

## Importance of Morality and Religion in Government

John Adams

*Signer of the Declaration of Independence and Second President of the United States*

**[I]t is religion and morality alone which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand. The only foundation of a free constitution is pure virtue.**

(Source: John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Charles Francis Adams, editor (Boston: Little, Brown, 1854), Vol. IX, p. 401, to Zabdiel Adams on June 21, 1776.)

**[W]e have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. . . . Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.**

(Source: John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Charles Francis Adams, editor (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co. 1854), Vol. IX, p. 229, October 11, 1798.)

**The moment the idea is admitted into society, that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence. If "Thou shalt not covet," and "Thou shalt not steal," were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society, before it can be civilized or made free.**

(Source: John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Charles Francis Adams, editor (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851), Vol. VI, p. 9.)

John Quincy Adams

*Sixth President of the United States*

**The law given from Sinai was a civil and municipal as well as a moral and religious code; it contained many statutes . . . of universal application-laws essential to the existence of men in society, and most of which have been enacted by every nation which ever professed any code of laws.**

(Source: John Quincy Adams, *Letters of John Quincy Adams, to His Son, on the Bible and Its Teachings* (Auburn: James M. Alden, 1850), p. 61.)

**There are three points of doctrine the belief of which forms the foundation of all morality. The first is the existence of God; the second is the immortality of the human soul; and the third is a future state of rewards and punishments. Suppose it possible for a man to disbelieve either of these three articles of faith and that man will have no conscience, he will have no other law than that of the tiger or the shark. The laws of man may bind him in chains or may put him to death, but they never can make him**

wise, virtuous, or happy.

(Source: John Quincy Adams, *Letters of John Quincy Adams to His Son on the Bible and Its Teachings* (Auburn: James M. Alden, 1850), pp. 22-23.)

Samuel Adams

*Signer of the Declaration of Independence*

**[N]either the wisest constitution nor the wisest laws will secure the liberty and happiness of a people whose manners are universally corrupt.**

(Source: William V. Wells, *The Life and Public Service of Samuel Adams* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1865), Vol. I, p. 22, quoting from a political essay by Samuel Adams published in *The Public Advertiser*, 1749.)

Fisher Ames

*Framer of the First Amendment*

**Our liberty depends on our education, our laws, and habits . . . it is founded on morals and religion, whose authority reigns in the heart, and on the influence all these produce on public opinion before that opinion governs rulers.**

(Source: Fisher Ames, *An Oration on the Sublime Virtues of General George Washington* (Boston: Young & Minns, 1800), p. 23.)

Charles Carroll of Carrollton

*Signer of the Declaration of Independence*

**Without morals a republic cannot subsist any length of time; they therefore who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so sublime & pure, [and] which denounces against the wicked eternal misery, and [which] insured to the good eternal happiness, are undermining the solid foundation of morals, the best security for the duration of free governments.**

(Source: Bernard C. Steiner, *The Life and Correspondence of James McHenry* (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers, 1907), p. 475. In a letter from Charles Carroll to James McHenry of November 4, 1800.)

Oliver Ellsworth

*Chief-Justice of the Supreme Court*

**[T]he primary objects of government are the peace, order, and prosperity of society. . . . To the promotion of these objects, particularly in a republican government, good morals are essential. Institutions for the promotion of good morals are therefore objects of legislative provision and support: and among these . . . religious institutions are eminently useful and important. . . . [T]he legislature, charged with the great interests of the community, may, and ought to countenance, aid and protect religious institutions—**

**institutions wisely calculated to direct men to the performance of all the duties arising from their connection with each other, and to prevent or repress those evils which flow from unrestrained passion.**

(Source: *Connecticut Courant*, June 7, 1802, p. 3, Oliver Ellsworth, to the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut)

Benjamin Franklin

*Signer of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence*

**[O]nly a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters.**

(Source: Benjamin Franklin, *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, Jared Sparks, editor (Boston: Tappan, Whittemore and Mason, 1840), Vol. X, p. 297, April 17, 1787. )

**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; and I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better, than the Builders of Babel: We shall be divided by our partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and bye word down to future ages. And what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing governments by human wisdom and leave it to chance, war and conquest.**

I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service.

(Source: James Madison, *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, Max Farrand, editor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911), Vol. I, pp. 450-452, June 28, 1787.)

