

Introduction

Ankerberg: Welcome to our program. How did our Founding Fathers think that we could maintain good government in the future? Well, some of them listened to John Locke who said that “good laws will insure that we have good government.” Others sided with William Penn who said, “No, good government depended on us having good men as leaders.” Now, what’s important to realize is that our Founding Fathers answered this question on the basis of their Christian beliefs. David Barton, who is an expert on the Founding Fathers and American history, explains the process our Founding Fathers went through to answer the question, “How can we maintain good government?” Listen.

Barton: What does it take to make and establish a good government? Now, certainly today we hear a lot of complaints about government. We say we need something different in government. Well, the cry for maintaining a good government is nothing new in America. For at least 300 years there have been discussions on how to maintain good government. For you see, history has always taught that governments tend to corrupt themselves, they tend to degenerate. So how can you maintain a good government? The Founding Fathers had very specific ideas on how to maintain a good government. They communicated those ideas through their writings and that’s what we’ll examine in this segment.

Now, the Founding Fathers understood that good laws are not the key to good government. See, that was something that had been proposed by John Locke. John Locke early on was asked to write the constitution for South Carolina, 1663. The people came to him and said, “We want a righteous government. We want a government that will always stay right. Can you help us create that?” John Locke said, “I can.” And so he said the key is good laws, and he made a very specific, tedious constitution for South Carolina that gave law after law after law. He said, “With good laws, it doesn’t matter who gets in office, you’ll always have good government.”

Now, some 18 years later under William Penn, William Penn did not believe that. William Penn took a completely different approach. William Penn said, “The key to good government is not in good laws, it’s in good men.” And so when William Penn created the original frame of government for Pennsylvania in 1681 it was very simple. It had two laws. The first law said, “Whatever is Christian is legal.” The second law said, “Whatever is not Christian is illegal.” It’s a simple way to run a government.

For you see, Penn was convinced that laws were not the key to government, good men were. And this is what William Penn said in his writings. He said, “Governments, like clocks, go from the motion that men give them, wherefore governments rather depend upon men than men upon governments. Let men be

good and the government cannot be bad. But if men be bad, the government will never be good.” He said, “I know some say, ‘Let us have good laws and it doesn’t matter who executes those laws.’” He said, “But let them consider that though good laws do well, good men do better. For good laws may lack good men, but good men will never lack good laws and they’ll never allow bad ones.”

And that is the truth of history. That is not only the truth of history, that is the truth of Scripture. In [Proverbs 29:2](#), very simply the Bible says when the righteous rule, the people rejoice. When the wicked rule, the people groan. Again, the emphasis is on the right type of people, not the right type of laws.

Now, in the most famous political speech ever given by Benjamin Franklin, given on Thursday, June 28, 1787, Franklin talked about the fact that the Founding Fathers were students of history. He said, “We have gone through every record that exists of every government on the face of the earth. We have tried to find what makes governments work and what causes them to fail. We don’t want to repeat the same mistakes they’ve made.” And so they were students of history and so when our Founding Fathers had opportunity to establish their very first governments, it’s interesting that they again put the emphasis on the quality of people, not on the type of laws.

Ankerberg: Now, in this next section we’re going to deal with the evidence that our Founding Fathers did create America as a Christian nation. And what you will hear next is seldom taught in our public school classrooms. It has to do with what our Founding Fathers wrote into their original state constitutions concerning the qualifications that they required in those men who would run for public office. Listen.

Barton: At the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Founding Fathers found themselves in a dilemma. With the Declaration they had wiped out every government they had formerly had because all the governments had been appointed by Great Britain, so now they’re faced with the task of replacing them with their own creations. And so when these men returned to their own home states, look at what our Founding Fathers put in their original constitutions, the ones they originally penned in 1776.

Delaware, for example, and this is written by signers Thomas McKean and George Read. Delaware very simply said, “Anyone appointed to public office must say, ‘I do profess faith in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost one God and blessed forevermore, and I do acknowledge the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by Divine inspiration.’” Now, those are qualifications for the individuals in office. The same was seen in North Carolina as in all the other states throughout the 13 colonies.

