

PENSACOLA CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

GRADUATE SCHOOL

DEMONSTRATIVE FAITH IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

LIFE OF JOHN ADAMS BASED ON HIS WRITINGS:

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To my loving wife Carrie

But without faith it is impossible to please him:  
for he that cometh to God must first believe that he is,  
and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

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## INTRODUCTION

John Adams was the second President of the United States (1797-1801). Considered to be a "passionate sage," many historians quote him in their manifold volumes. There is a problem, however, in the references to Adams' faith. Ignored, dismissed, and distorted by these writers, the "context" of Adams' life expediently conforms to the "secular" writers' presuppositions and conclusions.

Unknown to the minds of many Americans, the basements of libraries are the reigning depository for works written by John Adams. Rarely are his actual writings within the scope of the general public. Students and scholars, filled with distortions of truth, continue ignorantly under the tutelage of biographical fiction of Adams and other Founding Fathers. This only serves the promotion of rampant ignorance in the populace.

Even though Adams' works include many references to God, Providence, and the Supreme Being, his critics rarely acknowledge his abiding faith in the Almighty. They present him as an Atheist, Agnostic, Deist, or Skeptic. They consider Adams void of absolute beliefs about the Creator of the Universe. They do not glimpse his reliance on God to deliver his soul nor the colonists from tyrannical Great Britain.

The purpose of this thesis is to chronicle Adams' life related to his faith in public and private, evicting popular notions that he rejected Biblical Christianity. To



accomplish this goal, his peculiar beliefs warrant examination. Areas related to theology, private and public conduct, views on the church and the family will be discussed.

## CHAPTER 1

### GOD, MY SHIELD AND MY ROCK

Adams corresponded with many individuals about the Majesty on High. He included a grasp of God's attributes as manifested through His Sovereignty, Plan, and Power. These attributes related to calamities and often the American struggle against Great Britain. Adams believed God protected and kept America throughout its struggles and ultimate victory rested with the Rock. God would deliver American liberty and John Adams thanked Him endlessly for this Providence. The Cause of Liberty, in Adams' mind, was the result of the work of the Lord.

#### **The Sovereignty of God**

In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, from September 14, 1813, Adams wrote about God and His sovereignty.

"God has infinite wisdom, goodness and power; he created the universe; his duration is eternal, *a parte ante* and *a parte post*. His presence is as extensive as space. What is space? An infinite spherical vacuum. He created this speck of dirt and the human species for his glory; and with the deliberate design of making nine-tenths of our species miserable for ever for his glory."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Adams, to Thomas Jefferson, 14 September 1813, found in Paul Wiltach, ed., *Correspondence of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson: 1812-1826*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1925), 81-2.

Adams was not afraid to share the truth of God's sovereignty related to "ninethts" of the inhabitants of the earth. He understood these individuals' paths led to eternal punishment. For what cause? The Glory of God. The Latin phrase (not given translation in Adams' works) in context represents "without beginning, without end,"<sup>2</sup> a clear reference to the eternality of the Lord.

### **The Plan of God**

Adams believed God's Plan worked through His Providence. America participated in this Plan; and Adams shared a manifest vision of it throughout his life and circumstances.

Adams referred to 'God's Plan for America' as early as 1765. In the *Boston Gazette* he wrote that "Providence" had expressly intended America "for the illumination of the ignorant, and the emancipation of the slavish part of humanity."<sup>3</sup> After signing the Declaration of Independence, Adams articulated this issue in a letter to his wife: "Through all the gloom I can see the rays of ravishing light and glory. Posterity will triumph in that day's transaction."<sup>4</sup>

In a letter from Amsterdam, he writes: "the great designs of Providence must be accomplished. Great Indeed! The Progres[s] of Society, will be accelerated by Centuries by this Rev[olution]....Light Spreads from the day Spring in the West, and may it shine

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<sup>2</sup>Writer's interpretation of the phrase "*a parte ante* and *a parte post*".

<sup>3</sup>Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Birth of the Nation: A Portrait of the American People on the Eve of Independence*, with an introduction by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 246.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

more and more until the perfect day."<sup>5</sup> Adams believed that even in Europe the "American Ideas of Toleration and religious Liberty" would become "fashionable."<sup>6</sup> Adams believed this to be God's Plan manifested through the American experience.

God's Plan allowed for calamities, as evidenced in this letter to his wife, after mentioning the death of one Governor Bernard:

"I wish, that with these primary Instruments of the Calamities that now distress almost all the World the Evils themselves may come to an End. For although they will undoubtedly End, in the Welfare of Mankind, and accomplish the Benevolent designs of Providence, towards the two worlds; Yet for the present they are not joyous but grievous."<sup>7</sup>

One of the best references to God's Plan and Purpose presented by Adams was upon the occasion of the siege of Boston; where he observed God's drawing the colonists together through suffering. He writes from Hartford to Abigail: "But, I can't help depending upon this, that the present dreadfull Calamity of that beloved Town is intended to bind the Colonies together in more indissoluble Bands, and to animate their Exertions, at this great Crisis in the Affairs of Mankind."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>John Adams, Amsterdam, to John Q. Adams, 28 April 1782, found in L.H. Butterfield and Marc Friedlaender, ed. *Adams Family Correspondence: Vol. 4, October 1780-September 1782*, The Adams Papers, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1973), 317.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>John Adams, Paris?, to Abigail Adams, 17 June 1780, found in L.H. Butterfield and Marc Friedlaender, ed. *Adams Family Correspondence: Vol. 3, April 1778-September 1780*, The Adams Papers, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1973), 367.

<sup>8</sup>John Adams, Hartford, to Abigail Adams, 2 May 1775, found in L.H. Butterfield and Marc Friedlaender, ed. *Adams Family Correspondence: Vol. 1, December 1761-May 1776*, The Adams Papers, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1963), 192.

## The Power of God

Throughout his writings Adams referred to various aspects of God's Power. He referred to the Lord's Power to heal, in a correspondence with Abigail: "My friends were so good to send me an excellent Physician and Surgeon, whose Skill and faithful Attention with the Blessing of Heaven, have saved my life."<sup>9</sup> Adams believed God worked through the doctor to save him. The power of God observed by Adams was a source of spiritual and physical salvation.

In 1775, writing from Philadelphia to Abigail, Adams implored God's power to stop a pestilence.

"But we can count a mother, a brother, an aunt, and a brother's child among the slain by this cruel pestilence. May God Almighty put a stop to its rage, and humble us under the ravages already made by it....I pray God to spare my parent, whose life has been prolonged by his goodness hitherto, as well as yours that survive."<sup>10</sup>

This horrible pestilence was probably the "small-pox" referred to earlier in a letter from October of 1775. Even in the midst of tragedy Adams called for God to humble them. Truly these words reflected the ideas of a believer, for what would they profit a man's flesh?<sup>11</sup>

Adams referred to God's Power demonstrated through pestilence, in the following quote: "While with reverence and resignation we contemplate the dispensations of

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<sup>9</sup>John Adams, Amsterdam, to Abigail Adams, 9 October 1781, *AFC: Vol. 4*, 224.

<sup>10</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 23 October 1775, published in Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail Adams, During the Revolution*. With a Memoir of Mrs. Adams. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1875), 116.

<sup>11</sup>John 6:63.

Divine Providence, in the alarming and destructive pestilence with which several of our cities and towns have been visited, there is a cause for gratitude and mutual congratulations that the malady has disappeared."<sup>12</sup> Adams stated this in an address before Congress in December of 1798.

Adams also observed God's Power over the British. In a letter written in April of 1777, he stated: "The Author of human Nature, who gave it its Rights, will not see it ruined, and suffer its destroyers to escape with Impunity. Divine Vengeance will sometime or other, overtake the Alberts, the Phillips, and Georges--the Alvas, the Grislers and Howes, and vindicate the Wrongs of oppressed human Nature."<sup>13</sup> In August of 1778, he mentioned to Abigail: "The Russell has returned to England, scarcely able to swim and with upwards of 200 Men sick of the Goal Fever. - Is it Presumption to imagine that one sees the Wrath of Heaven against a Nation overloaded with Guilt."<sup>14</sup>

### **On the Side of God**

Adams referred to the force that carried America through Independence as the Rock. He believed the Cause of Liberty was immovable, regardless of British power,

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<sup>12</sup>John Adams speech delivered on Saturday, December 8, 1798 during the 5th Congress 3d Session in *Speeches of President John Adams. Taken from American State Papers: Class I (Foreign Relations)*. Vol. 1-3, (April 30, 1789- March 3, 1815), Reel 1. Special Collections, Main Branch of Tacoma Public Library, Tacoma, Washington, 47.

<sup>13</sup>John Adams, to Abigail Adams, 22 April 1777, found in L.H. Butterfield and Marc Friedlaender, ed. *Adams Family Correspondence: Vol. 2, June 1776-March 1778*, The Adams Papers, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1963), 225.

