

Constitution Day

September 17

Biblical Principles in our Federal and State Constitutions and Other Founding Documents

*For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them,
as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for?*

*And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments
so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?*

*Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things
which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life:
but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons;*

*Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb,
when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together,
and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days
that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.*

Deuteronomy 4:7-10

Introduction

Happy birthday to our Constitution! If it had a cake, there would be over 220 candles on it. In 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower proclaimed September 17-23 Constitution Week to remember the signing of our most important legal document. Our Constitution was approved and signed on September 17, 1787, in Philadelphia by the delegates of twelve states. Rhode Island was not represented and did not approve it. Of course, to become binding on the states it still had to be ratified by nine states. This happened on June 21, 1788, as New Hampshire became the ninth state to ratify it. A Bill of Rights was added to insure further protection for the people and the states from the federal government. Since the Bill of Rights was added, our Constitution has only been amended sixteen times. This is amazing, confirming the fact that our Constitution is the world's most enduring written constitution! British Prime Minister William Gladstone once remarked that our Constitution is, "the most remarkable work known . . . in modern times to have been produced by the human intellect, at a single stroke." Gladstone is correct that this is a remarkable work, but those who have done their research know that this was not a work that was produced solely by the human intellect. It was a work that was produced predominantly by Christians who applied their understanding of the Scriptures to civil government.

Our state constitutions, the Declaration of Independence, the federal Constitution and other founding documents were so Biblically based that in 1892 the Supreme Court was prompted to conclude that we were a Christian nation:

This is a religious people. This is historically true. From the discovery of this continent to the present hour, there is a single voice making this affirmation . . . these are not individual sayings, declarations of private persons; they are organic utterances; they

... speak the voice of the entire people . . . these and many other matters which might be noticed, add a volume of unofficial declarations to the mass of organic utterances that this is a Christian nation¹ (Church of Holy Trinity vs. US)

Notice that the Supreme Court indicates that their conclusions are based upon organic utterances. Organic means belonging to the fundamental or constitutional law. In other words the evidence that we are a Christian nation is found in our written founding documents. Let us briefly look at some of that evidence, including our federal Constitution.

Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms

The document that was the precursor to the Declaration of Independence was the July 1775 *Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms*. Our representatives meeting in Philadelphia made this declaration just one year before they declared independence. It is full of references to God, recognizing His sovereignty. Here are a few phrases giving evidence of its Biblical nature:

- *If it was possible for men, who exercise their reason to believe, that the divine Author of our existence intended a part of the human race to hold an absolute property in, and an unbounded power over others, marked out by his infinite goodness and wisdom . . .*
- *But a reverence for our great Creator, principles of humanity, and the dictates of common sense, must convince all those who reflect upon the subject, that government was instituted to promote the welfare of mankind, and ought to be administered for the attainment of that end.*
- *Our forefathers, inhabitants of the island of Great Britain, left their native land, to seek on these shores a residence for civil and religious freedom.*
- *Our cause is just. Our union is perfect. Our internal resources are great, and, if necessary, foreign assistance is undoubtedly attainable. We gratefully acknowledge, as signal instances of the Divine favor towards us, that his Providence would not permit us to be called into this sincere controversy, until we were grown up to our present strength, had been previously exercised on warlike operation, and possessed of the means of defending ourselves. With hearts fortified with these animating reflections, we most solemnly, before God and the world, declare, that exerting the utmost energy of those powers, which our beneficent Creator hath graciously bestowed upon us, the arms we have been compelled by our enemies to assume, we will, in defiance of every hazard, with unabating firmness and perseverance, employ for the preservation of our liberties; being with one mind resolved to die freemen rather than to live slaves.*
- *With an humble confidence on the mercies of the supreme and impartial judge and ruler of the Universe, we most devoutly implore his divine goodness to protect us happily through this great conflict, to dispose our adversaries to reconciliation on reasonable terms, and thereby to relieve the empire from the calamities of civil war.²*

The Declaration of Independence:

Other than the indirect references to God and Biblical principles, there are four direct references to God in the Declaration of Independence:

- *laws of nature and of nature's God*, indicating God as the Supreme lawgiver.
- *that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights*, acknowledging God as the all-powerful Creator who alone is the author of rights which, since they are not granted by man, cannot be taken away.
- *appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world*, indicating that God is the ultimate and supreme Judge who is judged by no man yet stands in judgment of all including civil rulers and governments.
- *with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence*, affirming that their hope and trust in this life is not in man, but in a God who cares for His creation and watches over all, ordering their steps and intervening in their lives.

