

What Do Ben Franklin and Donald Trump Have in Common?

Donald Trump has much in common with Benjamin Franklin, one of America's most famous Founding Fathers. But there is one big difference that poses an ongoing concern for many evangelicals.

Their Similarities

Like Franklin, Trump is a successful businessman who has accumulated enough wealth to be able to enter politics later in life, as did Franklin. Like Franklin, Trump is a member of the Presbyterian Church. Like Franklin, Trump is not a regular church-goer and comes across as nonreligious. Nonetheless, as Franklin became close friends with evangelicals, such as George Whitefield, the most famous preacher of the Great Awakening, Trump has made friends with several well-known evangelicals, such as Tony Perkins, Paula White and Ralph Reed.

Like Franklin, Trump has gained negotiating skills through his business dealings, and he often touts his negotiating skills as a part of his qualifications to serve as president. Franklin's negotiating skills were well-known, which is why he was chosen to lead the negotiations with Great Britain that ended the Revolutionary War and led to the signing of the Treaty of Paris.

1 Area of Difference

An area where I believe Trump could learn and benefit from Franklin is in Franklin's understanding of the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament as being necessary for a stable and prosperous society. Whereas Franklin was totally committed to Christian principles and values being taught in every sphere of American society, it is not clear that Trump has the

same sort of commitment to a Christian worldview. In fact, a recent article in *Charisma News* raised real concerns about his thinking and lifestyle.

Although it is still debated whether Franklin ever became a born-again, evangelical Christian, there is no question that he held a Christian worldview and believed Christian principles and values to be absolutely necessary for a healthy and prosperous nation.

Franklin Demonstrated His Commitment to Christian Values

When, for example, Franklin founded the school that is today the University of Pennsylvania, he wrote a letter to Whitefield explaining that the students would learn “the value of public and private religion, and the excellency of the Christian religion above all others.” He chose Christians, from various denominations, to serve on the Board of Trustees and appointed a minister to be the first provost. He also set aside a special hall to accommodate preachers and revivalists who would be passing through the city and would address the student body.

Another example of Franklin’s commitment to Christian values occurred when the Deist Thomas Paine sent him a manuscript in which he attacked historic Christianity. Franklin refused to print the manuscript and in strong language advised Paine to burn it before anyone else had opportunity to see it. Showing his conviction that Christianity provides a restraint on evil in society, he said to Paine, “If men are this wicked with Christianity, what would they be without it?”

Another example of Franklin’s commitment to Christian truth came at the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Franklin, now an old man of 81, arose from his seat and addressed the convention president, George Washington, and suggested that they begin their mornings with prayer. He explained:

“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?”

Concluding Thought

Trump seems to have the boldness and force of personality to bring much-needed change in Washington, D.C. If, however, he is not committed to a Christian worldview, we cannot have confidence as to where a Trump presidency would ultimately lead the country.

Pray for Donald Trump and all the presidential candidates of both parties that they will have a genuine encounter with the risen Lord. Let your voice be heard on the vital importance of Christian principles and values for a stable and prosperous nation. Benjamin Franklin would approve!