fathers, including nine members of this Constitutional Convention. In many respects, it is the Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon who may be more deserving of the title: “Father of the U.S. Constitution.”

Rev. Witherspoon’s strong theology of the depravity and sinfulness of mankind greatly influenced Madison’s philosophy of government. Madison wrote in Federalist #51:

But the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department, consists in giving to those who administer each department the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others.... It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.³⁴

Having so recently escaped from one tyrant in England, the drafters of the Constitution were careful not to merely replace him with another. There must be checks and balances lest one branch rule over the others. If one should have pre-eminence, let it be the one closest to the people, which is the legislature, thus the hierarchy found in the Articles. The Christian religion, which emphasized the fallen nature of man, shaped Madison’s view of law and government.³⁵

V. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS AND BIBLICAL PARALLELS

Perhaps the overriding biblical principle that seems to permeate the Constitution is the sinfulness of humankind: “The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9).” Thus, the need for checks and balances among the three branches of government. In fact, there are several provisions in the Constitution have parallels in biblical principle, even though chapters and verses are not cited. For example, compare the following:

- Art. I, II, III (3 Branches of Government) with Isaiah 33:22: “For the LORD is our judge (Judicial - Art. III), the LORD is our lawgiver (Legislative - Art. I), the LORD is our king (Executive - Art. II); it is he who will save us.”
- Art. I, Sec. 7, Par. 2 (No Business on Sunday) with Exod. 20:8-11.
- Art. I, Sec. 8, Par. 4 (Uniform Immigration Law) with Lev. 18:26, 19:33-34.
- Art. I, Sec. 8, Par. 9 (Tribunals, i.e., Courts under the Supreme Court) with Deut. 16:18, 17:8-10.
- Art. II, Sec. 1, Par. 4 (President must be a Natural Born Citizen) with Deut. 17:15.
- Art. III, Sec. 1, Par. 1 (Judges and Courts) with Deut. 16:18-20.
- Art. III, Sec. 3, Par. 1 (Witnesses and Capital Punishment) with Deut. 17:6.
- Art. III, Sec. 3, Par. 2 (Provision against Attainder, i.e., punishing a group without due process for individual) with Ezek. 18:20.
- Art. IV, Sec. 4, Par. 1 (Representative Government) with Exod. 18:21-22; Acts 6:3-5.

Finally, the document is signed “...in the year of our Lord,” an overt reference to Jesus Christ. So much for a “godless” Constitution! The framers of the Constitution created a document that at the very least has several provisions that have parallels with biblical principles and those who signed it acknowledged Jesus Christ as “our Lord.”

Consequently, the Framers of the U.S. Constitution had no intention of establishing an atheistic or secular state. President George Washington later stated to a group of Baptists: “If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension that the Constitution framed by the Convention, where I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical Society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it.”³⁶

Speaking of signers, 39 of the 55 delegates fixed their signatures to the Constitution when it was presented on September 17, 1787. So there were some who refused, like George Mason of Virginia who felt that it didn’t go far enough on dealing with slavery and didn’t provide a Bill of Rights. Even some of the hallowed heroes of the revolution such as Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, John Hancock, and Richard Henry Lee were among the opponents to the new federal government outlined in the Constitution. Had not America spent precious blood and treasure in the War to free itself from the evils of a central government? To many, this seemed like a legitimate point. In fact, if an opinion poll had been taken at that time, there is no doubt the country would have been divided. Yet the old lions eventually acquiesced, but not without many concessions and compromises, not the least of which was promise of a Bill of Rights, enumerating essential freedoms.

Not surprisingly, the most important man at the Constitutional Convention was George Washington. It was Washington’s sober presence, his noble demeanor, and the fact that everyone knew that he would certainly be the nation’s first President that provided the decisive factors in the Constitution’s passage. A mere nod from the revered Washington in favor of the new government was enough to convince most people. “Be assured,” wrote James Monroe of Virginia in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, still in France, Washington’s “influence carried this government.”

APPLICATION POINTS

Maryland delegate James McHenry tells of an encounter Ben Franklin had with a Mrs. Powel, a grand lady of Philadelphia, as the Constitutional Convention ended this day in 1787. “Well Doctor what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?” she asked the oldest of the Founding Fathers. You can almost see the twinkle in his eye, as he peered over his spectacles and quipped: “A republic, if you can keep it.”³⁷ Wise old Ben Franklin knew that republics were not easy to keep. We have been through bloody battles to keep it, even a devastating Civil War, where brother fought against brother, to keep it. Now we are as deeply divided as ever in my lifetime, so how can we keep it? How can we keep this Constitutional Republic handed to use by the Founding Fathers and preserved for us by brave souls who have given their very lives? Four suggestions:

1. Keep it by *Praying* for it. Dr. Franklin knew the importance of prayer, declaring to the Convention: “In the beginning of the Contest with Great Britain... we had daily prayer in this room for Divine protection. Our prayers, Sir, were heard, & they were graciously answered... I ... move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessing on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business...” If they needed prayer then, we need to pray for our nation now (see 1 Tim. 2:1-4). Visit www.Call2Fall.com and join up to receive weekly Prayer Targets to pray for our nation with knowledge, focus, and discernment. Ask God to keep this republic by praying for it.

