

“Founders and Foundations”

Deuteronomy 8:11-20

MOSES' WARNING: DO NOT FORGET THE LORD

1. National amnesia is possible. v.11, 14, 19

- This is a theme in Deuteronomy. 4:9, 23, 30-31; 6:10-12; 8:11, 14, 19
- There is such a thing as national amnesia—and the LORD warned against it. Ref. Judges 2:7-10

2. National amnesia is progressive. v.11-16

- They forgot the LORD by not obeying His commands. v.11
- They forgot the LORD by taking His abundant material blessings for granted. v.12-13
- They forgot the LORD by neglecting their own history. v.14-16

3. National amnesia is prideful. v.17-18

- They ascribed wisdom, strength & power to themselves—instead of God.

4. National amnesia is perilous. v.19-20 Ref. 2 Kings 22

- When you go after (pursue), serve, and worship other gods...*you shall surely perish.*
- The warning is for all the nations (not just Israel).

The Founders and the Biblical foundation of man's depravity (sinful nature).

- Man's sin is the basis for both the *need* for human government and the *danger* of human government.

1. Government is necessary to restrain the sinful impulses of man. Romans 13:1-4

- Human government is necessary because we live in a fallen world.
- James Madison's idea of “factions” was a foundation of his political theory.
- “Factions” = groups with similar interests can begin to affect the liberty and wellbeing of others.
- At least part of the role of government is to regulate factions.
- Thomas Jefferson (Declaration of Independence): 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.

2. Because government is made up of sinful humans, the government itself must also be restrained.

- The government needs both internal and external controls to its power.
- E.g., Separation of Powers, Bill of Rights, Federalism, etc.
- James Madison: “If men were angels no government would be necessary.... If angels were to govern men, neither external or internal controls on government would be necessary.”¹

The Founders and the Biblical foundation of man's dignity.

1. Man is a mixture of depravity and dignity.

- Madison: “As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust; so there are other qualities in human nature, which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence.”²

2. Man has worth and the ability to reason because he is made in the image of God.

- Man's fallen nature still has enough good to govern in a restrained and congenial manner.
- The influence of ‘Common Sense Realism’ on the Founders through Rev. John Witherspoon.
 - Man has an innate sense of good and evil—placed there by God. aka. a conscience
 - God gave man the ability to reason. Reason can be trusted—and reason will verify revelation (the Bible).
 - These principles ‘are the foundations of all reasoning,’ and they have to be accepted as given. They simply are not susceptible to proof.”³

¹ Madison, *Federalist* no. 51, II.

² Madison, *Federalist* no. 55, II.

³ *American Presbyterians*, 66:4 (Winter 1988), p. 227.

- James Madison: "...the belief in a God All Powerful, wise and good, is so essential to the moral order of the World and to the happiness of man, that arguments which enforce it cannot be drawn from too many sources...."⁴

The Founders and the Biblical foundation of Judeo-Christian morality.

1. True virtue (morals, religious piety in the citizens of the United States) promotes the common good.

- John Witherspoon: "To promote true religion is the best and most effectual way of making a virtuous and regular people. Love to God and love to man is the substance of religion; when these prevail, civil laws will have little to do.... The magistrate (or ruling party of any society) ought to encourage piety...[and] make it an object of public esteem."⁵
- John Adams: "The Constitution is made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."
- Alexis de Tocqueville: "America is great because America is good. If America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

2. The responsibility for developing morality rested upon both the people and the government.

- Witherspoon: "Those who are vested with civil authority ought...to promote religion and good morals among all under their government."⁶

3. There is a vital link between Biblical morality and civil liberties.

- A foundation of Biblical morality in the people and the government was vital to keeping religious liberty.
- I.e., Liberty is inherently *Judeo-Christian*. Lose the 'Judeo-Christian' and you lose liberty.
- "There is not a single instance in history, in which civil liberty was lost, and religious liberty preserved entire. If therefore, we yield up our temporal property, we at the same time deliver the conscience into bondage."⁷
- "Nothing is more certain, than that a general profligacy and corruption of manners, makes a people ripe for destruction. A good form of government may hold the rotten materials together for some time, but beyond a certain pitch, even the best constitution will be ineffectual, and slavery must ensue."⁸
- "What follows from this? That he is the best friend to American liberty, who is most sincere and active in promoting true and undefiled religion, who sets himself, with the greatest firmness, to bear down profanity, and immorality of every kind. Whoever is an avowed enemy to God, I scruple not to call him an enemy to his country."⁹

→ Why? If not Biblical morality... what kind of morality will it be?

If there is no God, then there are no rights from God.

If there is no God, then the greatest power and authority on earth is atheistic human government.

If there is no God, then there is no image of God in man.

Book recommendation: *Restoring America's Soul* by Rita Dunaway.

There is growing momentum for a 'Convention of States' to reign in the abuses of the federal government.

⁴ *The Writings of James Madison*, 9 vols. (New York, 1904), IX, 230-231.

⁵ Witherspoon, *Works* (1815), vol. 7, 118-119, "Jurisprudence," Lecture 14.

⁶ Witherspoon, "Sermon Delivered at Public Thanksgiving After Peace." from *Works*, Vol. 4, p.265.

⁷ Witherspoon, "Dominion" in *The Presbyterian Enterprise*, (Westminster Press; Philadelphia, PA. 1956) edited by Maurice W. Armstrong, Lefferts A. Loetscher, and Charles A. Anderson, p.86.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 88

⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.