<sup>14</sup>John Adams, Passi, to Abigail Adams, 11 August 1778, *AFC: Vol. 3*, 72.

because of that Rock, here understood as Christ: "The Winds may blow, and the Rain descend and it will not fall, for it is built upon a Rock."<sup>15</sup>

The Rock was on their side, Adams wrote: "God helps them who help themselves, and if we obtain the divine aid by our own virtue, fortitude, and perseverance, we may be sure of relief."<sup>16</sup> Confirming his belief in the Almighty's influence on the affairs of American Independence, he related a story of Dr. Zubly: "The Catholics have on their side the Pope, and the Emperor of Germany, etc., etc., etc.; but as to those poor devils, the Protestants, they have nothing on their side but God Almighty."<sup>17</sup> The Protestants, represented colonists who fled persecutions in Europe and now experienced similar ones from the British government.

The Rock would prove Himself to the Cause on many occasions. Adams recalled a day in 1777, "This Morning, a Vessell has arrived in this City with 6800 stand of excellent Arms and 1500 Gun locks, belonging to Congress and 1500 more private Property."<sup>18</sup> After sharing the news of desperately needed military provisions to James Warren, Adams continued with thanks to God. "Thus, it is-on how many Occassions,

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<sup>15</sup>John Adams, to John Boylston, 5 March 1779, found in Gregg L. Lint and Robert J. Taylor, Richard Alan Ryerson, Celeste Walker, Joanna M. Revelas, eds. *Papers of John Adams: Vol. 8, March 1779-February 1780*, The Adams Papers, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>16</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 1 October 1775, *Familiar Letters*, 101.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to James Warren, 24 March 1777, found in Robert J. Taylor, ed., *Papers of John Adams: Vol. 5, August 1776-March 1778*, The Adams Papers, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1983), 128.

when We have been unable to see any Way to help ourselves has Providence, Sent Us an unexpected Relief! Thus it has been, and thus it will be."<sup>19</sup>

On the First of August 1777, Adams reminded Abigail of God's ordination in the battle for America. "I really think that Providence has ordered this Country to be the Theatre of this Summers Campaign, in Favour of Us, for many Reasons."<sup>20</sup> He then reasoned why this was the case:

"1. It will make an entire and final Separation of the Wheat from the Chaff, the Ore from the Dross, the Whiggs from the Tories. 2. It will give a little Breath to you in N. England. 3. If they should fail in their Attempt upon Philadelphia, it will give Lustre to our Arms and Disgrace to theirs, but if they succeed, it will cutt off this corrupted City, from the Body of the Country, and it will take all their Force to maintain it."<sup>21</sup>

As final homage to the Source responsible for American Independence, Adams writes to Thomas Cushing: "Our Bayonets, under God must be our Defense. We are contending for all the Ends of Government."<sup>22</sup> In Adams' mind there would only be victory through God; and without Him defeat.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 1 August 1777, *AFC: Vol. 2*, 298.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>John Adams, Passy, to Thomas Cushing, 8 December 1778, found in Gregg L. Lint, Robert J. Taylor, Richard Alan Ryerson, Celeste Walker, and Joanna M. Revelas, eds., *Papers of John Adams: Vol. 7, September 1778-February 1779*, The Adams Papers, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1989), 263.



## Giving Thanks to God

As President, speaking before the Fifth Congress in 1797, Adams reminded the people of the United States upon Whom the nation's defense rested. He stated the people of the United States had a "beneficent Providence" who "has kindly placed within their power....the exertion of those resources of national defense."<sup>23</sup> Before Congress, in 1798, he stated: "we have abundant reason to present to the Supreme Being our annual oblations of gratitude for a liberal participation in the ordinary blessings of his providence."<sup>24</sup>

In 1799, he continued this theme: "the demand on the whole American People sincere thanks to a benevolent Deity for the merciful dispensations of his providence."<sup>25</sup>

Before the Sixth Congress, Adams said: "It would be unbecoming the Representatives of this nation to assemble, for the first time, in this solemn temple, without looking up the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, and imploring his blessing."<sup>26</sup>

Why give thanks to God, one might ask? Thanks ought to be given to God because He is the only source of hope as evidenced in 1774 by Adams: "Resignation to the Will of Heaven is our only Resource in such dangerous Times."<sup>27</sup> Adams continued

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<sup>23</sup>John Adams speech delivered on Thursday, November 23, 1797 during the 5th Congress 2d Session in *Speeches of President John Adams*, 44.

<sup>24</sup>John Adams speech delivered on Saturday, December 8, 1798 during the 5th Congress 3d Session in *Speeches of President John Adams*, 47.

<sup>25</sup>John Adams speech delivered on Tuesday, December 3, 1799 during the 6th Congress 1st Session in *Speeches of President John Adams*, 50.

<sup>26</sup>John Adams speech delivered on Saturday, November 22, 1800 during the 6th Congress 2d Session in *Speeches of President John Adams*, 53.

<sup>27</sup>John Adams, Prince Town New Jersey, to Abigail Adams, 28 August 1774, *AFC: Vol. I*, 145.

the same theme in 1775 when he wrote again to Abigail: "God Almighty's Providence preserve, sustain, and comfort you" recognizing the Lord as the only refuge to which they ought to turn.<sup>28</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Adams understood God and His attributes. America was showered with blessings and curses in the exhausting struggle for Independence. Once independence was achieved, Adams witnessed the Rock continuously drawing individuals to Himself. The Lord would prosper the United States and its citizenry; whose Constitution would allow men to worship Him "in spirit and in truth."<sup>29</sup>

Not only did Adams see God working in America but he observed changes within his own soul. His special devotion to God, through acknowledgment of God's Sovereignty, Plan, Power, and Protection, underscores his submissive hope in the Rock, the Author of the Universe. It is appropriate then to ask how this relationship was established; and why did it continue?

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<sup>28</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 7 July 1775, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 227.

<sup>29</sup>John 4:24.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRAYER, SCRIPTURES AND FASTING

From beginning to end, the writings of John Adams convey a special sense of relationship to God built upon his devotion and systematic faith. This assurance, constructed on truth, was not capricious emotion. Through prayer, dedication to the Scriptures, and private and public fasting, his faith was evident. These strengthened and sustained him; whether in Braintree or in the midst of rampant immorality in Europe.

#### **Effectual Fervent Prayer**

Adams wrote often on prayer through correspondence to family, friends and acquaintances. His prayers were intercessory by nature: for individuals, for himself, and for the Cause of Liberty. Adams believed God answered prayers, in respect to: war, illness, prosperity, safety, victims of tyranny, and personal growth. Prayer was the boundless resource, to which Adams could present any circumstance and expect a response.

### *Intercessory Prayer*

Writing from Boston in 1764, to Abigail Smith<sup>1</sup> (while still a bachelor) Adams made requests for prayer in the midst of a small pox epidemic. "My Regards as due to Pappa, and should request his Prayers, which are always becoming, and especially at such Times, when We are undertaking any Thing of Consequence as the small Pox."<sup>2</sup> John Adams would suffer later from the "Pox." When the letter was written he was exposed, but not suffering from its influence. Certainly, disease was something Adams believed was directly under God's power and control.

Once married, he partially fulfilled his responsibilities as a believer; to pray for his wife. Adams concludes a letter from Philadelphia "Adieu my dear Wife-God bless you and yours. So wishes and prays, without ceasing."<sup>3</sup> Adams' obedience to the Apostle Paul's command to Thessalonian believers-ignored often by believers today-was a plenitude of blessing to him; and often his only consolation.

In the days of struggle for Independence, frequently absent from home and constrained by a brother's illness, Adams referred to prayer as his consolation: "I have nothing to do but pray for the abundant Outpourings of Patience, Patience, Patience."<sup>4</sup> These burdens on his mind forced Adams to secure the attribute of long-suffering from

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<sup>1</sup>This is Abigail (Smith) Adams, his future wife.

<sup>2</sup>John Adams, Boston, to Abigail Adams, 13 April 1764, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 29.

<sup>3</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 7 October 1774, *Familiar Letters*, 45.

<sup>4</sup>John Adams, to Abigail Adams, 14 August 1782, *AFC: Vol. 4*, 366.

the One who could provide it. He affirmed his inability to "remove mountains."<sup>5</sup>

Accomplishing these feats came only through prayer and not by flesh.

In a letter to Cotton Tufts, written from The Hague, Adams stated: "I have only time to inclose a few Papers and to pray for your Health and prosperity."<sup>6</sup> This quick note came amidst concerns for many friends and family, whom Adams heard were ill or near death.<sup>7</sup>

Upon sending his son Charles home, Adams wrote Abigail from Amsterdam: "Pray God Charles may be with you."<sup>8</sup> Concern for Charles' safety on the precipitous voyage across the Atlantic, noted for its sudden and often violent storms, caused Adams to hope and pray for God's deliverance.

