

GOD IN THE FOUNDING OF AMERICA

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In recent years there has been much discussion about how much, or how little, of a role God played in the founding of our nation. As anti-Christian values and sentiment grow in America, many would have us believe that our Founders had minimal belief in God, and even less concern to bring His Presence into the founding principles and documents of our nation. But what do the documents themselves reveal to us?

God in the Declaration of Independence

These sections of the Declaration of Independence make reference to God.

“When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Also in the closing paragraph the signers of the Declaration of Independence appealed to the *Supreme Judge of the world* and *divine Providence*.

In summary,

- God is named twice in the Declaration: *Nature’s God* and *Creator*,
- the Declaration states that God has established *Laws of Nature* (Natural Law) and *Unalienable Rights*,
- the Declaration also states that God is living and active: *Supreme Judge of the world* and *Divine Providence*.

From this it is immediately clear that the first and visionary document of our nation powerfully recognizes and calls upon the Lord God Almighty.

God in The Constitution of the United States

Whereas God is in the wording of the Declaration of Independence, God is in the spirit of The Constitution of the United States as seen in the Founders’ worldview and four aspects of the type of government defined in the Constitution.

1. FOUNDERS’ WORLDVIEW

The First Great Awakening (1730s to 1760s) had a lasting impact on the new nation that continued through the War of Independence and in establishing the Constitution: many people came to Christ and a Biblical worldview was established throughout the thirteen colonies.

Our Founders were not all Christians; however, they all shared this Biblical worldview, for example:

George Washington

John Marshall, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, said of George Washington, *“Without making ostentatious professions of religion, he was a sincere believer in the Christian faith, a truly devout man.”*

Thomas Jefferson

Extracts of Thomas Jefferson’s writing at the Jefferson Memorial in Washington DC note, *“God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that his justice cannot sleep forever.”*

Benjamin Franklin

When the 1787 Constitutional Convention was about to breakdown, Benjamin Franklin spoke out, *“The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this Truth – that God governs in the Affairs of Men. I also believe, that without His concurring Aid, we shall succeed in this political Building no better than the Builders of Babel.”*



2. REPRESENTATIVE FORM OF GOVERNMENT

The preamble of the Constitution notes, *“WE THE PEOPLE of the United States do ordain and establish this Constitution.”*

Also Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address noted, *“... this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”*

This representative form of government aligns with God’s instructions to the Israelites in Exodus 18:21, *“Select capable men from all the people – men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain – and appoint them as officials.”*

3. A REPUBLICAN FORM OF GOVERNMENT

Article IV, Section. 4 of The Constitution of the United States states, *“The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government”*

In a Republic the majority rule of a Democracy is limited by a written Constitution safeguarding the rights of the individual and the minority. For this form of government to succeed – so that both the needs of the majority and the minority are met – requires a solid foundation, i.e. belief in God-given absolute truths (natural law), and a generally virtuous population who engage in the political process.

4. LIMITED GOVERNMENT

Amendment X of the Bill of Rights states, *“The powers not delegated to the [federal government] by the Constitution ... are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.”*

For a limited government to work the people must be largely self-governing, which requires the people to be educated and to have a firm moral foundation. These attributes of self-government are described in 2 Peter 1:5-7, *“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.”*

5. SEPARATION OF POWERS

The Founders understood the sinfulness of man as described in Jeremiah 17:9, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”* This required the separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government so that each branch of government would be restrained by the other two.

This concept of separation of powers originated from Isaiah 33:22 where it states, *“For the Lord is our judge (judicial branch), the Lord is our lawgiver (legislative branch), the Lord is our king (or in our case ‘president’ as in the executive branch); it is he who will save us.”*

Conclusion

God was intentionally and powerfully referenced in the visionary document, the Declaration of Independence, because the Founders knew that without God the noble cause would fail. Also the name of God was intentionally left out of the working document, The Constitution of the United States, because the Founders also knew that they should not establish a theocracy. However, they wrote the document largely on the basis of Biblical principles, recognizing that it would require a moral and religious people to sustain it. This was confirmed by the first two presidents:

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable support” George Washington’s Farewell Address, 1796.

“Our Constitution is designed only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for any other.” John Adams, 1798 message.

Therefore our challenge today is for us to rekindle a correct understanding and application of the words of our founding documents knowing that, **“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord”** (Psalm 33:12).