State Constitutions

As you read these excerpts from our state constitutions, bear in mind that religion in that day was understood in a different way than how we use this word today. Here is Webster's original definition of religion:

*Religion in its most comprehensive sense, includes a belief in the being and perfection of God, in the revelation of his will to man, in man's obligation to obey his commands, in a state of reward and punishment, and in man's accountableness to God; and also true godliness or piety of life, with the practice of all moral duties. It therefore comprehends theology, as a system of doctrines or principles, as well as practical piety; for the practice of moral duties without a belief in a divine lawgiver, and without reference to his will or commands, is not religion.*³

Constitution of Delaware, 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: 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.*⁴

Constitution of Maryland, Article 36:

*That, as it is the duty of every man to worship God in such manner as he thinks most acceptable to him; all persons, professing the Christian religion, are equally entitled to protection in their religious liberty; wherefore no person ought by any law to be molested in his person or estate on account of his religious persuasion, or profession, or for his religious practice; unless, under color of religion, any man shall disturb the good order, peace or safety of the State, or shall infringe the laws of morality, or injure others, in their natural, civil, or religious rights. . .*⁵

Constitution of Massachusetts, Article II:

*It is the right as well as the duty of all men in society, publicly, and at stated seasons, to worship the SUPREME BEING, the great Creator and Preserver of the universe.*⁶

Constitution of New Hampshire, Article V:

*Every individual has a natural and unalienable right to worship GOD according to the dictates of his own conscience, and reason; and no subject shall be hurt, molested, or restrained in his person, liberty or estate for worshipping GOD, in the manner and season most agreeable to the dictates of his own conscience; or for his religious profession, sentiments, or persuasion provided he doth not disturb the public peace or disturb others in their religious worship.*⁷

Constitution of Vermont, Article III:

*That all men have a natural and unalienable right to worship ALMIGHTY GOD, according to the dictates of their own consciences and understanding, regulated by the word of GOD; and that no man ought, or of right can be compelled to attend any religious worship, or erect, or support any place of worship, or maintain any minister, contrary to the dictates of his conscience; nor can any man who professes the Protestant religion, be justly deprived or abridged of any civil right, as a citizen, on account of his religious sentiment, or peculiar mode of religious worship, and that no authority can, or ought to be vested in or assumed by, any power whatsoever, that shall, in any case, interfere with, or in any manner control, the rights of conscience, in the free exercise of religious worship: nevertheless, every sect or denomination of people ought to observe the Sabbath, or the Lord's day, and keep up, and support, some sort of religious worship, which to them shall seem most agreeable to the revealed will of GOD.*⁸

Constitution of Virginia, Sections 15 & 16:

That no free government, or the blessings of liberty, can be preserved to any people, but by a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, frugality, and virtue, and by frequent recurrence to fundamental principles. That religion, or the duty

which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity towards each other.⁹

Human Government Must be Limited

One of the most fundamental and absolutely essential Biblical principles embodied in all of our founding documents and specifically our federal Constitution is the principle of limitation of all human governments. This is God's idea, fully declared in His Word. It is necessary because of the fallen nature of man, which of course also is the reason for the necessity of civil government. English philosopher John Locke lived in a day when the idea of limits on civil government or limits on the civil ruler were questioned. In reality, in all of history, man has dealt with this issue. The doctrine of the divine right of kings, absolutism or the absolute power of the monarchy or king has been around for thousands of years. In the early 1600's Robert Filmer, a country squire, wrote *Patriarcha*, a defense of absolute royal power. For this great act he was knighted by Charles I. Filmer stated:

The greatest liberty in the world—if it be duly considered—is for a people to live under a monarch. It is the Magna Charta of this kingdom; all other shows or pretexts of liberty are but several degrees of slavery, and a liberty only to destroy liberty.¹⁰

The amazing thing is, Filmer makes his case for monarchy from the Scriptures! He argues that all power derives from the father's power over his child, which is absolute. Since kings are an extension of earthly power, we must honor them as we would our natural fathers.

John Locke in his *First Treatise on Civil Government* devastates Filmer's argument by properly interpreting the Scriptures. He points out first that the Bible says to honor your father and your mother. He wonders what Filmer concludes about the mother aspect since he only talks about the male king as head. Then Locke points out that children are only to obey their parents absolutely until they reach the age of maturity and reason. Since a king has adults as his subjects he cannot claim authority over them as a parent over a child.

Our federal Constitution is an *expressed powers* document, which means the federal government was given only a few, implicitly stated powers. All other powers were reserved to the States or the people. This is a very important statement, that the federal government was to be limited, just as state governmental power was limited and indeed all civil power in our country had been limited.

Civil government is an institution created by God, and its purpose is the protection of life, liberty and property. (Romans 13:1). Civil government has the power of the sword to enforce its will: it has a monopoly on the use of deadly force. Therefore, its power must be carefully guarded lest it be abused! God limits civil government; our Founding Fathers recognized this fact and incorporated this idea into the Constitution. The history of man has been the history of the abuse of the power of civil government (I Samuel 8: II Chronicles 10). In America, our civil government has grown to proportions far beyond Biblical and constitutional boundaries, threatening to swallow up the liberties of states, churches, businesses, homes and individuals. A total tax burden of 40-50% is proof of this assertion. The tax rate that caused our Founders to declare the British government tyrannical was estimated to be less than 5%. The following article from *WORLD Magazine* illustrates the problem: What book has 75,606 pages, which no one has read completely, but its contents cost the nation hundreds of billions of dollars? The answer is the Federal Register, which lists the rules and regulations that businesses and citizens of the United States must follow.