#### *Prayer in the Cause of Liberty*

As a member of the Sons of Liberty, Adams prayed for individuals in the Cause. They had been victimized by despotism and tragedy. On behalf of this organization, Adams encouraged and edified fellow-patriot John Wilkes, in the Fall of 1769: "That you may be soon fully restored to your liberty, your family, your friends, your Country, and to the world; and enjoy all imaginable prosperity, is the ardent wish and fervent prayer of the

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 365.

<sup>6</sup>John Adams, The Hague, to Cotton Tufts, ? August 1782, *AFC: Vol. 4*, 369.

<sup>7</sup>Concern for those who are sick (Epaphroditus) in the Church was evidenced in Philippians 2:25-30.

<sup>8</sup>John Adams, Amsterdam, to Abigail Adams, 22 March 1782, *AFC: Vol. 4*, 300.

Friends of Liberty in Boston."<sup>9</sup> Christianity's influence on matters of State, supported here by Adams' letters and prayers, finds representation in Scripture: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."<sup>10</sup> Adams, aware of this standard, supported prayer for private matters as well as those of public capacity; such as the Cause of Liberty.

With zeal for his fellow citizens and in the midst of a siege, Adams shared his concern with Abigail: "Our Hearts bleed for the poor People of Boston."<sup>11</sup> At the mercy of the British and in a hopeless situation, Adams confessed: "What will, or can be done for them I cant conceive. God preserve them."<sup>12</sup> The desperation of this cry to God is a common occurrence in Adams' life and writings. He concluded with prayerful statements for the Bostonians in May 1775: "God grant that the Furnace of Affliction may refine them. God grant that they may be relieved from their present Distress."<sup>13</sup>

In a prayer for General Horatio Gates, Adams writes "I pray God to prosper you in Canada, and grant you a plentiful Crop of Laurels."<sup>14</sup> This final gesture implored God's blessing for Gates on the eve of his negotiations and subsequent fighting in Canada. This

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<sup>9</sup>Committee of the Boston Sons of Liberty, Boston, to John Wilkes, 4 November 1769, found in Robert J. Taylor, ed., *Papers of John Adams: Vol. 1, September 1755-October 1773*, The Adams Papers, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1977), 235.

<sup>10</sup>First Peter 5:7.

<sup>11</sup>John Adams, Hartford, to Abigail Adams, 2 May 1775, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 191.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, 192.

<sup>14</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Horatio Gates, 18 June 1776, found in Robert J. Taylor, ed. *Papers of John Adams: Vol. 4, February-August 1776*, The Adams Papers, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1979), 320.

mission particularly interested him as he sent a fellow lawyer and friend to join Gates on his journey North.<sup>15</sup>

Adams believed prayer was vital to the Cause of Liberty; though he recognized a lack of zeal among many patriots concerning its practical application. His reference to "long Suffering" and "small souls" distinguished patriots in the following letter to Samuel Freeman from Philadelphia: "I hope you will hear of something done before long. We have been insulted long enough. We have borne even to long Suffering. If something is not done Soon I shall think Americans have very small souls."<sup>16</sup> Prayer's importance was stressed; noting a lack of prayer produced ill results, and effectual prayer resulted in many blessings. Prayer and praise came after news greatly rejoicing the arrival of 2000 men dispatched to Rhode Island to fend off the "Nest of Vermin"<sup>17</sup> who had terrorized the area of Newport. Adams awaited the tidings of victory.

### *Heathen Prayer*

In Adams' life there were moments when his faith seemed to stray. The following letter to Edmund Jenings from Nantes in 1779, included a "heathen Prayer...learned in my early youth" that he stated "has often in the Course of Life been of service to me."<sup>18</sup> Considered a weak moment in his faith, by the writer, the depression stemmed from the certainty that he would remain in France indefinitely:

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<sup>15</sup>Rice was the name of this former law employee and friend of the Adams family.

<sup>16</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Samuel Freeman, 6 May 1777, *PJA*: Vol. 5, 178.

<sup>17</sup>Reference to the British Army.

<sup>18</sup>John Adams, Nantes, to Edmund Jenings, 29 April 1779, *PJA*: Vol. 8, 52.

"Parent of Nature! Master of the World  
Wher'eer thy Providence directs, behold  
My steps with chearfull Resignation turn  
Fate leads the willing, drags the backward on.  
Why should I grieve, when grieving I must bear  
and take with Guilt, what guiltless I <might>  
<must> might share?"<sup>19</sup>

However, even this prayer produced by a pagan's pen, mentions "Providence" as the One who guides and oversees even "Fate." Adams does not fail to recollect whom Providence remains to be: "Master of the World" and "Parent of Nature." Both of these titles point back to the Cause of all the universe's existence, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### *Conclusion*

Adams believed that prayer is the greatest service man can do on behalf of himself and others. His countless references to prayer should convince the gainsayers that he was a "born again" believer and not a Deist. Why would a Deist pray when his prayers obviously go unanswered; because he believes in an impersonal God who does not interact with His creation? Adams' own admission, of the power and value of prayer, conclusively demonstrates that his faith in God is more than an intellectual exercise built around the false belief system of Deism; or any other man-made religion.

### **Search The Scriptures**

In addition to prayer, Adams referred often to the Scriptures. Searching through his copious written works, it becomes an indisputable fact that he was an avid student of

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.



the word of God. Throughout his lifetime he read, meditated on, and memorized the Scriptures with the fervency of a biblical scholar. He understood the maxim that to understand God was to understand His word.

### *Love of the Word*

Adams emphatically quoted the Scriptures throughout his writings to family, friends, and in his diary. His earliest entries reference daily reading and meditation on Scripture, including previous passages critiqued by preachers.

In his diary entry from 10 June 1753, he wrote: "Heard Mr. Appleton expound those words in I Cor. 12 Chapt. 7 first verses, and in the afternoon heard him preach from those words in 26 of Matthew 41 verse, watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation."<sup>20</sup>

On 24 June he continued: "heard Mr. Cotton of New-town vociferate from the 19. of Proverbs 2nd verse. In the afternoon, from those words in the 37th Psalm and 4th. verse, Delight thyself in the Lord and he shall give thee thy Desires."<sup>21</sup>

From Philadelphia in 1775, he writes: "This Day, I have heard my Parish Priest, Mr. Duffill from 2. Chron. 15. 1. 2. This Gentleman never fails to adapt his Discourse to the Times..... You may well suppose that this Language was exceedingly pleasing to me."<sup>22</sup> Adams makes these statements concerning the way that the Lord blessed Israel

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<sup>20</sup>John Adams, Sunday 10 June 1753, found in L.H. Butterfield, ed. *The Earliest Diary of John Adams: June 1753-April 1754, September 1758-January 1759*, The Adams Papers, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1966), 43.

<sup>21</sup>John Adams, Sunday 24 June 1753, *Earliest Diary*, 47.

when they sought Him; and when they did not He would forsake them. He believed it was necessary, for the cause of liberty, that Americans seek the Lord with all of their might and that they practice "Piety and Virtue."<sup>23</sup> Adams rejoiced in God's word whenever it called men to live pure lives. He realized that this would lead to blessing and edification.

Referring to a sermon by Mr. Duffield, whom he thought closely resembled "New England Clergy" (in a good sense,) Adams writes to Abigail:

"America was the Wilderness and the Solitary Place, and he said it would be glad, rejoice, and blossom as the Rose. He laboured to strengthen the weak Hands, and confirm the feeble Knees. He said to them that were of a fearful Heart, be strong, fear not: behold your God will come with Vengeance, even God with a Recompense will come and save you. No Lyon shall be there, nor any ravenous Beast shall go up thereon, but the redeemed shall walk there."<sup>24</sup>

Adams believed that the reference to Isaiah 35 prophetically referred to America- as Duffield recounted it. As his theological position unravels, Adams' writings portray America as an identifiable embodiment of spiritual Israel. He, along with theologians of the times, believed America to be a remnant capable of receiving salvation if they would repent and turn from their wicked ways. Adams' passion for the Scriptures heralded this theme.

Writing to Abigail in 1776 Adams recalled another meeting where he heard Mr. Duffield from Jeremiah 2:17. "Hast thou not procured this unto thy self, in that thou hast

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<sup>22</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 30 July 1775, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 268.

<sup>23</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 30 July 1775, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 268.

<sup>24</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 11 June 1775, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 215.

forsaken the Lord thy God, when he led thee by the Way?--He prayed very earnestly for Boston and New York, supposing the latter to be in Danger of Destruction."<sup>25</sup> Adams knew the Scriptures would prove the American cause whether it meant their victory or their destruction. He saw the necessity of expounding Scripture that would serve to purify the cause of liberty and eliminate the sins that so easily beset many of the cities at the time.