North Carolina said, “No person who denies the Being of God or the truth of the Christian religion or the Divine authority of either the Old or New Testaments” – and they said, “Or, if you hold religious principles to be incompatible with the freedom and safety of the state,” if you think that these principles, religious principles, don’t apply to government – they said, “You’re not capable of holding any office or place of trust in the civil government of this state.”

Now, they understood that these basic Christian principles, these biblical precepts, were what produced good government. As Daniel Webster said, “Whatever makes men good Christians makes them good citizens.” And they knew that these Christian principles produced good citizens and so that’s the requirements they had to be in office. Just as they said you had to be 18, you had to reside in your home state, this was a requirement for being qualified for office.

Ankerberg: Now, what steps did our Founding Fathers take to insure that future generations would continue to maintain sound government? David Barton explains.

Barton: The Founding Fathers sought to make sure that future generations would know that these were very sound requirements, and that’s why so many of the educators in the early years of America were Founding Fathers. You see, the Founding Fathers very wisely recognized, they said, “When we die and go to the grave, America goes to the grave with us unless we can find out how to transmit what we know to the next generation.” Education was the logical means and that’s why so many of the Founding Fathers either started universities or they became professors or they wrote textbooks.

Now, one of the Founding Fathers that jumped right in the middle of education, trying to preserve America for the future was Noah Webster. We think of Noah Webster as an educator but he is certainly a Founding Father. This man was a soldier in the American Revolution. He was nine terms in the Connecticut legislature, four terms in Massachusetts, three terms as a judge. He was one of the first Founding Fathers to call for the Constitutional Convention. Noah Webster is personally responsible for Article I, Section VIII of the U.S. Constitution and he’s one of the most active Founding Fathers in helping to ratify the Constitution.

Now, he wanted to see America last (endure), so he wrote numbers of textbooks for students. This is a textbook he wrote in 1832 on the history of the United States. In the back of this he takes the students through the history of the United States and then he gives them a section on civics and government. He says, “This is how this government has come to be.” And he goes through all the history from Columbus on to the Puritans and the Pilgrims. He goes up through the American Revolution. He goes to the Constitutional Convention. He says, “I was part of the process of the Constitution. Much of what I’m sharing with you is from my own experience.”

And then he comes past that and he says, “Now, our nation has lasted 40 years and it has done very, very well. But,” he says, “if it’s going to continue to last there are certain things you must understand.” Because you see, the Founding Fathers pointed out very clearly, they said, “Liberty is not self-sustaining.” Liberty does not take care of itself. It must be cared for, watched after. You have to put much effort in to preserving liberty.

So, wanting to preserve what he put his life into, he told students how to go about doing that. This is what he told them in the civics section. He said, “When you become entitled to exercise the right of voting for public officers, let it be impressed on your mind that God commands you to choose for rulers just men who will rule in the fear of God.” He said, “The preservation of our republican government depends on the faithful discharge of this duty.” He said, “If the citizens neglect their duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted, laws will be made, not for the public good so much as for selfish or local purposes. Corrupt and incompetent men will be appointed to execute the laws. The public revenues will be squandered on unworthy men and the rights of citizens will be violated or disregarded.”

Sounds like a clip out of a recent newspaper article. And then he finishes. He says, “If our republican government fails to secure public prosperity and happiness, it must be because the citizens neglect the Divine commands and they elect bad men to make and administer the laws.”

Now, what he’s trying to transmit to the next generation is: elect godly, God-fearing men – men who fear God; men who love truth, who hate covetousness, who hate greed. Elect godly, God-fearing men. Now, this is from a Founding Father that he’s put in the textbook there for students.

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Ankerberg: Now, many people do not realize that our Founding Fathers established America primarily as a republic and not as a democracy. When we say the pledge to the flag, we say, “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands....” We don’t pledge allegiance to a democracy. But what’s the difference? Why was this point so important to our Founding Fathers? David Barton explains.

Barton: Why was there such a big emphasis on keeping godly people in office? It dealt with the fact that we were a republic and not a democracy. And there is a vast difference between the two.