2. Keep it by *Preparing* to Defend it. The only way to do that is to know it and understand it. Rick Green and David Barton created a video driven study called: Constitution Alive, filmed in Independence Hall and at Barton’s extensive library of original sources of the Founding Fathers. Visit www.ConstitutionAlive.com. Consider hosting a small group study. Keep this republic by preparing to defend it.

3. Keep it by *Participating* in the Political Process: Start by registering to vote, voting your values, and voicing your constitutional convictions to elected officials. Visit www.FRCAction.org, sign up, and get started. Some might want to run for public office. We need some Josephs and Deborahs, some Daniels and some Esthers in places of public influence. Keep this republic by participating in the political process.

4. Keep it by *Passing* it on to the Next Generation: We have an obligation to teach our children and their children, handing our heritage down to them without loss (Ps. 78:3-4). We must pass on our spiritual and civil liberties to the next generation of patriots. They too need to learn about our constitutional freedoms. In his *History of the United States*, Noah Webster wrote:

“The brief exposition of the constitution of the United States, will unfold to young persons the principles of republican government; and it is the sincere desire of the writer that our citizens should early understand that the genuine source of correct republican [representative government] principles is the Bible, particularly the New Testament or the Christian religion.”³⁸

Check out [Generation Joshua](#), [Patriot Academy](#), and [Teen Pact](#), who all provide excellent student training from a Christian worldview that respects the Founders' philosophy of constitutional government. Look them up, compare them, and consider sending your kids for training.

The Founders gave us a republic if we can keep it. So pray for it, prepare to defend it, participate in the political process, and pass it on to the next generation so that they will take up the torch of freedom into the future.

CONCLUSION

Passage of the U.S. Constitution was a remarkable achievement. George Washington wrote Lafayette on February 7, 1788 from Mount Vernon: "It appears to me, then, little short of a miracle, that the Delegates from so many different States...should unite in forming a system of national Government..."³⁹ Signer of the Declaration Dr. Benjamin Rush went even further, writing to Elias Boudinot on July 9, 1788:

"I do not believe that the Constitution was the offspring of inspiration, but I am as satisfied that it is as much the work of a Divine Providence as any of the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament."⁴⁰

Looking back 230 years, seeing the many ways God has prospered and protected this nation, even with all our flaws, America is still the most prosperous, most compassionate, most free, and the greatest mission sending, Gospel sharing nation on the face of the earth. So under God, let's do everything we can to keep it! And all God's people said: Amen!

-END

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¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Republic of the United States of America and Its Political Institutions, Reviewed and Examined*, Henry Reeves, trans., 2 vols., (Garden City, NY: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1851), 2:36.

² America Is the Richest, and Most Unequal, Country by Erik Sherman Sep 30, 2015 Fortune. Online version: <http://fortune.com/2015/09/30/america-wealth-inequality/>

³ Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution: The Case Against Religious Correctness* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1997).

⁴ Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8 vols., (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press 1953),, 4:169.

⁵ Again, I offer two books for evidence: M. E. Bradford, *A Worthy Company* (Marlborough, NH: Plymouth Rock Foundation, 1982), who reviews all 55 framers and Phil Webster, *1787 Faith: The Christian Worldview of the Signers of the Constitution* (Xulon Press, 2016), who surveys the 39 signers. My challenge is to find anyone of the 55 who was an open "Deist" or Unitarian other than Ben Franklin.

⁶ Source: Dr. Mark David Hall, George Fox University, lecture at Azusa Pacific University: "Christianity and the American Founding."

⁷ Donald S. Lutz, *The Origins of American Constitutionalism* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 141 and his earlier work "The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth Century American Political Thought," *American Political Science Review* 189 (1984):189-97.

⁸ http://www.adherents.com/gov/Founding_Fathers_Religion.html#Constitution.

⁹ Jared Sparks, ed., *The Works of Benjamin Franklin: Containing Several Political and Historical Tracts Not Included in Any Former Edition and Many Letters Official and Private Not Hitherto Published with Notes and a Life of the Author*, 10 vols., (Boston: Tappan, Whittmore and Mason, 1838), 10:423-24.