In 1777, to save his reader time, Adams quoted a whole passage from 2 Kings 6:21-23 in a letter to James Lovell:

"In Exchange for your Hessian Psalm, I must give you Mr. Howards Text, the Sunday after the News arrived of the Convention of Sarratoga. 'And the King of Israel said unto Elisha when he Saw them, My Father, shall I smite them? shall I Smite them? and he answered thou shalt not Smite them: wouldst thou Smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy Sword, and with thy Bow? Sett Bread and Water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their Master. And he prepared great Provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away and they went to their Master: So the Bands of Siria came no more into the Land of Israel.'"<sup>26</sup>

Illustrating amplified knowledge of the Scriptures, Adams expounds the drama of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, as viewed previously in a waxwork.<sup>27</sup> He described it in a letter to his wife:

"The Prodigal is prostrate on his Knees, before his Father, whose Joy, and Grief, and Compassion all appear in his Eyes and Face, struggling with each other. A servant Maid, at the Fathers command, is pulling down from a Closet shelf, the choicest Robes, to cloath the Prodigal, who is all in Rags. At an outward Door, in a Corner of the Room stands the elder

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<sup>25</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 11 February 1776, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 345.

<sup>26</sup>John Adams, Braintree, to James Lovell, 6 December 1777, *PJA: Vol. 5*, 348.

<sup>27</sup>Observed by Adams in a waxwork by a Mrs. Wright in 1777.

Brother, chagrined at this Festivity, a Servant coaxing him to come in. A large Number of Guests, are placed around the room."<sup>28</sup>

*Illustrative Commentary from the Word*

Not only did Adams love to read the word of God but he loved to write about it. He had a natural flair for applying the Scriptures to his circumstances. Writing in the *Boston Gazette*; promoting liberty of conscience and freedom of speech and press; Adams reflected on the Sermon on the Mount, using the pseudonym "U": "The divine Author of our religion has taught us, that trivial provocations are to be over look'd; and that if a man should offer you an insult by boxing one Ear rather than indulge a furious passion, and return blow for blow, you ought even to turn the other also."<sup>29</sup> Here Adams correctly interprets what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 5:39 and then concludes with his own interpretation and application.

"This expression however, tho' it inculcates strongly the duty of moderation and self-government upon sudden provocations, imports nothing against the right of resistance or of self-defense. The sense of it seems to be no more than this: that little injuries and insults ought to be born patiently for the present rather than run the risque of violent consequences by retaliation."<sup>30</sup>

Adams applied this passage's intent to his own struggle-the cause of freedom in America. In his mind, accepting a certain degree of abuse, or persecution, for the sake of peace was acceptable-and even one's responsibility; but not exhaustively to the exclusion of "self-defense" or defense of property.

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<sup>28</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 10 May 1777, *AFC: Vol. 2*, 235.

<sup>29</sup>"U", to *Boston Gazette*, 5 September 1763, *PJA: Vol. 1*, 84.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

Writing to John Trumball, Adams applied Scripture with an illustration from the life of Samson.<sup>31</sup> In a final act to avenge himself, Samson destroys himself along with his enemy, the Philistines:

"Human Nature seems to be employed like Sampson, taking Hold of the Pillars of Tyranny and pulling down the whole building at a <Time> at a -- Lunge I believe is the best Word. I hope it will not, like him bury itself in the Ruins, but build up the wisest and most durable Frames for securing its Happiness. But Time must determine."<sup>32</sup>

Adams feared the Colonists would not only destroy the British, but would themselves be destroyed. He desired that they not follow the poor example of Samson; but retain their good attributes, not reducing themselves to the ways of their enemies.

Concerning the government in Maryland, Adams writes in 1777 to James Warren:

"The last Week, compleated their new Government chose Mr. Johnson Governor, chose a new privy Council to the Governor, every Man of whom is an honest Whigg and also chose a new Delegation in Congress, every Man of whom is equally Stanch, leaving out all who have been Suspected of Trimming, or of hankering after the Leeks of Egypt."<sup>33</sup>

Adams rightly concluded that those Americans who would be weak-minded, as the Israelites chronicled in Numbers 11:5, are not worthy of holding office or positions of responsibility in the government. He correctly observed that those who recoiled to Egypt (in context, Great Britain,) would scarcely be able to serve the cause of liberty; and would spoil the efforts of religious freedom.

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<sup>31</sup>Judges 16.

<sup>32</sup>John Adams, to John Trumball, 5 November 1775, *PJA*: Vol. 3, 279.

<sup>33</sup>John Adams, Baltimore, to James Warren, 17 February 1777, *PJA*: Vol. 5, 87.

## *Conclusion*

The Scriptures were invaluable to the Cause of Liberty as evidenced by the letters sent to family and friends. Adams understood the challenge of Christ to "search the Scriptures"<sup>34</sup> and he knew the fruit it could produce in the lives of believers, either Whiggs or Tories. On a personal note, it's study would help Adams work out his own salvation "with fear and trembling," the same challenge Philippian believers received from the Apostle Paul during his imprisonment at Rome.<sup>35</sup>

## **Fasting**

In addition to exhaustive study of Scriptures, Adams fasted regularly with reverence. This same requirement was given to Anna the prophetess, in Acts chapter Two, who was to serve "God with fastings and prayers night and day." Her successful demonstration of discernment reminded Adams that fasting was a valid part of the sanctification process. It was a help in understanding Scripture and enhanced a healthy prayer life. It was not simply an extraneous exercise in futility.

Adams mentioned fasting and admonished not only on individuals to fast; but the entire United colonies, and the future United States. This practice was a means of recalling the kind Providence that had blessed them on an individual and national scale.

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<sup>34</sup>John 5:39.

<sup>35</sup>Philippians 2:12.

### *A Personal Call to Fast*

On several occasions Adams mentioned fasting as a means of accomplishing the goals in which he strongly believed. Today, this practice has utterly faded away in churches across the United States. However, during the War for Independence, it was considered a patriotic responsibility by many church members.

In a letter to James Warren from Braintree, Adams called for fasting on the part of Americans: "We must fast a[nd pray, learn to] bear and forbear. We must [have that charity which] suffereth long and is kind, which be[areth all things and] hopeth all things."<sup>36</sup> As Christians and Americans, Adams believed fasting to be the responsibility of all who wished to demonstrate a love for God and the cause of liberty. There would be no lack of zeal with him in this particular practice. The sacrifices to be made, long-suffering and the bearing of burdens, were apparent to Adams. He always underscored these convictions with the Scriptures.

### *A Public Call to Fast*

"We have appointed a continental Fast. Millions will be upon their Knees at once before their great Creator, imploring his Forgiveness and Blessing, his Smiles on American Councils and Arms."<sup>37</sup> This letter validates Adams' belief that the enemy was so strong against their cause, that only through "fortitude, vigour, and perseverance" could they hope for deliverance from death at the hands of the British. The fast would

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<sup>36</sup>John Adams, Braintree, to John Trumball, Plymouth, 25 July 1774, *PJA: Vol. 2*, 115.

<sup>37</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 11 June 1775, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 216.

create a climate that would induce Christians and patriots to turn to God for help and repentance. The purpose was to implore His Mercy, so victory over their spiritual and physical enemies would occur.

The Draft Resolution appointing this Fast-Day is not written by his hand.

However, portions of it underlined by him and the full manuscript retained in his *Papers*, reinforces his support and recognition of this day.

"Resolved that it be and hereby it is recommended to the Inhabitants of the united Colonies in America of all Denominations That Thursday the 20th day of July next be set apart as a day of public humiliation fasting and prayer, that a total Abstinence from servile labor and recreation be observed and all their religious Assemblies solemnly convened to humble themselves before God under the heavy Judgments felt and threatened, to confess <those manifold> our manifold sins <that have brought them upon us,> to implore the forgiveness of Heaven, <that a sincere repentance and reformation may influence our future Conduct, that the> and that a Blessing <of Heaven> may descend on the husbandry, Manufacturers and other lawful Employments of this people and especially that the Union of these American Colonies in defense of their Just Rights and priviledges <(for which hitherto we thank God)>may be preserved, confirmed and prospered, that the<Continental and Provisional> Congress may be inspired with Wisdom and <prudence> Concord <and firmness,> that Great Britain and its Rulers may have their eyes opened to discern the things that shall make for the peace and Happiness of the Nation and of her many Grievances, the restoration of her invaded Liberties, a reconciliation with the parent State upon terms Constitutional and Honourable to them both and the Security of them to the latest posterity."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Draft Resolution Appointing a Fast-Day, [ante 12] June 1775, found in Taylor, Robert J., ed. *Papers of John Adams: Vol. 3, May 1775-January 1776*, The Adams Papers, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1979), 9-10. (also see JCC, 2:87-88)



The results of this particular fast were apparent in Adams joyous letter to his wife on 23 July 1775:

"The Fast was observed here with a Decorum and solemnity, never before seen ever on a Sabbath. The Clergy of all Denominations, here preach [...] Politicks and War in a manner that I never heard in N. England. They are a Flame of Fire. It is astonishing to me, that the People are so cool here. Such sermons in our Country would have a much greater Effect."<sup>39</sup>

The Fast-Day seemed to stir up emotion even from the pulpits of these various denominations; though the laity seemed not as stirred up as Adams would perhaps have liked to have seen them.

