

George Washington's Birthday

February 22

George Washington—The World's Apostle of Liberty

The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.
Proverbs 10:7

Introduction

Which U.S. President:

- . . . had states, babies, seven mountains, eight streams, nine colleges, and 33 counties named after him?*
- . . . has a national holiday for his birthday? (February 22nd)*
- . . . has an image of his face carved 60 feet tall in rock?*
- . . . was elected President two times, unopposed?*
- . . . used to have his picture hanging in every classroom in the country?*

Of course, the answer is our first President, George Washington. This man is so honored by our nation that we celebrate his birthday each year; it is a national holiday. The first public occasion of celebrating Washington's birthday was in New York in 1784. He was annually honored during the years of his presidency. When Washington died in 1799, Congress passed a resolution stating that, "February 22nd next would be observed as a day of mourning." Beginning in the mid-1800s, Washington's Birthday as well as the Fourth of July became times of patriotic celebrations. Since the Civil War, the fervor to honor Washington has diminished.

Today sadly, we celebrate the generic President's Day rather than Lincoln's and Washington's birthdays. Still, in various parts of the country this great man is honored each year. His *Farewell Address* is read in the Senate each year on his birthday.

Revisionist History, or "Founding Father Bashing"

Secular historians never tire of denigrating the character of godly men and women. These excerpts are from *Parade Magazine*, February 21, 1988, entitled "The Real George Washington":

- *He never said anything.*
- *He lied as well as the next man. Gambling infatuated him, and he went to cockfights. It was said that he swore till the leaves shook on the trees.*
- *He was often moody and bleak.*
- *When he was President, he required so much ritual and formality that caused one observer to quip: "I fear we may have exchanged George the Third for George the First."*
- *He drank hard with the enlisted men.*

These are all total fabrications and are examples of the importance of not relying on recent works to learn the truth about history. Authors of curriculum, media, and even professors intentionally invent “dirt”, real or supposed, on the individuals God used in shaping our nation’s history. The only way to discern truth from error is to dig deep into many primary sources and some selected, reliable secondary sources.

Revealing the Reasons Behind the Defamation of Christians

Efforts to slander Christians are not new. Satan is described as the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). The unrighteous do not want any righteous examples because that exposes their unrighteousness as sin. Consider these passages of Scripture:

Hebrews 12:1–2: *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

In this passage we see that there are those who have gone before us and are now in heaven whose faith is such that they cause us to look to Jesus, the one who made them worthy of emulation. This cloud of witnesses also encourages us to walk a holy and pure life.

Hebrews 13:1,7: *Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*

The Scripture says that we are to remember godly leaders of the past. We are to remember those who led us and who spoke God’s Word to us, and how their words, deeds and faith in our Lord brought them blessing. Doing so causes us to walk in the same path for the glory of God, not man.

I Thessalonians 3:7,9: *For you, yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you . . . but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us.*

Paul repeated this theme in his teachings often, emphasizing the need of believers to be role models, examples or mentors to others. God knows that it is our nature to follow the example of others, so this is one more important reason for each of us to live a life that is worthy of being emulated.

Karl Marx said that before a nation can be overtaken its heroes must be removed. In the *Communist Manifesto* he wrote, “Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis; it therefore acts in contradiction to all past historical experience.”¹

Let Another Man’s Lips Praise You and Not Your Own

In his extensive research, Douglas Southall Freeman found all accusations against Washington to be false:

*Principles of right conduct prevailed: there is no echo of any scandal, no hint of any breach of accepted morals, no line of obscenity, no reference to any sex experience, no slur on any woman. In Washington this nation has a man greater than the world ever knew . . . a man dedicated, just and incorruptible, an example for long centuries of what character and diligence can achieve,*²

Thomas Paine, the famous Deist and author of *Common Sense*, had this to say of Washington:

*The cause of America is in great measure the cause of all mankind. By common consent, Washington is regarded as not merely the hero of the American Revolution, but the World’s Apostle of Liberty.*³

Abraham Lincoln, whose birthday is also celebrated in February, had some of the highest praise for Washington that has ever been written:

*Washington is the mightiest name on earth—long since mightiest in the cause of civil liberty, still mightiest in moral reformation, on that name no eulogy is expected. It cannot be. To add brightness to the sun, or glory to the name of Washington is alike impossible. Let none attempt it. In solemn awe we pronounce the name and in its naked splendor leave it shining on.*⁴

A Lifetime of Great Accomplishments

The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things. (Proverbs 15:28)

Apparently those who accuse Washington of not saying much believe that the multitude of words one says is more important than the quality of what is said, or the character of the individual behind the words. Refuting this accusation is the testimony of forty volumes of his diaries, state papers, addresses and orders to the army. The truth is that he did not talk much *about himself*. Rather than being a man of great words, he was a man of great deeds. A partial list of Washington's accomplishments reveal a man dedicated to the cause of liberty:

- Self-educated
- A successful surveyor, farmer and investor
- An aide to General Braddock in the French and Indian War
- Commander of the Virginia Militia
- A member of the Virginia House of Burgesses
- Helped form the Committees of Correspondence
- Served as commander of the Continental Army
- The main promoter of the Constitutional Convention and unanimously elected as chairman
- Served as President for two terms, eight years total
- Labored to see that the Constitution was ratified

If it is true that actions speak louder than words, Washington's deeds speak volumes of his dedication to God, country, his fellow man, his family and the holy cause of liberty.