You’ll find that the Founding Fathers absolutely abhorred democracies, and yet today we hear ourselves called a democracy. But if you think, in the pledge of allegiance we pledge allegiance to a republic, not a democracy. Prominent Founding Fathers explained why. You see for example Fisher Ames. This is the

author of the First Amendment. September 20, 1789 he gave us the First Amendment. But he said very simply that, “A simple democracy has been very aptly compared to a volcano that contained within its own bowels the fiery materials of its own destruction.” He said a democracy is a bomb waiting to go off. It’s a volcano waiting to explode.

Well, similarly, Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration from Pennsylvania, said it this way. Benjamin Rush was never one to mince words. He said very simply, “A democracy is the devil’s own government.”

Or if you move to John Marshall. John Marshall, one of the top chief justices of the Supreme Court. As a matter of fact, his is the face in stone there at the apex of the Supreme Court today. John Marshall very clearly said, “Between a republic and a democracy the difference is like that between order and chaos.”

You see, the Founding Fathers so much hated democracy – and there were many democracies of their day – Russia had a democracy; France had a democracy; Italy had a democracy. They saw democratic governments; they despised them. So to make sure that we never became a democratic government they very simply at the Constitutional Convention put in a clause to insure that we would be a republic, not a democracy. Article IV, Section IV of the U.S. Constitution very simply says that “each state shall maintain a republican form of government.”



Now, today we’ve lost the definition between the two. But allow Noah Webster to define it, because he did define it for the students and he told them why it was important to elect godly people to preserve our republican government. He said, “The brief exposition of the Constitution of the United States will unfold to young persons the principles of republican government.” He said, “It is the sincere desire of the writer that our citizens should early understand that the genuine source of correct republican principles is the Bible, particularly the New Testament of the Christian religion.”

You see, the Founding Fathers very clearly explained that what they had built was on biblical principles. The only way to preserve the government they had given us was to elect people who respected those principles and to place them in office. And this is why the Founding Fathers put an emphasis on godly people in office, because we were a republic and not a democracy.

Ankerberg: Now, since this is such an important point, I asked David Barton to explain further the differences between a republic and a democracy. Listen.

Barton: So what is the difference between a republic and a democracy? Well, very simply a democracy is simple majority rule. Whatever 51 percent of the nation wants, that’s what it gets.

Now, a republic is quite different. A republic is defined as the rule of a nation on the basis of unchanging law. That was given by John Locke. It was also given in *Blackstone's Commentaries on the Law* which this was the legal textbook that we used in America for 160 years. From 1766 to 1920 this provided the basis of a republic. This was our definition. And it pointed out that in a republican form of government, those things on which God had already legislated, man was not free to legislate. It said, for example, in the specific case of murder, "Man can pass no law on murder other than that which God has passed." God has said everything that needs to be said about murder. Therefore, in a republic it didn't matter if 75 percent or 89 percent of the people wanted to abolish murder, in a republic it would always be murder because in the Scriptures it's always murder.

You see, the legal textbooks pointed out the basis of a republic was the unchanging law of the Bible. Now, they also pointed out that in our form of government we had many things that our legislature was free to act on. Again, the law book said specifically, it said in the instance of importing and exporting wool, the Bible says nothing about how to import and export wool. Our legislature can do what it wishes with importing and exporting wool.

You see, it was very simple. We are basically a democratic republic. We can decide what we want in certain areas, but with the view of the Founding Fathers, as a republic, a Bible-based republic, there were certain rights and wrongs that would always stand. Murder, rape, all these things that are listed in the Ten Commandments and in so many Old Testament laws would always be wrong. And that's why we were a republic and not a democracy. It was not up to the whim of the people.

See, Benjamin Rush called a democracy "mob-ocracy." He said, "They can get on whims. They can go off on a tangent. And in one vote they can abolish everything that we've done." He said, "We are not that type of government." And that's why they gave us a republic and not a democracy.

Ankerberg: Now, in any election, even the ones we have today, the question comes up: "Should we emphasize looking at the private life of an individual? Or forget that completely and only examine his public life?" Well, what did our Founding Fathers think? Listen.