In February of 1777 Adams mentions in a letter another Fast-Day proclaimed in Baltimore:

"This Day has been observed in this Place, with exemplary Decency and Solemnity, in Consequence of an Appointment of the Government, in Observance of a Recommendation of Congress, as a Day of Fasting. I went to the Presbyterian Meeting and heard Mr. Allison deliver a most pathetic and animating, as well as pious, patriotic and elegant Discourse. I have seldom been better pleased or more affected with a sermon."<sup>40</sup>

The fasting that Adams promoted stirred up emotion, repentance, and patriotism in the churches and communities throughout America. Apparently, the strong advocacy of this practice was prosperous for liberty and for personal edification. Adams' faith grew and God's Plan prospered through these Fast-Days.

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<sup>39</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 23 July 1775, *Familiar Letters*, 84.

<sup>40</sup>John Adams, Baltimore, to Abigail Adams, 3 February 1777, *AFC: Vol. 2*, 152.

## **Conclusion**

The faith and convictions evidenced by John Adams, in this chapter, underscored facts demonstrated by his writings and actions. Adams prays for himself and his family, but also for the nation and his enemies. His dedication to the Scriptures benefited his own private devotion and the edification of friends and patriots at large. His call to fasting was very personal; yet, it encompassed the whole citizenry of the United States in different situations and at different times.

John Adams was not a man with a dead faith. He was not a man who believed only in an impersonal God oblivious to his struggles. He grasped a living faith assembled on truth. This solid faith in Jesus Christ, molded his character and inspired him to live a virtuous life. He encouraged that same virtue and character in his children, family, friends and associates throughout his life.

## CHAPTER 3

### VIRTUE AND CHARACTER

Throughout his lifetime, Adams pursued virtue and character as recognizable gems to be rewarded and praised. This was Adams' simple faith put into practice. It was his "do all to the glory of God" sermon. Adams shared his assertions on these gems and consistently affiliated them with the cause of liberty.

#### **A Life of Virtue**

##### *Virtue Defined*

Writing to Elbridge Gerry, Adams partially defined virtue using the example given by Mr. Lovell: "In him We shall find a Man of Spirit, Fortitude, and Patience, three Virtues the most Usefull of any in these Times."<sup>1</sup> Adams here identified three Biblically-based attributes, and noted that because of these virtues, his friend Lovell had "taste, sense, and learning."<sup>2</sup> He equated these characteristics as by-products of virtuous living.

From Passy, in 1778, Adams wrote to Abigail about the strength of virtue; that it was not dependent nor the conjunction between what many, even today, refer to as prosperity religion. "Your Reflections upon the Rewards of the Virtuous Friends of the

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<sup>1</sup>John Adams, Boston, to Elbridge Gerry, 31 December 1776, *PJA: Vol. 5*, 56.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

public are very just. But if Virtue was to be rewarded with Wealth it would not be virtue. If Virtue was to be rewarded with Fame, it would not be Virtue of the sublimest Kind."<sup>3</sup>

Virtue, in essence, defined by Adams was moral excellence embracing Biblical doctrines as they ought to be lived out in the Christian life.

### *Virtue Classified*

Adams classified virtue in writing William Hooper in 1776: "I hold the Principle of Honour, a Sacred-but am not ashamed to confess myself So much of a Grecian, or Roman, if not of a Christian as to think the Principle of Virtue of higher Rank in the Scale of moral Excellence, than Honour."<sup>4</sup> Adams placed the importance of virtue above honor in moral excellence. He agreed with the Divines, e.g., the ministers of the Gospel: "Divines, Moralists, Philosophers, and Men of Pleasure all agree that it consists in Virtue."<sup>5</sup>

### *Virtuous Fruit*

From Amsterdam, to Abigail in 1780, Adams writes about the fruit (or product) of virtue as demonstrated in the lives of the people living in Amsterdam and Holland. "The Frugality, Industry, Cleanliness, &c. here, deserve the Imitation of my countrymen. The

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<sup>3</sup>John Adams, Passy, to Abigail Adams, 2 December 1778, *AFC: Vol. 3*, 125.

<sup>4</sup>John Adams, to William Hooper, ante 27 March 1776, *PJA: Vol. 4*, 73-4.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid*, 73.

Fruit of these Virtues has been immense Wealth, and great Prosperity. They are not Ambitious, and therefore happy. They are very sociable, in their peculiar Fashion."<sup>6</sup>

Adams promoted virtue as the way of the new government. He recognized it's significance in the preservation of liberty and success. Writing to the Judge Advocate of the Army, William Tudor, Adams stated: "It behoves the Congress, it behoves the Army to shew that nothing but a rigid inflexible Virtue, and a Spotless Purity [of] Character, can preserve or acquire any Employment."<sup>7</sup>

He concluded the letter acknowledging the need to reward those who exhibited this virtue: "Virtue, my young Friend, Virtue alone is or can be the Foundation of our new Governments, and it must be encouraged by Rewards, in every Department civil and military."<sup>8</sup>

### *Virtue Concluded*

Adams placed such importance on virtue that he included reference to it in *Rules for the Regulation of the Navy of the United Colonies* in 1775. He stated in Article I that "Commanders of all ships and vessels....are strictly required to shew in themselves a good example of honor and virtue" and that failure to adhere to such high standards would result in correction and punishments.<sup>9</sup> These rules and regulations, attributed to his hand

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<sup>6</sup>John Adams, Amsterdam, to Abigail Adams, 4 September 1780, *AFC: Vol. 3*, 410.

<sup>7</sup>John Adams, Cambridge, to William Tudor, 14 November 1775, *PJA: Vol. 3*, 295-6.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>"Rules for the Regulation of the Navy of the United Colonies", 28 November-December 1775, *PJA: Vol. 3*, 147.

while serving in the Marine Committee,<sup>10</sup> demonstrate his value for the Word of God and the conduct of His children. He mentions sermon preaching on Sundays and Biblical principles for punishments based primarily on the Ten Commandments. To Adams moral excellence (virtue) was necessary in every avenue of life. Without it, one should only expect failure and the absence of truth, justice and success.

In writing *Thoughts on Government*, Adams summarized his doctrinal stance on virtue: "All sober inquiries after truth, ancient and modern, Pagan and Christian, have declared that the happiness of man, as well as his dignity consists in virtue."<sup>11</sup>

Virtue was a necessary outworking of Adams' faith in God. He desired not only to be a hearer of the Word, but a doer of the Word also.

### **Character**

*"As a man thinketh in his heart so is he"*

Adams believed in the importance of having a godly character. He evidenced this yearning through practicing Christian morality, integrity, and conscience. His desire was to do right-even if it meant the loss of life, family or country. As a man of character, he held necessarily to separation from worldliness; though the world would laugh and scorn.

About his own character Adams wrote: "We have, indeed the liberty of choosing what character we shall sustain in this great and important drama. But to choose rightly,

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<sup>10</sup>Found in L.H. Butterfield, ed. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams: Vol.3, Diary 1782-1804 Autobiography Part One to October 1776*, The Adams Papers, (Cambridge,Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1961), 350.

<sup>11</sup>"Thoughts on Government", April 1776, Reprinted from *Thoughts on Government*, Boston, 1776 itself reprinted from the Philadelphia edition of 1776, *PJA: Vol. 4*, 86.

we should consider in what character we can do the most service to our fellow-man as well as to ourselves. The man who lives wholly to himself is of less worth than the cattle in his barn."<sup>12</sup>

At times Adams' character was called into question. Writing from L'orient, in June of 1779, Adams shared threats against his character with Arthur Lee: "My own Character at stake from various Quarters, and without any Thing to support me, but Truth and Innocence and you need not be informed that these are not always Sufficient....Upon the whole, Truth must be my shield, and if the shafts of interested Malice, can pierce through this, they shall pierce me."<sup>13</sup> Regardless of the outcome, character and truth were inseparable entities which Adams vowed to uphold; even amidst illustrious, damaging attacks.

### *Morality*

Another area cited by Adams, throughout his writings, was the issue of morality. Adams wrote about its definitive importance in a letter to his wife in 1775. This letter sums up morality's relevance regarding his faith:

"I agree with you in your sentiments that there is Reason to be diffident of a Man who grossly violates the Principles of Morals, in any one particular habitually. This sentiment was conveyed to Us in one of the Paradoxes of the ancient Stoicks, that 'all sins were equal', and the same Idea is suggested from higher Authority, He that violates the Law in any one Instance is guilty of all. I have no confidence in any Man who is not

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<sup>12</sup>John Adams quoted in a letter of April 1, 1756 to Charles Cushing, found in Charles Francis Adams and John Quincy Adams, *John Adams*, Vol. 1, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1871), Reprint from American Statesmen Series, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., (New York: Chelsea House, 1980), 39-40.