Evidence of Washington's Faith

Those who knew Washington testified to the genuineness of his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Mason L. Weems, a contemporary of Washington and his biographer, had this to say about his character and faith:

*When the children of the years to come, hearing his great name re-echoed from every lip, shall say to their fathers, what was it that raised Washington to such heights of glory? Let them be told that it was great talents constantly guided and guarded by religion . . . the noblest, the most efficient element of his character was that he was a humble, earnest Christian.*⁵

At the age of twenty, Washington wrote out a series of prayers that he would lift to the Lord each morning and evening. This is the Monday evening prayer:

*Thou madest me at first and hast ever since sustained the work by thy own hand; thou gavest thy son to die for me; and hast giveneth me assurance for salvation, upon my repentance and sincerely endeavoring to conform my life to his holy precepts and example . . . let the whole world be filled with the knowledge of thee and thy son Jesus Christ . . .*⁶

Consider this beautiful and familiar story: Isaac Potts, a Quaker Minister and Tory sympathizer, came across Washington on his knees in prayer in the woods at Valley Forge. This encounter with Washington profoundly influenced Potts:

I have this day seen what I never expected. Thee knows that I have always thought that the sword and the gospel were utterly inconsistent; and that no man could be a soldier and a Christian at the same time. But George Washington has this day convinced me of my mistake. If George Washington be not a man of God, I am greatly deceived—and still more shall I be deceived, if God does not, through him, work out a great salvation for America. If there is anyone on this earth whom the Lord will listen to, it is George Washington; and I feel a presentiment that under such a commander there can be no doubt of our eventually establishing our independence, and that God in his providence has willed it so.⁷

Washington's reverence for the Word of God is also well-known. He was a student of Scripture in private and honored it publicly as well, encouraging others to read it and practice its teachings. When Washington was sworn in as our first President, the ceremony called for his hand to be placed on an open Bible. Washington added something to this ceremony that was his own doing; he leaned over to the Bible that was opened to Genesis chapters 49–50 and kissed it, declaring, "So help me God."

Serving for Love of Country, not Love of Money

George Washington served as the commander of the Army *without pay* and was only reimbursed for expenses. His salary would have been five hundred dollars per month for the eight years of war. This would have totalled \$48,000. Only \$15,000 of his expenses were reimbursed, so the U.S. profited at least \$30,000. John C. Fitzgerald wrote, "If any other American backed the forlorn hope of independence with heart, hand, and purse as did George Washington, he is yet to be discovered."⁸ If only our politicians today would learn from his example that it is noble and right to give to one's country, and not expect that they should be made rich by their government service.

The Best-Educated Man of His Time

Washington's early education came primarily from his father and his mother. His curriculum consisted of the history of Rome and Greece, penmanship, moral character, respect for scholarship, mathematics, the Bible, literature, and studying men of fine character and obedience. George was eleven years old when his father August died. At this time, his half-brothers Lawrence and Austin provided his teaching. Col. William Fairfax, the master of neighboring Belvoir, also taught him. Fairfax had one of the best educations that England could provide and one of the best libraries of the day. He taught Washington many things, including an understanding of the use of naval power. Fairfax's son George William also tutored Washington and it was calculated that these faithful tutors and mentors helped Washington obtain the equivalent of a university education and beyond. Professor Hart of Harvard University stated, "George Washington was the best educated man of his time."⁹

King Washington?

In 1782, when America faced an economic crisis, and many troops and officers were threatening a military coup, a group of officers led by Col. Lewis Nicola offered a solution. They wanted to set up a monarchy and make General George Washington a king! Washington responded with shock and alarm to Col. Nicola in a letter dated May 22, 1782:

Sir, with a mixture of great surprise and astonishment, I have read with attention the sentiments you have submitted to my perusal. Be assured, Sir, no occurrence in the course of the war have given me more painful sensation, than information of their being such ideas existing in the army, as you have expressed, and I must view with abhorrence and reprehend with severity . . . I am much at a loss to conceive what part of my conduct could have given encouragement to an address, which to me seems big with the greatest mischiefs that can befall my country. If I am not deceived in the knowledge of my self, you could not have found a person to whom your schemes are more disagreeable . . .¹⁰

Once again, Washington shows us his great character and his understanding of the Biblical principles of civil government.