¹⁰ Ben Franklin and his son William made subscriptions toward the steeple. Construction began in May 1751, but more funds were needed, and two lotteries were held in the winter and spring of 1752–53, Franklin serving as one of the managers of both. The total cost of steeple and bells was £3162 9s. 11d. See Benjamin Dorr, *An historical account of Christ Church, Philadelphia, from its foundation, A.D. 1695 to A.D. 1841* (Philadelphia: Burns & Sieg, 1859), 98–108. The “Scheme” of the first Steeple Lottery was printed in *Pa. Gaz.*, Nov. 2, 1752, and weekly for three months thereafter; that of the supplemental lottery first appeared in *Pa. Gaz.*, Feb. 27, 1753. Reference to pew 70 is found at <http://www.ushistory.org/tour/christ-church.htm>.

¹¹ William B. Miller, “Presbyterian Signers of the Declaration of Independence,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society*, Vol. 36, No. 3, (September, 1958), 150, 169.

¹² Worthington Chauncey Ford, Gaillard Hunt, John Clement Fitzpatrick, and Roscoe R. Hill, eds., *Journals of the Continental Congress 1774-1789*, 34 vols., (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904-1937), 34:485 on September 3, 1788.

¹³ David Hosack, *A Biographical Memoir of Hugh Williamson, M.D., LL.D.*, (New York: C.S. van Winkle, 1820), 90.

¹⁴ John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*, 39 vols., (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1931-44), 11:342-43.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15:55.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 26:496.

¹⁷ Jared Sparks, ed., *The Writings of George Washington: Being His Correspondence, Addresses, Messages, and Other Papers, Official and Private, Selected and Published from the Original Manuscripts, with a Life of the Author*, 12 vols. (Boston: American Stationer's Company, 1837), 12:407.

¹⁸ Gouverneur Morris, *Oration upon the Death of General Washington, Delivered at the Request of the Corporation of the City of New York On the 31st of December, 1799.*

¹⁹ The Virginia Plan advocated the following:

- A two chambered legislature
- An executive elected by the legislature
- A separate judiciary
- Representation would be based on each state's population

²⁰ Patterson said this about Government: “Religion and Morality... [are] necessary to good government, good order and good laws.” See Maeva Marcus, ed., *The Documentary History of the Supreme Court of the United States, 1789-1800*, 3 vols., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 3:436.

²¹ As recorded on June 28, 1787 by James Madison, *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985), 209-10.

²² Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, 3 vols., (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1911), 3:471.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1:451.

²⁴ See James Hutson, Chief of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic* (Washington, D. C.: Library of Congress, 1998), 50-51. See the handwritten note image at <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/f0402as.jpg>.

²⁵ Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (New York: New American Library, 2003), 464, citing Baron Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* 1:186.

²⁶ Farrand, *Records of the Federal Convention*, 2:553.

²⁷ Eben Edwards Beardsley, ed. *Life and Times of William Samuel Johnson*, (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1876), 142.

²⁸ Rufus King on October 30, 1821 as found in Nathaniel H. Carter and William L. Stone, eds., *Reports of the Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of 1821, Assembled for the Purpose of Amending The Constitution of the State of New York* (Albany: E. and E. Hosford, 1821), 575. See also Robert Ernst, *Rufus King: Federalist Patriarch* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 381.

²⁹ Gouverneur Morris, in “An Address on the Bank of North America given in the Pennsylvania State Assembly” in 1785 as recorded in Jared Sparks, ed., *The Life of Gouverneur Morris, with Selections from His Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers*, 3 vols. (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1832), 3:465.

³⁰ Broadus Mitchell, *Alexander Hamilton: The National Adventure 1788-1804* (NY: MacMillan, 1962), 513-514.

³¹ Gaillard Hunt, ed., *The Writings of James Madison: Comprising His Public Papers and His Private Correspondence Including Numerous Letters and Documents Now for the First Time Printed*, 9 vols., (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900), 1:10-11. Bracketed item added.

³² William T. Hutchinson and William M. Rachal, eds., *The Papers of James Madison*, 7 vols., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912), 1:95-97.

³³ Bishop Meade, *Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia* (1872), quoted in Eidsmoe, *Christianity and the Constitution*, 96.

³⁴ Clinton Rossiter, ed., *The Federalist Papers* (New York: Penguin Group, 1999), 318-19. Federalist 51.

³⁵ Eidsmoe, 101.

³⁶ George Washington, on May 10, 1789, in addressing the General Committee of the United Baptist Churches of Virginia. Jared Sparks, ed., *The Writings of George Washington* 12 vols. (Boston: American Stationer's Company, 1837; NY: F. Andrew's, 1834-1847), 12:154.

³⁷ Farrand, *Records of the Federal Convention*, 3:85.

³⁸ Noah Webster, *History of the United States*, (New Haven, CT: Durrie & Peck, 1833), Preface, v.

³⁹ Farrand, *Records of the Federal Convention*, 3:187.

⁴⁰ L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 2 vols., (Princeton, New Jersey: American Philosophical Society, 1951), 1:475.