<sup>13</sup>John Adams, L'orient, to Arthur Lee, 9 June 1779, *PJA*: Vol. 8, 82.

exact in his Morals. And you know that I look upon Religion as the most perfect System, and the most awfull Sanction of Morality."<sup>14</sup>

### *Integrity*

The Scriptures state "The just man walketh in his integrity."<sup>15</sup> Adams placed a high value on that integrity as demonstrated in a correspondence from Philadelphia April 27, 1777. He writes concerning a story told him by the Commissary General that affirmed his belief that "Integrity was not lost out of the world."<sup>16</sup>

"He [the Commissary General] said that in comparing his Accounts he missed Seventy Pounds and puzzled himself a long Time, to no Purpose to discover, where it could be gone. For several Months he had given it up, as lost and unaccountable. At last Coll Cary of Bridgewater, (of whose military Abilities, I have no Opinion,) came to him and told him, that after he went home from Cambridge where he had commanded a Regiment of Militia, he paid off, every Bill, and had Seventy Pounds left. He recollected that he had received no Money but from the Commissary General, and therefore that he must have received too much. This accounted for the Commissarys Loss. Here was Integrity. If all Americans, were Carys, We should be fit for a Republic. But, how many Carys have We? I am afraid to Say how few I think We have."<sup>17</sup>

### *Conscience*

Adams believed that to follow the dictates of one's conscience was biblical. He evidenced this publicly by his support for the Constitutional precept that government should not compel forced worship within a particular denominational setting. Adams

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<sup>14</sup>John Adams, to Abigail Adams, 18 November 1775, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 327.

<sup>15</sup>Proverbs 20:7.

<sup>16</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, "To Unknown", 27 April 1777, *PJA: Vol. 5*, 163.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid*, 163-4.



privately reinforced this belief with the understanding that conscience was vital in living out the Christian life.

In a letter to Charles Cushing in 1756, Adams used an illustration to demonstrate the importance of conscience.

"Upon common Theatres indeed the applause of the audience is of more importance to the Actors than their own approbation. But upon the Stage of Life, while Conscience Clapps, let the World hiss! On the contrary if Conscience disapproves, the loudest applauses of the World are of little Value. While our own minds commend, we may calmly despise all the Frowns, all the Censure, all the Malignity of men."<sup>18</sup>

Adams commented that real values stood the test of Christian conscience; not compliance to worldly pressures. Man should follow his conscience rather than the proddings of a lost world.

The importance of conscience is amplified in Adams' thoughts in the following statement to Abigail: "Nay whether I stand high or low in the Estimation of the World, so long as I keep a Conscience void of Offense towards God and Man. And thus I am determined by the Will of God, to do, let what will become of me or mine, my Country, or the World."<sup>19</sup>

### **Conclusions on Virtue and Character**

Virtue, as Adams practiced it, was moral excellence valued above worldly treasures. Its product was immense prosperity in tangible goods as well as intangible spiritual blessings. This gem helped to establish the viability of the Constitutional for a

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<sup>18</sup>John Adams, Worcester, to Charles Cushing, 1 April 1756, *PJA: Vol. 1*, 12.

<sup>19</sup>John Adams, York, to Abigail Adams, 1 July 1774, *Familiar Letters*, 7.

good and moral people. Virtue was a substantial influence on Adams' faith as it was worked out.

Morality, integrity, and conscience are the building blocks of character in Adams' mind. These three character traits combined to separate him from wordliness and set him apart for God. These produced actions profitable for a Christian and patriot.

Virtue and character were attributes Adams projected in his public and private life. These qualities were critical to living in this world without acquiescing to sinful lusts. His faith is further demonstrated by virtue and character through interaction with his family, part and parcel of Christ's second command "to love one another."

CHAPTER 4  
SELFLESS FAMILY SERVICE

John Adams was an important part of the founding of the United States and the Cause of Liberty. The scope of this involvement deprived him of important time with his family. The impact of this separation is irreconcilable; however, Adams' commitment to family never lacked demonstration as evidenced by his letters. Writing from France in 1779 Adams shared some of the sacrifice that he and his wife would bare throughout the years. "You and I however must prepare our Minds to enjoy the Prosperity of others not our own. In Poverty and Symplicity, We shall be happy, whenever our Country is so."<sup>1</sup> In this letter Adams shared his hopes for peace but realized the cost to his family.

Though their separation seemed indefinite at times, the importance of family never left Adams' mind. In a letter from Philadelphia in 1777 he writes: "The Loss of Property affects me little. All other hard Things I despize, but the Loss of your Company and that of my dear Babes for so long a Time, I consider as a Loss of so much solid Happiness."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Adams, Passy, to Abigail Adams, 1 January 1779, *AFC: Vol. 3*, 145.

<sup>2</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 8 July 1777, *AFC: Vol. 2*, 277.

Adams' great love for his family continuously appeared throughout many correspondences with Abigail and his children (John Quincy, Charles and Abigail). In these letters: he encouraged them in tragedy and death; he shared desires for the children's well-being; and he wrote advice to them for their future growth and prosperity. It can be said that Adams attempted to model the role of a Christian husband and father; within the constraints of time and place and his vital constitutional role.

### **Tragedies and Comfort**

The Adams' family suffered at least one miscarriage referred to in two letters written from Philadelphia in July and August of 1777. Note Adams' ability to deal with tragedy through his faith. "Devoutly do I return Thanks to God, whose kind Providence has preserved to me a Life that is dearer to me than all other Blessings in this World. Most fervently do I pray, for a Continuance of his Goodness in the compleat Restoration of my best Friend to perfect Health."<sup>3</sup>

Adams also purposed to encourage Abigail. He shared God's Plan that allowed for the tragic loss of life. "Altho I shall be, and am disappointed of a Blessing, which I hoped to enjoy But this is the Result of Wisdom superiour to ours and must be submitted to with chearfull Resignation."<sup>4</sup>

Upon news of his mother-in-law's impending death Adams relays to Abigail: "Our Lives are not in our own Power. It is our Duty to submit.--"The Ways of Heaven are

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<sup>3</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 28 July 1777, *AFC: Vol. 2*, 292.

<sup>4</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 4 August 1777, *AFC: Vol. 2*, 299.

dark and intricate.' Its designs are often inscrutable, But are always wise and just and good."<sup>5</sup>

Once informed of her death, Adams wrote the family: "I mourn the loss of so much purity, and unaffected piety and virtue, to the world....Pray, my dear, cherish in their minds the remembrance of their grandma, and remind them of her precepts and example. God Almighty grant to you and to every branch of the family all the support that you want."<sup>6</sup>

In his attempt to console his own daughter over the loss of her grandmother, Adams wrote on October 20, 1775.

"I console with you, most sincerely, for the loss of your most worthy grandmamma. I know you must be afflicted at this severe stroke. She was an excellent instructress to you, and a bright example of every amiable virtue. Her piety and benevolence; her charity; her prudence, patience, and wisdom, would have been, if it had pleased God to spare her life, an admirable model for you to copy. But she is no more: however, I hope that you will remember a great deal of her advice and be careful to pursue it."<sup>7</sup>

Adams used examples of virtue to console his daughter and to teach her to follow her grandmother's example throughout her life. These and many other techniques Adams used to comfort his family when difficulties came. He believed the Scripture that says: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 7 October 1775, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 295.

<sup>6</sup>John Adams, to Abigail Adams, 13 October 1775, *Familiar Letters*, 109.

<sup>7</sup>John Adams, to Abigail Adams 2d, 20 October 1775, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 304.

<sup>8</sup>Galatians 6:2.

## Desire for Children

"Public Virtues, and political Qualities therefore should be incessantly cherished in our Children."<sup>9</sup> This came from correspondence Adams' sent to Abigail from October of 1775. He responded to the Biblical principle of "train up a child" and was consistently writing his wife towards that end. Again in 1776, with further instructions as to the order of importance for his children's upbringing; he wrote, "Let them revere nothing but Religion, Morality and Liberty."<sup>10</sup>

Adams recited an allegory from mythology and compared it with his desire for his children to pursue right choices and virtuous lives. He wanted them to demonstrate virtue; yet he feared that they were failing. He wanted them to know that he would pray that they would follow the path of virtue.

"Hercules marches here in full View of the Steeps of Virtue on one hand, and the flower Paths of Pleasure on the other-and there are few who make the Choice of Hercules. That my Children may follow his Example, is my earnest Prayer: but I sometimes tremble, when I hear the syren songs of sloth, lest they should be captivated with her bewitching Charms and her soft, insinuating Musick."<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, this allegory was a favorite of Adams throughout his life. He later proposed using it as a theme on the Great Seal of the United States.<sup>12</sup> This behavior suggests his position on the importance of virtue in how own children's lives as well as that of all citizens.

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<sup>9</sup>John Adams, to Abigail Adams, 29 October 1775, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 316-317.

<sup>10</sup>John Adams, to Abigail Adams, 15 April 1776, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 384.

<sup>11</sup>John Adams, Paris, to Abigail Adams, April-May 1780, *AFC: Vol. 3*, 333.

<sup>12</sup>Footnote in L.H. Butterfield and Marc Friedlaender, ed., *AFC: Vol. 3*, 333.