Wine is a Mocker

Washington called rum “the bane of morals and the parent of idleness.” In his general orders of July 4, 1775, he stated, “the general most earnestly requires, and expects, a due observance of those articles of war, established for the government of the army, which forbids profane cursing, swearing and drunkenness.”¹¹ Writing to Robert Dinwiddie, Washington stated this:

*. . . this I am certain of, and can call my conscience, and what, I suppose, will still be a more demonstrable proof in the eyes of the world, my orders, to witness how much I have, both by threats and by pervasive means, endeavored to discountenance gaming, drinking, swearing, and irregularities of every other kind; while I have, on the other hand, practiced every artifice to inspire a laudable emulation in the officers for the service of their country, and to encourage the soldiers in the unerring exercise of their duty.*¹²

Let No Unwholesome Word Proceed Out of Our Mouth

Washington knew that the Scriptures teach that the tongue is very powerful and must be controlled (James 3). He endeavored at all times to lead by example and instruct his men concerning the proper use of the tongue. For example, on August 3, 1776, he issued this order condemning profanity:

*The General is sorry to be informed that the foolish and wicked practice of profane cursing and swearing, a vice heretofore little known in an American Army, is growing into fashion; he hopes the . . . men will reflect that we can have little hope of the blessing of Heaven on our arms if we insult it by our impiety and folly; added to this, it is a vice so mean and low . . . that every man of sense and character detests and despises it.*¹³

Number 49 of his famous Rules of Civility states, “Use no reproachful language against any one, neither curse or revile.”¹⁴

The Vice of Gaming

Washington also was keenly aware of the deleterious effects of gaming (gambling). Accordingly, he used his powers of persuasion to admonish others not to give in to this temptation to get rich quick:

*Avoid gaming. This is a vice, which is productive of every possible evil; equally injurious to the morals and health of its votaries (people devoted to it). It is the child of avarice, the brother of iniquity, the father of mischief. It has been the ruin of many worthy families; the loss of many a man’s honor; and the cause of suicide.*¹⁵

Inscription at Mount Vernon

When visiting Mount Vernon, make sure that you go to the Washington cemetery. There you will find this inspiring and instructive inscription on one of the memorials:

*Washington, the brave, the wise, the good,
Supreme in war, in council, and in peace,
Valiant without ambition, discreet without fear,
Confident without presumption.
In disaster, calm; in success, moderate; in all, himself.
The hero, the patriot, the Christian.
The father of nations, the friend of mankind,
Who, when he had won all, renounced all,
And sought in the bosom of his family and of nature, retirement,
And in hope of religion, immortality.*

Conclusion: Washington's Prayer for the Nation

Washington prayed this prayer for his beloved nation. Let us pray that these sentiments will soon come to pass:

Almighty God; we make our earnest prayer that Thou wilt keep the United States in Thy holy protection; that Thou wilt incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government; and entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another and for their fellow citizens of the United States at large. And finally that Thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Divine author of our blessed religion, and without a humble imitation of whose example in these things we can never hope to be a happy nation. Grant our supplication, we beseech Thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Celebrate George Washington with Your Family!

- Visit Mt. Vernon. Plan your trip at <http://www.mountvernon.org/>
- Play with the Washington family paper dolls. Buy at <http://store.doverpublications.com/0486258580.html>
- Read *George Washington's Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior*. It's available from Amazon.com.
- Read this chapter aloud with your family; have each family member read one section.
- Enjoy and perform the monologue "George Washington—Father of our Nation" which begins on page 129 of this book.

Endnotes

1. Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton company, Inc., 1988), 73-74
2. William Wilber, *The Making of George Washington* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1970), xvi
3. James Renwick Manship, *Providential Perspective*, February 2000, 1
4. Ibid, 253
5. Lucile Johnston, *Celebrations of a Nation* (Willmar, Minnesota: Biword Publications, 1987), 101
6. Ibid, 104
7. William J. Johnson, *George Washington the Christian*, reprinted by Mott Media, 176, pp. 120-12
8. William Wilber, *The Making Of George Washington*, 252
9. Ibid, 165
10. Stephen McDowell, *Providence Foundation Letter*, October 9, 1-2
11. John Frederick Schroeder compiler, *Maxims of George Washington* (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. 1942), 153
12. Ibid, 153
13. Verna M. Hall, *George Washington: The Character and Influence of One Man* (San Francisco, CA: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1999), 181
14. Ibid, 147
15. John Frederick Schroeder compiler, *Maxims of George Washington*, 154