

It's High Time We Reclaim This Vision for America

Late one night about 12 weeks ago, while sitting and enjoying the quietness and solitude, I heard the voice of the Lord in my heart giving me instructions to do something for which I had had no interest or desire. I heard the Holy Spirit instructing me to write a book about Benjamin Franklin.

I was familiar with Franklin through general historical studies. Through researching the Great Awakening I had also learned of his friendship with George Whitefield, the most famous preacher of the Great Awakening. Still, I had no thought of researching the life of the skeptical printer from Pennsylvania, generally considered to be, along with Thomas Jefferson, the most nonreligious of America's *Founding Fathers*.

But hearing the voice of the Lord in my heart produced an excitement and desire for the project. The project is now completed, and at the time of this writing, the book is at the printer with a release date of around July 10 (*The Faith & Vision of Benjamin Franklin*).

As a result of carrying out this assignment, I came to realize why understanding Benjamin Franklin is so important for America today. As I researched his life and saw his deep commitment to Christian principles and values, I was astounded. My response was, "If Franklin is the most nonreligious of America's *Founders*, what does it say for our political leaders today? If he is one of the most nonreligious *Founders*, then it shows how far we have drifted from our origins as a nation.

Franklin, in fact, envisioned a Christian America in which its inhabitants would be governed from within by Christian

principles of virtue and morality. Such a people would create a stable and prosperous society with little need for outward regulation and controls. He also wanted government leaders to pray privately and publicly, imploring God for His assistance in their duties.

That Franklin envisioned such a nation is found throughout his writings, but I will here mention four events in his life that clearly demonstrate this fact: (1) a letter he wrote to George Whitefield in 1757, (2) his call for a day of prayer and fasting for Pennsylvania, (3) a letter of rebuke he wrote to Thomas Paine, and (4) his call to prayer at the Constitutional Convention in 1787.

His Letter to George Whitefield

In a letter dated July 2, 1756, Franklin presented a proposal to George Whitefield, the most famous preacher of the Great Awakening, proposing that they partner together to establish a Christian colony “in the Ohio,” which would have been frontier country at the time. In this letter, Franklin expressed his belief that by establishing such a colony with “a strong body of religious and industrious people,” the other colonies would be made more secure and commerce among the colonies would be increased.

He also presented a missionary reason for such a colony, saying it would greatly facilitate the introduction of “pure religion” among the American Indians in that region. They could be evangelized, Franklin said, by showing them “a better sample of Christians than they commonly see.” He expressed confidence that God would give them success in such a project, “if we undertook it with a sincere regard to his honor.”

Although time, distance and circumstances did not allow them to attempt this venture, I suggest that Franklin’s vision for a Christian colony did not die with that project, but was later fulfilled in a manner beyond anything he could have

imagined. Twenty years after the date of the above proposal, Franklin, with 55 others, signed the Declaration of Independence and brought into existence a new nation built on Christian values of faith and freedom.

His Call for a Day of Prayer and Fasting for Pennsylvania

That Franklin never thought in terms of a separation of God and state, was made obvious just a few years after Whitefield's initial visit to Philadelphia and the beginning of their friendship. In the 1740s Britain and Spain declared war and many in Philadelphia were concerned since being on the coast made them vulnerable to marauding Spanish ships that could well pass their way.

Franklin led the way in organizing citizen militias and building fortifications with cannon at the edge of the city. He then proposed that the assembly and civic leaders issue a call for a day of prayer and fasting "to implore the blessing of Heaven on our undertaking."

The people of Philadelphia had no knowledge of a public day of prayer and fasting, but Franklin was able draw on his Puritan roots in New England where public days of prayer and fasting had been observed since the time the Pilgrims landing at Plymouth in 1620. He wrote:

"They embraced the motion; but as it was the first fast ever thought of in the province, the secretary had no precedent from which to draw the proclamation. My education in New England, where a fast is proclaimed every year, was here of some advantage. I drew it in the accustomed style, it was translated into German, printed in both languages and divulged through the province."

Franklin and all of Pennsylvania, including government officials, then participated in a day of prayer and fasting, imploring God's blessing and protection on their colony. Even at this early stage of his life he obviously saw no conflict

between God, prayer and government. Indeed, throughout his life Franklin would consider Christian values a necessary force for a prosperous and stable society.

His Rebuke of Thomas Paine

Franklin, indeed, came to believe the teachings of Jesus—whom he sought to emulate—to be a necessary and positive force in society and a restraint on evil in the world. This is why when the well-known Deist Thomas Paine sent him a manuscript copy of a book he had written challenging the idea of a providential God and other aspects of orthodox Christianity, Franklin, in very strong language, urged him not to print the book or even allow anyone else to see it. He wrote:

“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.”

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*, which became very popular in America. 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.

He Calls the Constitutional Convention to Prayer

On June 28, 1787, Franklin was participating as one of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention in his hometown of Philadelphia. Much regional disagreement had surfaced and the convention was about to be suspended because of unresolved

strife and dissension. It was at this critical moment that Franklin, now 81 years of age, rose to his feet, and addressed the Convention President, George Washington, with these words:

“How has it happened, sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly appealing to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings? In the beginning of the contest with Great Britain, when we were sensible to danger, we had daily prayers in this room for Divine protection. Our prayers, sir, were heard and they were graciously answered. I have lived, sir, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, sir, in the sacred writings that *except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it*. I firmly believe this. I therefore beg leave to move that, henceforth, prayers imploring the assistance of heaven and its blessing on our deliberation be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business.”

That it was Franklin who would call the assembly to prayer shows the depth of his Puritan roots (he was born into a Christian, Puritan home) and the impact of Whitefield and the Great Awakening on his life and thinking. The words in this call to prayer show how far he had moved away from his earlier Deistic thinking, for Deists did not believe that God “governs in the affairs of men” and prayer for them would be meaningless.

Franklin’s call to prayer demonstrates that he wanted faith in God to be a vital part of this new nation, and that he considered it necessary for the nation’s success. “Is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?” was his challenging question to the delegates.

According to those present, “an atmosphere of reconciliation

seemed to settle over the convention hall.” Petty grievances and local interests were laid aside, and the delegates went on to complete their task of formulating the American Constitution and Bill of Rights. I think Whitefield must have smiled down from heaven on his old friend!

Franklin, no doubt, was living out the vision for a Christian society he had shared with Whitefield 37 years prior to this momentous event.

Concluding Thought

As we celebrate the 239th birthday of this nation, it is important that we remember our godly heritage as a nation. It is crucial that we protect this heritage and build on it for the next generation. The future belongs to those who know from whence they have come.

This article was derived from Dr. Eddie Hyatt’s new book, The Faith & Vision of Benjamin Franklin, available from Amazon and Hyatt’s online bookstore at

Pockets of true revival are breaking out across America. Want to know more about the next great move of God? Click here to see Jennifer LeClaire’s new book, featuring Dutch Sheets, Reinhard Bonnke, Jonathan Cahn, Billy Graham and others.

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