



George Washington's Christianity

It was a critical point of the Constitutional Convention. With the windows closed, for secrecy, the delegates were enduring a sweltering Philadelphia summer in 1787. The question of how members of the proposed Congress would be chosen — by population, with larger states getting more representation, or by an equal vote of all states, regardless of size — appeared to be so intractable it threatened the survival of the convention.



And the country itself.

Then, 81-year-old Benjamin Franklin asked to speak, proposing that each session open with prayer. Recalling that they had done so during the late war for independence, Franklin said, “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?”

What was particularly striking about these comments was not so much the sentiments — God governs in the affairs of men — but who said them. Franklin was perhaps the most worldly of the founding fathers, and his call was certainly not that of a deist — a person who believes God does not govern in the affairs of men.

Sitting a few feet away from Franklin, in the chair presiding over the convention, was George Washington of Virginia. There is absolutely no indication whatsoever that Washington would have disagreed with Franklin's assertion — God governs in the affairs of men — and yet it is common to hear today by supposedly learned scholars that not only was Franklin a deist, the father of our country — George Washington — was a deist, as well.

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The historical record indicates that Washington was a firm believer in Jesus Christ as the Second Person of the Trinity, and that Jesus had died for Washington's sins, and rose from the dead three days later. A deist does not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

At Washington's tomb at Mount Vernon, a Bible verse graces the wall. Taken from the Gospel of John, it is a quotation of Jesus, when He sought to reassure Martha, the sister of Jesus' dead friend Lazarus: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”

Speaking less than one month following Washington's death, Jonathan Mitchell Sewall told an audience in New Hampshire, “Let the deist reflect on this, and remember that Washington, the savior of his country, did not disdain to acknowledge and adore a great Savior, whom deists and infidels affect to slight and despise.”

John Marshall, the noted chief justice of the Supreme Court and a close friend of Washington's, wrote a biography of Washington, in which he described him as a “sincere believer in the Christian faith.”



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Washington clearly believed that God had given victory to the United States, believing the perseverance of his army was a “miracle.” In 1778, Washington said, “I am sure there never was a people who had more reason to acknowledge a divine interposition in their affairs, than those in the United States.”

Historian Jared Sparks published *The Writings of George Washington* in the 1830s, and wrote to Nelly Custis-Lewis, Washington’s granddaughter, inquiring as to the exact nature of Washington’s religious views. Nelly told Sparks that her grandmother, Martha Washington, herself a very devout Christian, had expressed shortly after his death the assurance that her late husband was now experiencing “happiness in Heaven.”

To those who would question her grandfather’s Christianity, she added, “Is it necessary that anyone should certify George Washington avowed himself to me a believer in Christianity? As well may we question his patriotism, his heroic, disinterested devotion to his country.”

Despite this powerful evidence that Washington was a Christian, there are skeptics. They argue that Washington would sometimes leave church before the communion. While this is true, it is also true that Washington did take communion, many times. One can only speculate as to why Washington did not always take communion. Perhaps he took the admonition of Paul, found in the first letter to the church at Corinth, in which the great apostle said that any person who ate the bread and drank the cup, unworthily, was guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. This was a fairly common view at the time, leading some Christians to skip communion, if they felt themselves “unworthy.”

So why do some insist that Washington was a deist, in the face of such overwhelming contrary evidence? Many, of course, just repeat what they have heard, and ignorance is their only excuse. But why are such falsehoods perpetrated by those who should really know better? Some simply want to tear down the “great man” of American history, and bring him down to their own level. After all, they reason, if the great Washington rejected biblical Christianity, it reinforces their inclination to follow suit.

After reading numerous letters Washington wrote to various person over the course of his life, the historian Jared Sparks concluded, “To say that he was not a Christian would be to impeach his sincerity and honesty. Of all men in the world, Washington was certainly the last whom any one would charge with dissimulation or indirectness; and if he was so scrupulous in avoiding even a shadow of these faults in every known act of his life, however unimportant, is it likely, is it credible, that in a matter of the highest and most serious importance he should practice through a long series of years a deliberate deception upon his friends and the public? It is neither credible nor possible.”

William Johnson, in his book *George Washington, The Christian*, notes that a book of prayers by Washington, in his own handwriting, was sold at auction in 1891. It is not known whether Washington composed the prayers himself, or simply copied them, but in one prayer, Washington asks God to pardon him of his sins, and “remove them from thy presence, as far as the east is from the west, and accept me for the merits of thy son, Jesus Christ, that when I come into thy temple and compass thine altar, my prayers may come before thee as incense.”

Perhaps the family of Washington felt comfortable in adding the words of Jesus, “I am the resurrection and the life” to the great man’s tomb, when one can read Washington’s own prayer wherein he speaks of Jesus Christ as one “who lay down in the grave and arose again for us, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.”

Indeed, while only God Himself knows the heart of every man, George Washington’s life gave every indication that he was a firm believer in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.



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This only adds to the greatness of the man, of whom it was said that he was “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.”

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