Barton: So what type of requirements did the Founding Fathers put out to recognize good candidates for office? Well, there was much written about it. Many of the Founding Fathers wrote textbooks and they put down in those textbooks the requirements for public office. One of the things you'll find they always emphasized was looking at the private life of an individual. They said, "Private life is always real life." That's where you can always see what a person's really like. And they gave examples, for example, of Benedict Arnold. Benedict Arnold had a great public life

but his private life was corrupt. He was a traitor in private. You couldn't see that in public. They said that's why you don't look at the public, you look at the private. So they encouraged the investigation of private life.

Now, when the Founding Fathers taught others about these principles, they took great care to emphasize again the private life. Now, John Witherspoon is a signer of the Declaration of Independence and he taught many of the Founding Fathers and so he is a good one to look to on what are the requirements for political office because he really can be called the "Father of the Founding Fathers." He produced nearly one-third of the Founding Fathers that we have and he himself was a Founding Father.

Now, he wrote about how to identify a true American patriot in his writings at Princeton. He was the president of Princeton University and these were his writings from 1803. And this is what he taught in school. And he gave the students three ways to identify an American patriot. These were his words. "What follows from this? That he is the best friend to American liberty who, number one, is most active and sincere in promoting true and undefiled religion." He says, "Number two, whoever sets himself with the greatest firmness to bear down on profanity and immorality of any kind." And he says, "Number three, whoever is an avowed enemy of God, I don't hesitate to call him an enemy to his country."

Now, here is the "Father of the Founding Fathers" giving three requirements for office. He said, number one, a true patriot is the one who is the most active and most sincere in promoting true and undefiled religion; number two, a true patriot is the one who sets himself with the greatest firmness to bear down on profanity and immorality of any kind. Now, why is that a sign of patriotism? Because the Founding Fathers knew that if you had a profane and immoral people, you would have a profane and immoral government. And a profane and immoral government, history shows, does not last. So if you love your government, you want a good government, you work on bearing down on profanity and immorality.

And he said, thirdly, "Whoever is an avowed enemy of God, I don't hesitate to call him an enemy to his country." He said, "Everything we founded this on, all that we fought for have been godly principles. Whoever opposes God, therefore, opposes the very basis of America."

So strong were they about looking at the private characteristics, at the moral qualifications, at the religious qualifications, that Noah Webster may have perhaps said it better than any other. Noah Webster had a textbook that he wrote for students and this textbook was written in 1823 by the Founding Father. Noah Webster told them about voting. And it said very clearly, he said, "It is alleged by men of loose principles and defective views of the subject that religion and morality are not necessary or important qualifications for political stations." And hear that,

that's what we hear all the time today. Noah Webster said that it's only by people of loose views or poor views of the subject that say we shouldn't look at moral or religious qualifications. He goes on and he says this, "But the Scriptures teach a different doctrine. The Scriptures direct that rulers should be men who rule in the fear of God, able men such as fear God, men of truth who hate covetousness," and then, look at this. "When a citizen gives his vote to a man of known immorality, he abuses his civic responsibility." He sacrifices not only his own interests but he betrays the interests of his neighbor and he betrays the interest of his country.

Noah Webster said if you vote for a person who is known to be immoral, he said, you're a traitor to your country, because what you're putting in office is the very thing that will destroy the country. You see, it takes moral qualifications, religious beliefs in the eyes of the Founding Fathers to be qualified for office.

Ankerberg: Now, why is it important to examine what our Founding Fathers said and put into the historic documents of our country? Well, it's important because they established the direction that America would go. They listed the qualifications they expected we would have for leadership in the future. They set the standards for education so that the next generation would maintain good government. In all three areas they solidly established our country on Christian principles. When one reads what the Founding Fathers said and what they did, it's sad to think how far we have wandered from our heritage.

Now, next week we're going to examine the writings of Christopher Columbus, as well as "The Mayflower Compact" that the Pilgrims wrote, and I hope that you'll join me to hear some surprising information that is a part of our American history. Goodbye, God bless you. We'll see you next week.