

Benjamin Franklin Issued This Prophetic Warning to Thomas Paine

I would give worlds, if I had them, if *The Age of Reason* had never been published. O Lord, help me! Christ, help me! Stay with me! It is hell to be left alone.

These were the dying words of the well-known, eighteenth century American Deist, Thomas Paine. Interestingly, Benjamin Franklin warned Paine of such pain and regret if he persisted in attacking historic Christianity. This warning by Franklin was prompted by Paine sending him a manuscript copy of *The Age of Reason*, or one of similar content.

Paine sent the manuscript to Franklin because Franklin was a printer and because he knew of Franklin's fondness for Deism. By this time, however, Franklin had moved away from his former Deistic thinking through the influence of the Great Awakening (1726-1770) and his friendship with the most famous preacher of the Awakening, George Whitefield.

Franklin and Whitefield had become close friends beginning with Whitefield's first visit to Philadelphia in 1739. They were not only friends, but also business partners with Franklin taking on the task of printing and distributing Whitefield's sermons. Franklin once said to his brother James, a printer in Boston, "Whitefield is a good man and I love him."

It seems that Paine was one person who rejected the positive influences of the Great Awakening. He continued to attack Christianity and push Deism. Although it is not clear, some think the manuscript he sent to Franklin was *The Age of Reason*, which was later printed and became quite popular and influenced many away from historic Christianity.

Deism, which became very popular in Europe during the 18th century, did not deny the existence of a deity, but insisted that if such existed he was not concerned about his creation. The god of the Deist was like the proverbial clockmaker who made a clock, wound it up, and then left it to run on its own. Because they rejected the Bible as a source of revelation, the Deist also denied orthodox Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, the deity of Christ and a future judgement with eternal rewards and punishments. Prayer was meaningless and miracles did not happen.

Although Deism gained some notoriety in colonial America, it never gained the popularity it did in Europe. One big reason was the Great Awakening, which directed the attention of the American populace back to the God of the Bible. This was the experience of Franklin who moved away from Deism and back to his Puritan roots as a result of the Awakening and his friendship with Whitefield.

Franklin read Paine's manuscript in which he attacked the idea of a providential, caring God and other aspects of orthodox Christian doctrine. He responded in very strong language, urging Paine not to print the book or even allow anyone else to see it. He warned:

"I would advise you, therefore . . . to burn this piece before it is seen by any other person; whereby you will save yourself a great deal of mortification by the enemies it may raise against you, and perhaps a good deal of regret and repentance. If men are so wicked with religion [Christianity], what would they be if without it. " (Hyatt, *The Faith & Vision of Benjamin Franklin*, 50)

Franklin's words predicting regret and repentance for Paine if he persisted in attacking Christianity proved to be prophetic. Many years later, on his deathbed in England, Paine expressed deep regret for writing and publishing *The Age of Reason*. While in the throes of death, he lamented:

I would give worlds, if I had them, if *The Age of Reason* had never been published. O Lord, help me! Christ, help me! Stay with me! It is hell to be left alone (Hyatt, *The Faith & Vision of Benjamin Franklin*, 50).

This example is merely one of many that demonstrate how Benjamin Franklin, America's so-called "nonreligious" founder, was a defender of historic Christianity and believed its values necessary for a stable and prosperous society. I pray that those today, who would destroy America's Christian foundations, will heed the warning of America's nonreligious founder.

This article was derived from Dr. Eddie Hyatt's latest book, *The Faith & Vision of Benjamin Franklin*.

Eddie L. Hyatt is an author, historian and Bible teacher. He is the founder of *The Revive America Project*, which is dedicated to reclaiming the vision and restoring the hope for another Great Awakening in America and around the world. His books on the church and revival are available from Amazon and from his website at