

The Bible And The Birth of America

Faith, Freedom, and the Founding

Week 1: Why Foundations Matter

Understanding The Ideas That Shaped America

“If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” ([Psalm 11:3, NKJV](#))

A house does not fall because the paint fades. It does not collapse because the curtains are outdated or because the furniture is worn. A house falls when the foundation gives way. The same is true of a nation. Before America had a flag, a capital, a Constitution, or a president, it had ideas. Those ideas shaped how early Americans thought about God, mankind, rights, government, law, justice, liberty, and responsibility. America was not born in an empty room. It was born in a world where the Bible was preached from pulpits, read in homes, quoted in public life, taught to children, and woven into the moral vocabulary of the colonies. That does not mean every Founder was a devoted Christian. It does not mean every decision America made was biblical. It does not mean the nation lived up perfectly to the truths it proclaimed. But it does mean this: the founding of America cannot be honestly understood apart from the biblical worldview that shaped so much of the culture around it. America was built on more than politics. It was built on convictions.

The Question Beneath The Nation

Every nation must answer foundational questions. Where do rights come from? What makes human life valuable? Is there such a thing as moral truth? Are rulers accountable to anyone above themselves? Should government have limits? Can freedom survive without virtue? These questions are not merely academic. They determine whether a nation protects life or cheapens it, whether government serves the people or controls them, whether liberty is preserved or slowly surrendered. The American Founders wrestled with these questions in a world deeply familiar with Scripture. The Bible taught that mankind was created by God, that rulers were accountable to God, that justice mattered to God, that sin corrupted human nature, and that liberty without righteousness would eventually destroy itself. Genesis begins with the foundation of human dignity:

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” ([Genesis 1:27, NKJV](#))

That one truth changes everything. If man is made in the image of God, then human value does not come from government. It does not come from wealth, class, race, power, usefulness, or popularity. It comes from the Creator. That means government does not grant human dignity. Government is obligated to recognize it. This idea echoes strongly in the Declaration of Independence, which says that all men are “*created equal*” and “*endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.*” The Declaration also says governments exist “*to secure these rights,*” not to invent them. That is a foundational idea: rights come from God, and government exists to protect what God has already given.

The Foundation Under Freedom

The Bible does not present liberty as lawlessness. Biblical liberty is not the freedom to do whatever the flesh desires. It is freedom to live rightly before God. Jesus said:

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” ([John 8:32, NKJV](#))

Notice that freedom is connected to truth. Not opinion. Not appetite. Not majority vote. Truth. That matters because freedom detached from truth becomes chaos. A people who reject moral restraint will eventually require external restraint. When conscience weakens, control grows. When self-government collapses, civil government expands to fill the void. This is one reason the Founders spoke so often about virtue. They understood that a republic depends on more than documents. A constitution can limit government on paper, but it cannot restrain every sinful impulse in the human heart. John Adams made this point powerfully in 1798 when he [wrote](#) that the Constitution was made “*only for a moral and religious People*” and was “*wholly inadequate*” for any other. Adams was not saying that Americans would always be moral. He was warning that the system itself depended on moral people. A free republic requires citizens who can govern themselves internally. Without that, liberty becomes unstable. The Bible says: “*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*” ([Proverbs 14:34, NKJV](#)) That verse does not apply only to ancient Israel. It reveals a principle of nations: righteousness lifts; sin degrades. Laws matter. Leaders matter. Constitutions matter. But beneath them all is the moral condition of the people.

Washington’s Warning

George Washington understood this as well. In his [Farewell Address of 1796](#), Washington warned that religion and morality were not optional accessories to public life. He called them “*indispensable supports*” of political prosperity. That phrase matters: indispensable supports. Washington was saying that religion and morality helped hold up the structure of public freedom. They were not merely private preferences. They shaped character. They shaped conscience. They shaped public trust. A nation cannot function if no one tells the truth. Contracts collapse. Courts become corrupt. Families fracture. Leaders deceive. Citizens distrust one another. Freedom becomes dangerous when people no longer have the character to steward it. This is why the Bible repeatedly connects righteousness with justice:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly^[a] with your God. ([Micah 6:8, NIV](#))

Justice is not merely a legal concept. It is a moral one. Mercy is not merely a social concept. It is a biblical one. Humility is not merely a personality trait. It is the posture of a people who know they are accountable to God. Washington’s warning reminds us that America’s political experiment assumed moral soil. Remove that soil, and the tree of liberty begins to wither.