\* For more details on this quote, [click here](#).

Thomas Jefferson

*Signer of the Declaration of Independence and Third President of the United States*

**Give up money, give up fame, give up science, give the earth itself and all it contains rather than do an immoral act. And never suppose that in any possible situation, or under any circumstances, it is best for you to do a dishonorable thing, however slightly so it may appear to you. Whenever you are to do a thing, though it can never be known but to yourself, ask yourself how you would act were all the world looking at you, and act accordingly. Encourage all your virtuous dispositions, and exercise them whenever an opportunity arises, being assured that they will gain strength by exercise, as a limb of the body does, and that exercise will make them habitual. From the practice of the**

**purest virtue, you may be assured you will derive the most sublime comforts in every moment of life, and in the moment of death.**

(Source: Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Albert Bergh, editor (Washington, DC: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Assoc., 1903), Vol. 5, pp. 82-83, in a letter to his nephew Peter Carr on August 19, 1785.)

**The doctrines of Jesus are simple, and tend all to the happiness of mankind.**

(Source: Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Albert Bergh, editor (Washington, D. C.: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Assoc., 1904), Vol. XV, p. 383.)

**I concur with the author in considering the moral precepts of Jesus as more pure, correct, and sublime than those of ancient philosophers.**

(Source: Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Albert Bergh, editor (Washington, D. C.: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Assoc., 1904), Vol. X, pp. 376-377. In a letter to Edward Dowse on April 19, 1803.)

Richard Henry Lee

*Signer of the Declaration of Independence*

**It is certainly true that a popular government cannot flourish without virtue in the people.**

(Source: Richard Henry Lee, *The Letters of Richard Henry Lee*, James Curtis Ballagh, editor (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1914), Vol. II, p. 411. In a letter to Colonel Mortin Pickett on March 5, 1786.)

James McHenry

*Signer of the Constitution*

**[P]ublic utility pleads most forcibly for the general distribution of the Holy Scriptures. The doctrine they preach, the obligations they impose, the punishment they threaten, the rewards they promise, the stamp and image of divinity they bear, which produces a conviction of their truths, can alone secure to society, order and peace, and to our courts of justice and constitutions of government, purity, stability and usefulness. In vain, without the Bible, we increase penal laws and draw entrenchments around our institutions. Bibles are strong entrenchments. Where they abound, men cannot pursue wicked courses, and at the same time enjoy quiet conscience.**

(Source: Bernard C. Steiner, *One Hundred and Ten Years of Bible Society Work in Maryland, 1810-1920* (Maryland Bible Society, 1921), p. 14.)

Jedediah Morse

*Patriot and "Father of American Geography"*

**To the kindly influence of Christianity we owe that degree of civil freedom, and political**

**and social happiness which mankind now enjoys. . . . Whenever the pillars of Christianity shall be overthrown, our present republican forms of government, and all blessings which flow from them, must fall with them.**

**(Source: Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon, Exhibiting the Present Dangers and Consequent Duties of the Citizens of the United States of America* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1799), p. 9.)**

**William Penn**

*Founder of Pennsylvania*

**[I]t is impossible that any people of government should ever prosper, where men render not unto God, that which is God's, as well as to Caesar, that which is Caesar's.**

**(Source: *Fundamental Constitutions of Pennsylvania*, 1682. Written by William Penn, founder of the colony of Pennsylvania.)**

**Pennsylvania Supreme Court**

**No free government now exists in the world, unless where Christianity is acknowledged, and is the religion of the country.**

**(Source: Pennsylvania Supreme Court, 1824. *Updegraph v. Commonwealth*; 11 Serg. & R. 393, 406 (Sup.Ct. Penn. 1824).)**

**Benjamin Rush**

*Signer of the Declaration of Independence*

**The only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments.**

**(Source: Benjamin Rush, *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Thomas and William Bradford, 1806), p. 8.)**

**We profess to be republicans, and yet we neglect the only means of establishing and perpetuating our republican forms of government, that is, the universal education of our youth in the principles of Christianity by the means of the Bible. For this Divine Book, above all others, favors that equality among mankind, that respect for just laws, and those sober and frugal virtues, which constitute the soul of republicanism.**

**(Source: Benjamin Rush, *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Printed by Thomas and William Bradford, 1806), pp. 93-94.)**

**By renouncing the Bible, philosophers swing from their moorings upon all moral subjects. . . . It is the only correct map of the human heart that ever has been published. . . . All systems of religion, morals, and government not founded upon it [the Bible] must perish, and how consoling the thought, it will not only survive the wreck of these systems but the world itself. "The Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." [Matthew**

1:18]

(Source: Benjamin Rush, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, L. H. Butterfield, editor (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 936, to John Adams, January 23, 1807.)