## **Advice to Family**

Adams wrote to his children throughout their lives, offering to them wisdom gleaned from the study of the Word; as well as from his life experiences. Following are excerpts of advice to his three children, Abigail, John Quincy and Charles. Throughout his correspondence with these children, Adams upheld a clear Christian testimony before them and desired the same in their lives. In these letters Adams' applies a strong hope for them to live out their Christian faith in practice.

### *To His Daughter Abigail*

From Ferrol, on 12 December 1779, Adams wrote to his daughter: "I hope your Attention will be fixed chiefly upon those Virtues and Accomplishments, which contribute the most to qualify Women to act their Parts well in the various Relations of Life, those of Daughter, Sister, Wife, Mother, Friend."<sup>13</sup> Note Adams' concern for proper behavior in his daughter. He is not opposed to his daughter learning and achieving greatness; but he desires for her to be attentive to the "useful and essential," as well as the "Arts and accomplishments which are merely ornamental." Adams noticed the frailty of outward manifestations-of what the world holds in esteem, versus those things that are worthy of praise. To Adams, Abigail ought to be known for being admirable and virtuous.

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<sup>13</sup>John Adams, Ferrol, to Abigail Adams 2d, 12 December 1779, *AFC: Vol. 3*, 248.

Writing from The Hague in 1782, Adams states:

"If you have not yet so exalted sentiments of the public good as have others more advanced in life, you must endeavour to obtain them. They are the primary and most essential branch of general benevolence, and therefore the highest honour and happiness both of men and Christians, and the indispensable duty of both."<sup>14</sup>

Adams here speaks of Christianity as the "essential branch of general benevolence" and a "duty" of his daughter.

Note his continued teaching on indifference as a negative and wicked thing.

"Indifference to the happiness of others must arrive from insensibility of heart, or from a selfishness still more contemptible, or rather detestable."<sup>15</sup>

Adams concluded that the cares of this world, the flesh, and materialism profits little. "You will easily see, my dear child, that jewels and lace can go but a very little way in this career."<sup>16</sup>

As a father, Adams was sensitive but not overtly protective. He gave Abigail particular freedoms within the realm of absolute values based on the Christian religion. His letters made it clear what her "indispensible duty" should be; and contrasted it with what would profit her "little or nothing."<sup>17</sup> Adams presented Abigail the truth; lost today but firmly planted in the hearts and minds of Adams and his children.

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<sup>14</sup>John Adams, The Hague, to Abigail Adams 2d, 26 September 1782, *AFC: Vol. 4*, 384.

<sup>15</sup>John Adams, The Hague, to Abigail Adams 2d, 26 September 1782, *AFC: Vol. 4*, 384.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>Allusions to Biblical themes taken from John 6:63 and First Corinthians 13.



### *To His Son Charles*

Adams challenged his son Charles much as he did Abigail. He was not afraid to question his children; nor to prevent them from following their desires, as long as their desires were healthy. In the following excerpt from a letter to Charles in 1777, Adams not only challenged his son, but also praised him for his natural abilities.

"But before you are grown up, I hope this War will be over, and you will have nothing to study but the Arts of Peace. If this should be our happy Lott, pray what Course of Life do you intend to steer? Will you be a Lawyer, a Divine, a Phisician, a Merchant, or what? Something very good and usefull I think you will be, because you have a good Capacity and a good Disposition."<sup>18</sup>

Adams encouraged Charles, to meditate, and most importantly to "pray" about his future employment and goals. He recognized his son's "capacity" and he wanted him to be happy and to have a peaceful life. He employed Biblical themes such as: peace, encouragement, love and hope. By these techniques, Adams encouraged his son in a Christian worldview, to "strengthen thy brethren."<sup>19</sup>

### *To His Son John Quincy*

Adams used similar methods to inspire and strengthen his son John Quincy. In a letter from Philadelphia, Adams writes: "You, my son, whom Heaven has blessed with excellent Parts, will never abuse them to bad Purposes, nor dishonour yourself by any Thing unworthy of you."<sup>20</sup> The challenge to John Quincy bases itself upon Adams'

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<sup>18</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Charles Adams, 17 March 1777, *AFC: Vol. 2*, 180.

<sup>19</sup>Luke 22:32.

<sup>20</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to John Quincy Adams, 8 April 1777, *AFC: Vol. 2*, 204.

thorough understanding of man being made "in the image of God"<sup>21</sup> and having the responsibility to be an image-bearer.<sup>22</sup> This correct understanding would help his son resist many of the worldly pleasures that so often reduced men to acting like wild beasts with their "reprobate" minds.<sup>23</sup>

Adams' love for the Scriptures and learning passed to his son in a letter from 1780: "The Greek Grammar and the Racines I would not have you omit, upon any Consideration, and I hope your Master will soon put you into the Greek Testament, because the most perfect Models of fine Writing in history, Oratory and Poetry are to be found in the Greek Language."<sup>24</sup> Two important ideas become apparent upon reading this excerpt. First, Adams wanted his son to read the New Testament for literary reasons but the benefits would also include spiritual reasons; otherwise he simply could have urged him to read the Greek Classics. Secondly, Adams himself had read extensively in the Greek Testament and this was an affirmation of his own devotion to the Word.

In another letter to John Quincy from Amsterdam, he shared the priority of reading the New Testament over that of other Greek Classics. "The Lectures upon the Greek of the New Testament, I would have you all attend, and those of Euripides, Sophocles, &c. too if you have Time, as it is thought proper."<sup>25</sup> This letter refers to both

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<sup>21</sup>Genesis 1:26.

<sup>22</sup>Information for this doctrinal theme is further advanced in "PART ONE Christian Life View, *All Things Are God's Things*" from the work of James Bramblet, *An Introduction to the Christian School*, (Tacoma, Washington: James M. Bramblet, 1985), 41-58.

<sup>23</sup>Romans 1:28.

<sup>24</sup>John Adams, Paris, to John Quincy Adams, 17 March 1780, *AFC: Vol. 3*, 308.

sons, ("you all"), and demonstrated the superiority of the Bible over secular history. His priority of education was correct for all of his children.

Through valiant efforts, Adams helped his son determine societal priorities. He gave instructions on acceptable amusements; yet added this maxim, to do "all things well as unto the Lord":

"Every Thing in Life should be done with Reflection, and Judgment, even the most insignificant Amusements. They should all be arranged in subordination, to the great Plan of Happiness, and Utility. That you may attend to the this Maxim is the Wish of your affectionate Father."<sup>26</sup>

In a world concentrated on learning, culture and rationalism, Adams made clear what must be truly important to his son-his innocence and his conscience:

"But, my dear Boy, above all Things, preserve your Innocence, and a pure Conscience. Your morals are of more importance, both to yourself and the World than all Languages and all Sciences. The least Stain upon your Character will do more harm to your Happiness than all Accomplishments will do it good."<sup>27</sup>

#### *Final Advice to Family*

As final advice, Adams summarized his philosophy of faith. The following excerpts, written from the Hotel des Etats Unis in 1782, is related to his children for their edification: "Your Morals are worth all the Sciences. Your Conscience is the Minister Plenipotentiary of God almighty in your Breast. See to it, that this Minister never negotiates in vain. Attend to him, in Opposition to all the Courts in the World. So

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<sup>25</sup>John Adams, Amsterdam, to John Quincy Adams, 20 December 1780, *AFC: Vol. 4*, 39.

<sup>26</sup>John Adams, Amsterdam, to John Quincy Adams, 28 December 1780, *AFC: Vol. 4*, 56.

<sup>27</sup>John Adams, Amsterdam, to John Quincy Adams, 28 April 1782, *AFC: Vol. 4*, 317.

charges, your affectionate Father."<sup>28</sup> Adams had a thorough understanding of the conscience in convicting men of sin. His desire for his children, specifically for John Quincy, was to plainly compel them to listen to what God gave him to act as a personal minister-the Holy Spirit. Adams may have alluded here to the work of the Holy Spirit as it states in Holy Scripture: "he [the Holy Spirit] will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."<sup>29</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The importance of personal faith in Christ is a resounding theme throughout Adams' writings to his family. This theme, perhaps more than any other, is telling of Adams' own private faith. Not only did Adams believe he ought to work out his own salvation; but he believed that he had a God-given responsibility to help his family members follow a similar course. The allusions to virtue, character, personal sacrifice, piety, study of Scripture, and devotion to prayer, all add up to faith based upon dying to self and living for others through Christ. Adams truly believed the Biblical principle presented by Jesus Christ: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."<sup>30</sup>

When viewed in light of personal devotion to family, virtue and character, devotion to prayer, fasting, Scripture, and views of God, the sincerity of Adams' faith is

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<sup>28</sup>John Adams, Hotel des Etats Unis, a la Haye, to John Quincy Adams, 13 May 1782, *AFC: Vol. 4*, 323.

<sup>29</sup>John 16:8.