A Culture Saturated With Scripture

To understand America’s founding, we have to understand colonial life. The Bible was not a fringe book in early America. It was central to worship, education, public rhetoric, family instruction, and moral formation. Children in colonial America often learned to read through books like [The New-England Primer](#), first printed in Boston around 1690. The New York Public Library describes it as one of the most successful children’s textbooks in America during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, noting that it blended reading instruction with moral lessons and Christian catechism. That means biblical language was not reserved for Sunday morning. It entered the minds of children as they learned letters, words, memory, and moral categories. The pulpit also played a major role. Election sermons were preached for generations in places like Massachusetts and Connecticut, often before governors, legislatures, and public officials. These sermons addressed civil responsibility, justice, leadership, liberty, and

accountability before God. In other words, early Americans did not draw a hard wall between faith and public morality. They expected biblical truth to inform public virtue. Again, this does not mean everyone agreed on theology. They did not. The Founders held a range of religious beliefs. Some were orthodox Christians. Some were more influenced by Enlightenment rationalism. Some used biblical language in a more general way. But even where theology differed, the Bible remained a powerful source of moral vocabulary and public reasoning. That distinction matters. We do not need to exaggerate history in order to recognize the truth: the Bible deeply shaped the moral world into which America was born.

The Declaration And The Creator

The Declaration of Independence is not a sermon, but it does rest on a theological claim: rights come from the Creator. The Founders did not merely say, “We want independence.” They argued that independence was justified because certain truths were higher than the king. They appealed to “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God,” and then declared that men are endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights. That is a radical claim. If rights come from the king, the king can remove them. If rights come from Parliament, Parliament can redefine them. If rights come from majority vote, majority vote can erase them. But if rights come from God, then government is not the source of rights. Government is the servant and protector of rights. This fits with the biblical view that human authority is real but limited. [*Romans 13*](#) teaches that governing authorities have a role under God. But Scripture also shows that rulers are not ultimate. Pharaoh was judged. Nebuchadnezzar was humbled. Herod was struck down. Kings were rebuked by prophets. The apostles declared, “*We ought to obey God rather than men*” when human commands contradicted divine authority. (see [*Acts 5:29*](#)) The Bible does not teach anarchy. It teaches ordered liberty under God. Government has authority, but it is not God. Law matters, but law must be grounded in justice. Rulers govern, but rulers are accountable. That idea helped shape the American instinct against tyranny.

Human Nature And Limited Government

Another biblical idea beneath the founding was a realistic view of human nature. The Bible teaches that mankind is made in God’s image, but also fallen in sin. That combination is essential. If you only believe man is valuable, you may trust human power too much. If you only believe man is sinful, you may forget human dignity. The Bible holds both together:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” ([*Romans 3:23, NKJV*](#))

This doctrine of sin has political consequences. If people are sinful, then no ruler should be trusted with unlimited power. If ambition, greed, pride, and corruption are real, then government must be restrained. James Madison famously [*wrote*](#) in *Federalist No. 51*, “*If men were angels, no government would be necessary.*” That statement reflects the same basic realism: human nature requires government, but human sinfulness also requires government itself to be checked.

The Bible had long taught that rulers could become oppressive when unrestrained. In [*1 Samuel 8*](#), Israel demanded a king like the other nations. God warned them through Samuel that a king would take their sons, daughters, fields, servants, flocks, and labor. The warning was clear: centralized power has a taking tendency. That does not mean government is evil. It means government must be limited because man is fallen. The Founders understood this danger. Their solution was not perfect people, but divided power: checks and balances, separation of powers, federalism, elections, written limits, and accountability. That framework makes sense in a

biblical worldview. Because man is made in God's image, his rights must be protected. Because man is sinful, his power must be restrained.