**Remember that national crimes require national punishments, and without declaring what punishment awaits this evil, you may venture to assure them that it cannot pass with impunity, unless God shall cease to be just or merciful.**

(Source: Benjamin Rush, *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America Upon Slave-Keeping* (Boston: John Boyles, 1773), p. 30.)

Joseph Story

*Supreme Court Justice*

**Indeed, the right of a society or government to [participate] in matters of religion will hardly be contested by any persons who believe that piety, religion, and morality are intimately connected with the well being of the state and indispensable to the administrations of civil justice. The promulgation of the great doctrines of religion—the being, and attributes, and providence of one Almighty God; the responsibility to Him for all our actions, founded upon moral accountability; a future state of rewards and punishments; the cultivation of all the personal, social, and benevolent virtues—these never can be a matter of indifference in any well-ordered community. It is, indeed, difficult to conceive how any civilized society can well exist without them.**

(Source: Joseph Story, *A Familiar Exposition of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1847), p. 260, §442.)

George Washington

*"Father of Our Country"*

**While just government protects all in their religious rights, true religion affords to government its surest support.**

(Source: George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, John C. Fitzpatrick, editor (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932), Vol. XXX, p. 432 n., from his address to the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in North America, October 9, 1789.)

**Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of man and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connexions with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice?**

And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. It is substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule, indeed, extends with more or less force to every species of free government. Who, that is a sincere friend to it, can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?

(Source: George Washington, *Address of George Washington, President of the United States . . . Preparatory to His Declination* (Baltimore: George and Henry S. Keatinge), pp. 22-23. In his Farewell Address to the United States in 1796.)

**[T]he [federal] government . . . can never be in danger of degenerating into a monarchy, and oligarchy, an aristocracy, or any other despotic or oppressive form so long as there shall remain any virtue in the body of the people.**

(Source: George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, John C. Fitzpatrick, editor (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1939), Vol. XXIX, p. 410. In a letter to Marquis De Lafayette, February 7, 1788.)

\* For the full text of Geo. Washington's *Farewell Address*, [click here](#).

Daniel Webster

*Early American Jurist and Senator*

**[I]f we and our posterity reject religious instruction and authority, violate the rules of eternal justice, trifle with the injunctions of morality, and recklessly destroy the political constitution which holds us together, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us that shall bury all our glory in profound obscurity.**

(Source: Daniel Webster, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1903), Vol. XIII, p. 492. From "The Dignity and Importance of History," February 23, 1852.)

Noah Webster

*Founding Educator*

**The most perfect maxims and examples for regulating your social conduct and domestic economy, as well as the best rules of morality and religion, are to be found in the Bible. . . . The moral principles and precepts found in the scriptures ought to form the basis of all our civil constitutions and laws. These principles and precepts have truth, immutable truth, for their foundation. . . . All the evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible. . . . For instruction then in social, religious and civil duties resort to the scriptures for the best precepts.**

(Source: Noah Webster, *History of the United States*, "Advice to the Young" (New Haven: Durrie & Peck, 1832), pp. 338-340, par. 51, 53, 56.)

James Wilson

*Signer of the Constitution*

**Far from being rivals or enemies, religion and law are twin sisters, friends, and mutual assistants. Indeed, these two sciences run into each other. The divine law, as discovered by reason and the moral sense, forms an essential part of both.**

(Source: James Wilson, *The Works of the Honourable James Wilson* (Philadelphia: Bronson and Chauncey, 1804), Vol. I, p. 106.)

Robert Winthrop

*Former Speaker of the US House of Representatives*

**Men, in a word, must necessarily be controlled either by a power within them or by a power without them; either by the Word of God or by the strong arm of man; either by the Bible or by the bayonet.**

(Source: Robert Winthrop, *Addresses and Speeches on Various Occasions* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1852), p. 172 from his "Either by the Bible or the Bayonet.")