

In Defense of the Bill of Rights

Separation of Church and State

By

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As Baptists one of our distinctives has always been the *Separation of Church and State*. What the Baptist means by this doctrinal view is far different than that which is meant by the liberal press or politician when he talks about "Separation of Church and State."

"Separation of Church and State" has been used as a title for defining the first amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America.

In 1801 the Danbury (Connecticut) Baptist Association wrote to President Thomas Jefferson asking for the enforcement of the First Amendment in the release of its pastors, (notably Pastor Isaac Backus) and those in Massachusetts who had been jailed for not paying mandatory taxes to the Congregational Church (the Puritans). Thomas Jefferson wrote back to the Danbury Baptist Association on January 1, 1802. This letter has been used to define the legal meaning of "Separation of Church and State," and it includes the now famous "wall of separation" clause.

Jefferson said: "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between a man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions

only, and not opinions"

"January 1, 1802

"Gentlemen:

"The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which you are so good to express towards me, on behalf of the Danbury Baptist Association, give me the highest satisfaction. My duties dictate a faithful and zealous pursuit of the interests of my constituents, and in proportion as they are persuaded of my fidelity to those duties, the discharge of them becomes more and more pleasing.

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between a man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith of his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole.

"American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between church and State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.

"I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection and blessings of the common Father and Creator of man, and tender you and your religious association, assurances of my high respect and esteem,

"Thomas Jefferson"

Notice that in Jefferson's legal opinion the wall of separation exists only to prevent the enactment of laws that would interfere with what a man believes. Laws were to govern a man's actions only. Notice again what Jefferson said: ". . . religion is a matter which lies solely between a man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith of his worship, that the

legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions."

The first amendment, to which Jefferson referred, says: "***Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof***, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Jefferson's letter was written to interpret the first amendment. This letter has been used in court as the meaning of the first amendment. The legislature can not regulate faith. There was never a mention of the church not interfering in the government of the country. The opposite was assumed to be true. The influence of the church was instrumental in the establishment of the United States of America, and responsible for the liberty that it enjoyed. The Declaration of Independence is replete with mentions of the influence of Christianity.

The influence of Christianity was both direct and extensive in the formation of the United States of America. The Declaration of Independence recognizes the existence of absolute truth when it speaks of "the Laws of Nature and Nature's God" and "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator . . ."

"When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.--

"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.--

"That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.--"

The first amendment only deals with government's interference in the affairs of the church. There was no mention of the church removing itself from the arena of public policy, debate, or politics. In fact, when George Washington retired from the presidency he said that there are two foundations for political prosperity: morality and Christianity.

As a country we have been deserting our two foundations, and more and more we are told that Christian ethics, faith, integrity, and morality have no place in this country. The liberal affirms this under the interpretation of "Separation of Church and State." These same people however, have room for atheism, evolution, and Freudian morality and ethics.

Godly Baptists fought the Revolutionary War to create the United States of America as a haven of freedom to worship God. We love this country for the freedom of religious faith that is recognized as given by Nature's God.

We as Baptists have a long and proud history of standing against governments when they have violated our rights on the issues of ethics, faith, morality or integrity. Protesting abortion was not the first time that we have taken a stand against unspeakable acts of men. The pro-abortionist tries to silence us by saying that we cannot protest, peaceably assemble to petition government or have any say in public morality. We cannot allow them to deny us the cornerstone liberty of the first amendment.

Great men of God from the past have firmly taken a stand against the government. I will be proud to stand with them in eternity. Their names fill the Celestial Hall of Fame.

Someone once told me that if I "do not like this country go somewhere else and stop complaining about it." This is my country! I love it. I was born here. I am a natural-born citizen of the United States. It is my God-given right and my responsibility to complain when my government goes off track. In a republican form of government such as ours, we elect those that represent us. If they do not represent our feelings, then we better complain about it, for we elected them either by our vote or our failure to vote.

It is my heritage as a Baptist and as an American to "petition the Government for a redress of grievances". If Baptists had not complained and even taken up arms in disagreement with the policies of King George we would still be a part of the British Empire. It is the debt of every citizen to protest the encroachment of Government into our churches and our lives. When government is immoral or amoral we must join a long list of men and women who have taken a stand against moral declension.

Baptists in U. S. history fought for the inclusion of the Bill of Rights.

In the state of Virginia, Pastor John Leland persuaded the Baptist pastors of Orange County, Virginia to support the adoption of the Constitution of the United States after a meeting with James Madison the end of March, 1788. Madison had asked for the meeting because of the opposition of the Baptists to a constitution that might allow the establishment of an official state church. James Madison opposed the inclusion of a Bill of Rights, which the Virginia Baptists insisted be a part of the Constitution. Without the support of Leland the Baptists of Virginia would have opposed the ratification of the new Constitution and thrown their support behind Patrick Henry, then governor of the state. Madison's meeting with Leland

brought about a compromise: Madison would support the Bill of Rights, and Leland and the Baptists would support him and the new Constitution.

