

FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH

SELF-GOVERNMENT

Text: Philippians 2:12

Introduction:

1. According to the Bible, the function of government is to maintain societal order that promotes peace and liberty (Romans 13:1-7).
2. Through the concepts of "Nature's God," "Natural Law," and People's Law," the founders of this country sought to pattern government after God's wisdom.
3. Foundational to this type of government was the freedom of religion.
4. The enumeration and protection of the rights of man came from a fundamental understanding of his nature and his God-given rights.
5. Because man possesses free will, he is responsible for his own life, liberty, and happiness.
6. Thus, the system the founders sought to create would respect the principle of self-government – in the words of Abraham Lincoln: "government of the people, by the people, for the people."
7. Again, the Bible sets the standard in this regard.

I. Responsibility of the Person

- A. The Bible clearly teaches the principle of individual responsibility.
- B. Both righteousness and wickedness are based upon a person's choices and actions, not those of another (Ezekiel 18:20).
- C. Each person will be judged according to his own deeds (Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:6, 11; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:7-8; Revelation 20:12).
- D. With the exception of Jesus, one cannot answer for the sins of another (Exodus 32:32-33; Romans 9:3; cf. 1 Peter 2:24).
- E. Thus, each individual must examine himself and respond appropriately (2 Corinthians 13:5; Psalm 119:59; Haggai 1:5, 7).
- F. Individual liberty comes with personal responsibility.

II. Rule of the People

- A. Because of their understanding of this principle, the founders sought to form a system in which the right to govern was vested in the people.
- B. In 1683, King Charles II executed Algernon Sidney by beheading.
 1. He was accused of treason and plotting the overthrow of the King.
 2. In fact, he spoke out against the notion that a king – or any man – had the divine right to rule over others.
 3. He wrote: "I will believe in the right of one man to govern a nation despotically when I find a man born unto the world with boots and spurs, and a nation with saddles on their backs."
 4. He declared: "Tis hard to comprehend how one man can come to be master of many, equal to himself in right, unless it be by consent or by force."
 5. He also claimed: "God leaves to Man the choice of Forms in Government; and those who constitute one Form, may abrogate it."

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- C. In the same year, John Locke left England for Holland where he could espouse the same truths as Sidney without the fear of execution.
 - D. The writings of these two men greatly influenced America's founders.
 - E. Thus, the Declaration of Independence affirms: "Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."
 - 1. Alexander Hamilton wrote: "The fabric of American empire ought to rest on the solid basis of the consent of the people. The streams of national power out to flow immediately from that pure, original fountain of all legitimate authority" (*Federalist Papers*, No. 22).
 - 2. James Madison stated: "[T]he ultimate authority, wherever the derivative may be found, resides in the people alone" (*Federalist Papers*, No. 46).
 - F. Because of this principle, the founders emphasized the power of the people to alter or abolish any government that became tyrannical.
 - 1. "Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience has shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed."
 - 2. "But, when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security" (*The Declaration of Independence*).
 - G. To ensure the enacting and protection of these principles, the founders established the government as a republic.
 - 1. The differences between a democracy and a republic are significant, and not just an exercise in semantics.
 - 2. "Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their death...."
 - 3. "A republic, by which I mean a government in which the scheme or representation takes place, opens a different prospect and promises the cure for which we are seeking" (James Madison, *Federalist Papers*, No. 10).
 - H. Thus, the Constitution was written to install this type of government with a system of checks and balances, protecting the rights and liberties of man.
- III. Requirement of the Participant
- A. Because each person possesses individual liberty, he or she must exercise private duties.
 - B. One must be educated and involved in the process of government.
 - C. Likewise, one must be educated and involved in the process of salvation (Philippians 2:12; 1 Corinthians 11:28, 31; Galatians 6:4; Hebrews 4:1; Revelation 2:5).
 - D. Only the obedient will be saved (Hebrews 5:8-9).