The Massachusetts Example

One clear example of founding-era thinking can be seen in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780. Its [Declaration of Rights](#) stated that public worship and instruction in "*piety, religion and morality*" promoted the happiness and prosperity of a people and the security of republican government. Whether one agrees with every policy detail of that era or not, the worldview is obvious: the people believed morality and religion were connected to the survival of self-government. They did not see virtue as decorative. They saw it as structural. This is very different from the modern idea that a nation can keep liberty while abandoning the moral foundations that made liberty possible. The founding generation generally understood that freedom required character. The Bible says that in these two verses:

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." ([Psalm 33:12, NKJV](#))

"Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law." ([Proverbs 29:18, NKJV](#))

When people cast off divine truth, restraint eventually disappears. And when restraint disappears, liberty does not flourish. It decays.

The House On The Rock

Jesus gave one of the clearest pictures of foundations in Matthew 7:

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock." ([Matthew 7:24, NKJV](#))

The wise man and the foolish man both built houses. From the outside, both structures may have looked impressive. The difference was not obvious until the storm came. The rain fell. The floods came. The winds blew. One house stood. The other fell. Why? Foundation. America has weathered many storms: war, division, injustice, economic crisis, cultural upheaval, corruption, and moral confusion. The question is not whether storms will come. They always do. The question is whether the foundation can hold. A nation cannot build permanently on temporary feelings. It cannot build securely on shifting moral sand. It cannot preserve freedom while mocking truth. It cannot protect rights while forgetting the God who gives them. This is why foundations matter.

America's Contradictions Do Not Cancel Its Foundations

At this point, someone may ask: "If America's founding was influenced by biblical truth, why did the nation tolerate slavery? Why were there injustices? Why were rights not equally applied?" Those are honest questions, and they must not be avoided. America did not perfectly live up to the truths it declared. The statement that "all men are created equal" stood in painful tension with the reality of slavery and other injustices. But the answer is not to deny the founding principle. The answer is to recognize that the principle was greater than the nation's obedience to it. In other words, America's failures were not evidence that the biblical foundation was wrong. They were evidence that the nation needed to be called back to its own highest truths. That is exactly what later reformers did. Many abolitionists appealed to Scripture and to the Declaration's claim of God-given equality. They used the founding principle as a standard against the nation's sin. That is how truth works. Truth judges us. It does not merely serve us.

[Hebrews 4:12](#) says:

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...” (NKJV) God’s Word exposes. It corrects. It confronts. It calls individuals and nations to repentance. So when we say the Bible shaped America’s founding, we are not saying America was sinless. We are saying America possessed truths that were strong enough to confront its sins.

What Happens When Foundations Are Forgotten?

The danger for any nation is not only that it rejects truth, but that it forgets why truth mattered in the first place. When a people forget that rights come from God, rights become negotiable. When a people forget that government is limited, power expands. When a people forget that man is sinful, they trust rulers too much. When a people forget that man is made in God’s image, life becomes cheap. When a people forget that liberty requires virtue, freedom becomes self-destruction. When a people forget that justice is rooted in God’s character, justice becomes whatever the powerful say it is. This is why the study of America’s founding is not merely historical. It is prophetic in the sense that it warns us. It shows us what happens when foundations are honored, and what happens when they are neglected. We read at the outset that if the foundations are destroyed, what can we do? The answer begins with remembering. Then repentance. Then rebuilding.

The Foundation Beneath The Foundation

At the deepest level, America’s founding raises a question every generation must answer: will we build on man or on God? Man changes. God does not. Public opinion shifts. God’s Word stands. Governments rise and fall. The kingdom of God remains. [*Isaiah 40:8*](#) says that *“the word of our God stands forever.”* That is the foundation beneath every true foundation. America’s founding documents matter. The Constitution matters. The Declaration matters. The Bill of Rights matters. But even these are not ultimate. They are only as strong as the truths beneath them. The Founders understood that liberty required more than parchment. It required virtue. It required faith. It required moral restraint. It required a people who knew that they were accountable to God. That is why we begin here. Before we study rights, law, pulpits, founding documents, or the preservation of liberty, we must first understand foundations. The Bible gave early America a way to understand human dignity, moral truth, limited government, justice, liberty, and accountability. And if those foundations are forgotten, the structure above them will not remain stable forever. America was not founded in a spiritual vacuum. Its founding generation lived in a world deeply shaped by Scripture, and many of the nation’s core ideas of God-given rights, human dignity, moral law, limited government, justice, liberty, and virtue were rooted in a biblical worldview. The question for our generation is not merely whether we admire the founding. The question is whether we still understand the foundation.