Our history of fighting for the rights of the individual did not begin with Pastor John Leland. He was one in a long history of men who insisted on the fundamental rights of the individual to believe and worship God according to the dictates of God's Word and the understanding of each man's conscience. As Jefferson said, "The legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions." No government has a right to tell me what to think, how to think, what is correct to think, or incorrect to think. As Baptists we are revolutionaries. We will think what we please before the God of Heaven, and no one will tell us what is politically correct or incorrect. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He alone will judge our "opinions." Government's job is to judge only my actions. *Why* I do something is up to the judgment of the Sovereign King of Kings and Creator of the universe.

Biblical history demonstrates a long history of resistance to government interference in the area of Soul Liberty.

If Moses parents were not rebels and disobeyed the law, they would have thrown Moses into the Nile. World history changed because of Amram and Jocabed, Moses' parents. Every freedom-loving man and woman in whom beats a heart of faith gives thanks for these two anti-abortion, religious-right fanatics who would not obey Pharaoh's law.

If Moses had not stood up against Pharaoh and the entire Egyptian Empire the Bible would not exist, and the Children of Israel would still be slaves in Egypt. This poor Jewish shepherd who had just spent forty years shepherding Jethro's sheep in the Sinai, went before the leader of the mightiest empire of his day and simply said, "Thus saith the LORD, Let my people go." This began a contest that left Egypt without crops, without cattle, destitute of money, without a firstborn, and without an army.

One man stood against an empire, and an empire fell, and a new nation was born.

Nathan, appalled at David's sin of adultery, cover-up and murder of Uriah, pointed his bony finger in David's face and said, "Thou art the man." He stood against the most popular and loved king in Israel's history.

Many of the prophets of the Old Testament preached against the rulers for participation in Ashtaroth or Moloch worship. Ashtaroth (or Venus) worship was the worship of fertility, sex, or hedonism. Moloch worship included the sacrifice of their little children to burn them in fire. At the risk of their lives these holy men of God spoke to a nation that hated them for their fanaticism to even dare to criticize them for what they were all doing. After all, if we all do it, it cannot be wrong.

Elijah and Elisha both decried the corruption of Ahab and Jezebel and even prophesied the death of them, saying that the dogs would lick up Jezebel's blood.

Some of the men who played important parts in this struggle against the evils of government have been forgotten by history. One such unnamed man is mentioned in I Kings 13. He was merely called the man of God who came out of Judah. He went and prophesied against the altar of Jereboam II. He counted his own life of little importance in his battle of resisting the authority of a corrupt government and criticizing it.

Isaiah and Jeremiah stood up against the sin-laden governments of their day. Isaiah was so unpopular with his prophesy against the rulers of his day that he was "sawn asunder" which means that they began cutting him with a saw at his feet and kept sawing until they reached his head. Jeremiah was considered unpatriotic for saying that Babylon would win the war against Judah. This was politically incorrect hate speech. He was called a traitor for taking the side of the enemy and was sent to a makeshift dungeon created in a cistern in the yard of the royal house.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego all stood against government, even at the risk of their lives.

John the Baptist preached publicly against Herod and the adulterous relationship between Herod and Herodias. When the political and religious leaders of the day came to John, he sent them away empty, telling them to first bring fruit meet for repentance. Unrepentant Herod eventually had John beheaded.

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke with disdain of Herod Agrippa calling him a female fox. He spoke out against the Sanhedrin in His day calling the majority party, the Pharisees, "whited sepulchres" and "hypocrites." When Jesus spoke about judging, He forbade us from judging the motives of the heart which are known to God alone, but we were told to judge their actions. Jefferson, after all was in agreement with Jesus in saying that man's government could legislate "actions only, and not opinions." Jesus had said it in these words, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matthew 7:20)"

In Hebrews 11 the Apostle Paul even went so far as to commend Rahab who helped the spies to overthrow her own country and people. He commended Gideon who worked to overthrow the sinful idolatry of his own government and establish a government that was pleasing to God. He spoke highly of those who "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness." He praised those who had trials of "cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment" and were "stoned" or "sawn asunder" (like Isaiah) for speaking out against government. He says of them "Of whom the world was not worthy." These men are my heroes.

Americans have a long history of resistance to government interference in any area of Soul Liberty.

Along with them I consider Baptist Pastor Roger Williams a hero who would not pay taxes to support the state religion. He went to jail for it and was exiled, with other Baptists, from Massachusetts

for believing in what was right. He spoke out against government and brought about, not only the state of Rhode Island, but also the religious liberty that we enjoyed for 200 plus years after him.

I consider David Brainerd to be a hero for believing that American Indians have a soul. I believe that David Brainerd was right, even when government did not agree with him. He was outspoken, and his outspoken views eventually led to his dismissal from Harvard.

I think men like Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and the signers of the Declaration of Independence were heroes who stood up against their government. They fought for freedom, not peace. I owe a debt of gratitude to these men. They put their lives, fortunes and sacred honor on the line that I might have the freedom today to be, like them, a rebel against tyranny.

My parents lit the torch of liberty in the darkest corner of my soul. They entrusted me with a country that was a harbor of refuge on the sea of humanity still yearning to breathe free. Have I failed to maintain that shining light? Have I failed to pass it on to my sons and daughters? Have my children understood that some things are more important than life itself, and certainly more important than economic wealth? Will my grandchildren grow up in a country where they will have the same rights that I had when I was born? Where are the godly men today? Where are the rebels against tyranny? Where are the heroes?