*The Cato Institute, in a study called *The Ten Thousand Commandments*, reports that the register continues to grow under the Bush administration, with federal agencies issuing 4,167 new rules last year. (The unreadable book had merely 74,258 pages in the final year of the Clinton administration.)*

The estimated cost of all of these arcane rules to businesses and their customers: \$860 billion, or five times the current projected budget deficit.¹¹

The ultimate reason for a growing external civil government is the decrease of Christian self-government. Therefore, the ultimate solution to this problem is not found in passing some sort of legislation, but in restoring Christian self-government to the American people and leadership. A Christian government, with laws based upon the Law of God, would provide the greatest degree of liberty to a people. Our Constitution codified the idea of the limits of civil government and this is a fundamental principle of government that we need to restore!

The Preamble to the Constitution

The Preamble to the Constitution is a bold declaration that acknowledges God's sovereignty over civil governments, for it expresses in a very concise way what God has declared to be the purpose of civil government. It declares that government is to do the following:

establish justice (I Peter 2:14; Genesis 9:6)
ensure domestic tranquility (I Timothy 2:1; 2)
provide for the common defense (Romans 13:4; Luke 22:36)
promote the general welfare (Romans 13:4)
secure the blessings of liberty (Genesis 1:27; II Corinthians 3:17; Ecclesiastes 5:19)

Biblical Principles of Government

Other principles either contained in the Constitution or which can be deduced from other founding documents include:

1. A Sovereign God presides over the affairs of men and nations. He alone is our ruler and all earthly rulers must be in submission to Him. (Psalms 2, 47:2; 103:19, and 146:3; Matthew 28:18; Acts 12:21–23; Daniel 4:31–37; 5:18–21)
2. In a Christian nation, civil laws should be based upon God's law. (Deuteronomy 4:7–8 and Matthew 5:17–19)
3. All men are equal before God and before the laws that they make. (Genesis 1:27; Matthew 22:16; Romans 3:9; and II Chronicles 19:17)
4. Individuals are created to, and able to govern themselves under God's government. (Proverbs 6:6–8, 16:32, 25:28; II Corinthians 9:27)
5. Man has inalienable rights that come from God (Alienate—withdraw or transfer). (Galatians 5:1; I Corinthians 9:19; I Peter 2:16)
6. For a republic to be maintained, the people must be virtuous. (Matthew 25:23; Proverbs 11:10, 14:34, 28:2, and 29:2,8)
7. Constitutional government means government by laws, not the arbitrary rule of men. (Deuteronomy 4:8; 17:14–20; Hebrews 8:10)
8. Proper government is representative government. (Titus 1:6–9; II Corinthians 5:21; Exodus 18:13–21)
9. The power of government, held in the hands of representatives, ought to reside in Christians. (I Corinthians 6:2; II Samuel 23:3–4; Exodus 18:21; Proverbs 29:2)
10. The primary responsibility of government is to protect property, both external and internal. (Romans 13:1; Proverbs 15:25; Matthew 23:14)
11. Government should provide impartial judgement. (Deuteronomy 1:16–17)
12. In recognition of the fallen nature of man, the powers of civil government must be separated. (I Samuel 8; Isaiah 33:22; Jeremiah 17:5,9)
13. A dual system of government (Federalism) keeps power decentralized. (Matthew 22:36); The Hebrew people were members of tribes (like states) and were Israelites (like national government).
14. Trial by jury protects the citizens from unconstitutional laws. (Deuteronomy 19:15; II Corinthians 13:1; Matthew 18:16; Acts 25:16; and Numbers 35:24)

Celebrate Constitution Day with Your Family!

- Fly the flag (your neighbors may ask why you are flying the flag and you can help them become aware of this commemoration).
- Read parts of the Constitution with your family. Recite the preamble in unison.
- Enjoy and act out the skit “America and Christianity What’s the Connection” which begins on page 96 of this book.
- Visit the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom in the National Archives in Washington D.C. where the Constitution is on display. <http://www.archives.gov/>
- Enjoy and present “The March of Liberty” which begins on page 148 of this book.
- Submit a letter to the editor using one of the points from this chapter.
- Ask family members to share what they love about our Constitution.
- Read the twenty powers given to the federal government.

Endnotes

1. David Barton, *The Myth of Separation* (Aledo, Texas: Wallbuilder Press, 1989), 83
2. Richard Perry, Editor, *Sources of Our Liberties* (Buffalo, NY: William S. Hein and Co., 1991), 295–300.
3. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language* (San Francisco, CA: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967)
4. David Barton, *The Myth of Separation*, 23.
5. Richard Perry, editor, *Sources Of Our Liberties* (Buffalo, NY: William S. Hein & Co., 1991), 349
6. Ibid, 374
7. Ibid, 382
8. Ibid, 365
9. Ibid, 312
10. John Locke, *Of Civil Government* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1924) introduction
11. Ruled and Regulated, *WORLD Magazine* (September 13, 2003).