

America at 250, part 1: Patrick Henry and His Worldview

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Announcer: Our speaker is Dr. Robby Dean, Pastor of West Houston Bible Church, author, and professor of Christian history at Chafer Theological Seminary. His teaching is available at deanbibleministries.org.

Opening

This July 4th, our nation celebrates its 250th birthday. And yet we find ourselves in a time of profound social upheaval—political discord, cultural conflict, and a deep uncertainty about who we are as a people. To understand where we’re going, we need to understand where we came from. Today is the first of June and this week on Saturday the 6th, we not only remember the victory of our allied forces in the D-Day invasion of Europe, but we are going to look back to one of our Founding Fathers and a sealed envelope on June 6, 1799.

Over these five messages, I will examine the role the Bible and our Judeo-Christian heritage played in the birth of this nation. Contrary to what many secular historians have taught over the past century, the teachings of Scripture profoundly shaped the political thinking of our Founding Fathers. They believed our rights and liberties were not granted by government—they were a possession provided to us by our heavenly Father the Creator of the heavens and the earth. And therefore they could not be taken away by human power.

Historians Daniel Driesbach, Mark David Hall, and many others, report that the Founding Fathers made frequent references to both Old and New Testaments. But it was mostly from the Hebrew Torah, the Pentateuch, along with 1 Samuel 8 that was most influential, along with a few New Testament passages. One of the most frequently quoted is Prov. 14:34

Prov. 14:34 states:

“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”

Keep that verse in mind. We’ll come back to it.

The Great Awakening

The story of America’s founding cannot be told without understanding the Great Awakening—a sweeping spiritual revival that swept both sides of the Atlantic from roughly 1720 to 1750. If you haven’t seen the recent film *A Great Awakening*, I strongly recommend it.

The high-water mark of this revival came with the arrival in Philadelphia of British evangelist George Whitefield in 1739. He would eventually make seven preaching tours through the colonies. The sparks of biblical truth he proclaimed lit fires in colonial pastors across the land. They preached a simple, powerful message: salvation is a free gift from God, received by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone—not by works—not by church membership. Only by grace, through faith. At the moment of belief in Jesus Christ’s substitutionary death to pay the penalty for our sin, a person is born again—and that life can never be lost.

Historians estimate that as many as 80% of colonists were touched in some way by this awakening. It wasn't merely a religious event. It reshaped how an entire generation thought about God, humanity, government, and freedom.

A Revival in Virginia—and a Young Boy Named Patrick

In 1739, Whitefield preached in Williamsburg, Virginia. A bricklayer in Hanover County named Samuel Morris read his sermon, “What Think Ye of Christ,” and was spiritually ignited. Morris began hosting gatherings in his home—reading Scripture, praying, and also reading Whitefield's sermons aloud on Sundays. Soon the crowds outgrew his home and they built a larger meeting place—called Morris's Reading House. More and more people were saved. Revival broke out in Hanover County.

Not long after, a pastor named Samuel Davies moved from Pennsylvania to Virginia. He was an eloquent preacher and hymn writer. Open-air revivals drew crowds of up to 9,000 people. His reputation spread.

A Virginia mother named Sarah Henry heard about Davies and joined his congregation. She brought her twelve-year-old son Patrick. That boy not only trusted Christ as Savior—he was permanently shaped by Davies' teaching and his commanding oratorical gifts. Later in life, Patrick Henry would say that Samuel Davies was one of the greatest orators he had ever heard.

Patrick Henry's Biblical Worldview

Patrick Henry became a diligent student of Scripture and a follower of Christ. Though his early schooling was limited, his home education was serious—Latin, Greek, advanced mathematics, and the Greek and Roman classics. But it was the Bible that became the primary authority for his thinking.

His speeches were saturated with biblical references and allusions. He was often compared to the prophet Jeremiah. And three convictions from Scripture grounded his entire political philosophy:

First: He believed in the Creator God of the Bible as the ultimate reality. This is the foundation of any biblical worldview—and the foundation on which the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights were built. Our rights come not from government but from God.

Second: He believed in the sinfulness of all human beings. Scripture taught that there is none righteous—not one. This meant that every leader, every king, every president, every justice was fallible and capable of corruption. Therefore, any just government must be legally limited. Power must be checked. Tyranny must be prevented by law, not by hoping for virtuous rulers.

Third: He believed the family was the center of a healthy nation. The home was the primary educational and moral training ground for the next generation. Healthy families produced healthy citizens.

This Judeo-Christian framework—drawn directly from Scripture—is what gave our founders the tools to build a government that, while imperfect, allowed for the correction of errors and the

expansion of human freedom. Despite its failures, this nation produced the greatest culture of liberty the world has ever seen.

But Henry also understood the danger. He believed that once freed from the restraints of the Bible and morality, people would inevitably pursue selfishness. He was so concerned that he had not done enough to publicly identify himself as a Christian that he wrote in a letter to his daughter:

“Amongst other strange things said of me, I hear it is said by the Deists that I am one of their number ... This thought gives me much more pain than the appellation of Tory, because I think religion of infinitely higher importance than politics ... I find much cause to reproach myself that I have lived so long and have given no decided and public proofs of my being a Christian. But indeed my dear child, this is a character which I prize far above all this world has or can boast.”

Patrick Henry, letter to his daughter Betsey

The Sealed Envelope

On June 6, 1799, Patrick Henry lay dying from stomach cancer. As his family gathered around him, he prayed for them, for his country, and for his own soul. When he finished, he thanked God for His goodness throughout his life—and then he turned to his doctor and begged him to receive Jesus Christ as his Savior.

After his death, his family found a sealed envelope. Inside was a single piece of paper. On it, Patrick Henry had written these words about American independence:

“Whether this will prove a Blessing or a Curse will depend upon the Use our people make of the Blessings which a gracious God hath bestowed on us. If they are wise, they will be great and happy. If they are of a contrary Character, they will be miserable. Righteousness alone can exalt them as a Nation. Reader! whoever thou art, remember this; and in thy Sphere, practice Virtue thyself, and encourage it in others.” — P. Henry

The question we should address is from:

Psa. 11:3 If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?

Closing

Righteousness exalts a nation. Patrick Henry believed it. The Founding Fathers built on it. The question for us—250 years later—is whether we still believe it.

Let’s close in prayer—for the President, for Congress, for our justices, and for leaders at every level of government.

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