<sup>30</sup>Matthew 25:40.

articulated. Complete understanding of Adams' faith, however, necessitates discussion of Adams' view and role concerning the life of the Church; as it impacted his faith in both public and private practice.

## CHAPTER 5

### PREACHERS, MINISTERS AND DIVINES

Adams himself nearly became a preacher except for some trying issues within the ministry and some doctrinal points that he was unable to reconcile, he undoubtedly would have pursued this life course. His thorough knowledge of the Scriptures and his love for Christianity and his country, persuaded Adams to occasionally write to newspapers and friends about the Church and its preachers. Discussions of pastoral responsibilities and abuses pervaded his writings and gave a measure of his personal testimony and faith.

#### **Scholars, Idiots, Contrasts and Problems**

Adams sensed a lack of scholarship among the laity of his community. Their rejection of sincere teaching by one preacher, who was Arminian-and in Adams' mind quite scholarly, prompted a letter to Charles Cushing: "As far as I can observe, people are not disposed to inquire for piety, integrity, good sense or learning in a young preacher, but for stupidity (for so I must call the pretended sanctity of some absolute dunces), irresistible grace and original sin."<sup>1</sup> Adams viewed the people as ignorant of the issues and quick to cast judgments without evidence. The issue does not seem to be Arminianism versus Calvinism in his mind, but scholarship versus ignorance.

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<sup>1</sup>John Adams, Worcester, to Charles Cushing, 19 October 1756, *PJA: Vol. 1*, 21-2.

Writing under the pseudonym "Humphry Ploughjogger" in 1763, Adams recounted Anglican ministers ordained in London, having high wages, fancy wigs, bringing "popery" with forced religion and persecutions. These he contrasted with Congregational ministers of New England:

"but our m----- thinks themselves well off if they can get a toe shirt ot go to Leckshun in, but that is not their sorts for if they ant well pade they cant help it and they ort to be ofr the bible sasy the laburrer is wurthy of his hier and they that prech the Gospel should live by the Gospel, but Ime dredful afrade that now there is so many of these minsturs here that they will try to bring in popiree among us and then the pritandur will come and we shal all be made slaves on."<sup>2</sup>

In June of the same year Adams clearly evidenced his faith and described more of the problems related to the ministry of his day:

"For it would be strange, if we ina land of light were not as good as Heathens, and I've seen it in a sermon book, that they worshipt, even arter he was dead, that man that taut um how to use Grapes, and tother too that taut um how to sow corn and such like. These Pagans were fools to worship um, tho it showsthat they lov'd and honour'd the man that did um good, which we Chrischans dont always do, tho I hope most of us should.- Sum of our ministers say that none of thes heathens are sav'd, which I can't hardly beleeve."<sup>3</sup>

Adams' writing is satire and political as well as religious. In the letter he mentioned "King Solomon, Cedar of Lebanon," and "Hyssop" terms specifically recounted from the Bible.<sup>4</sup> He attempted, in the letter, to address agricultural reforms but also confessed that he was a Christian. He presented the need of being thankful and

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<sup>2</sup>Humphry Ploughjogger, Boston, to *Boston Gazette*, 3 March 1763, *PJA: Vol. 1*, 62.

<sup>3</sup>Humphry Ploughjogger, to *Boston Gazette*, 20 June 1763, *PJA: Vol. 1*, 65.

<sup>4</sup>References to Solomon's desire and call to build a house for the Lord from First Kings 4:33-5:6.

questioned what preachers of the day were preaching. It is a treatise of various attacks and claims regarding the utterly ashamed state of conditions; at least in Massachusetts.

Confusing lines of demarcation dramatized pulpits of America in 1774, as preachers vied for political position between Whigs and Tories. Adams believed the preachers were scandalous in their actions and writes: "The ministerial News Papers have swarmed with as numerous and as malicious Libels as the (Whiggs) antiministerial ones."<sup>5</sup>

### **Minister or Statesman**

The force of political persuasion constrained Adams to consider the issue of ministers acting as statesmen within the Continental Congress. It seemed wise to have devout men involved in the governing process; yet, issues of organized state religion further advanced with representation from specific denominational clergymen. Also, the issue of experience in governing matters was a possible area of ignorance for the minister; as he would not be familiar with the ways of governing in the midst of politicians.

In the following quotations Adams' opinion stating why clergy endangered Congress, finds verification upon a "Clergyman of the independant Perswasion who has a Parish,"<sup>6</sup> one Dr. Zubly of Georgia. He writes Abigail: "He is a Man of Zeal and Spirit, as We have already seen upon several occassions."<sup>7</sup> This statement lends excellent

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<sup>5</sup>John Adams, Falmouth, to Abigail Adams, 6 July 1774, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 127.

<sup>6</sup>John Adams, Philadelphia, to Abigail Adams, 17 September 1775, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 280.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*



review of his spiritual qualification for office; however, he follows up with the questionable issues:

"However, as he is the first Gentleman of the Cloth who has appeared in Congress, I can not but wish he may be the last. Mixing the sacred Character, with that of the Statesman, as it is quite unnecessary at this Time of day, in these Colonies, is not attended with any good Effects. The Clergy are universally too little acquainted with the World, and the Modes of Business, to engage in civil affairs with any Advantage. Besides those of them, who are really Men of Learning, have conversed with Books so much more than Men, as to be too much loaded with Vanity, to be good Politicians."<sup>8</sup>

Secular and pseudo-Christian historians would argue that, by his disavowal of ministers in the Congress, Adams here authenticated the issue of "separation between Church and State."<sup>9</sup> Upheld only by ignorant promoters of revisionist history, the argument fails the test of time and scholarship. The issue is one of practical experience versus inexperience. Adams did not support the idea of excluding Christianity from government. His only prescription was that individual Liberty and freedom of conscience be allowed. There was no law established that prevented ministerial participation in the Congress. Adams only shared his personal views with his wife, they were not incorporated into written Laws of the Land.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid, 281.

<sup>9</sup>Misrepresented quote from President Jefferson's reply to Danbury Baptists on January 1, 1802. Found in David Barton, *Original Intent: The Courts, The Constitution, and Religion*, 2nd Edition, 1st Printing, (Aledo, Texas: WallBuilder Press, 1997), 45-46.

## What Ought the Pulpit Preach

Another problem, which many preachers had rationalized, was the removal of the teaching of the doctrine of sin. It was excluded from the pulpit preaching, as part and parcel of the Gospel message:

"I dont like his advice to leeve off studying the decrees, and original sin.-for tho I cant hardly beleeve, that heathens and infants are all lost, for Adams first transgreshon, yet them doctrines are great misterees, that we ought to pry into, as far as the word can guide us.-I do declare I would not leeve off reeding Mr. Willard, Mr. Edwards, and Mr. Taylor, and Dr. Whitby about them points, for all my knowledge in farming, added to Mr. U's knowledge too."<sup>10</sup>

In the previous quotation Adams does not fully understand the doctrine as evidenced by his correspondence in the *Boston Evening-Post*. However, he never supported removal of its teaching; concluding that the implications and points of the doctrine were beyond the realm of human reasoning. Adams confirmed that rationalism, in the church, had no right to remove it's teaching.

In 1765, Adams wrote, *A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*, a dissertation about the history and struggle of Christianity. In the following quote he mentions what he believed to be proper resoundings from the pulpits of America:

"Let us hear the danger of thraldom to our consciences, from ignorance, extream poverty and dependance, in short from civil and political slavery. Let us see delineated before us, the true map of man. Let us hear the dignity of his nature, and the noble rank he holds among the works of God! that consenting to slavery is a sacriligious breach of trust, as offensive in the sight of God, as it is derogatory from our own honor or interest or happiness; and that God almighty has promulgated from heaven, liberty, peace, and good-will to man!"<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Humphrey Ploughjogger, to *Boston Evening-Post*, 5 September 1763, *PJA: Vol. 1*, 91.

## Recollections of Good Preachers

Adams went to several churches throughout his travels. He recounted in his writings several visits to various denominations, even Catholic, while traveling throughout the Colonies and Europe. One of the more spectacular recollections he made to his wife is one about a Mr. Moody from the town of York.<sup>12</sup> In the letter Adams mentions the many attributes which people adored about Mr. Moody. These are reflective of Adams' own feelings about a good preacher:

"In the first Place he settled in the Place without any Contract. His professed Principle was that no Man should be hired to preach the Gospell, but that the Minister should depend upon the Charity, Generosity, and Benevolence of the People.

In the next Place, he acquired the Character of firm Trust in Providence. A Number of Gentlemen came in one day, when they had nothing in the House. His wife was very anxious, they say, and asked him what they should do? 'Oh, never fear, trust Providence, make a fire in the oven, and you will have something.' Very soon a Variety of every Thing that was good was sent in, and by one O Clock they had a Splendid Dinner.

He had also the Reputation of enjoying intimate Communications with the Deity, and of having a great Interest in the Court of Heaven by his Prayers.

But the best story I have heard Yet, was his Doctrine in a Sermon from this Text-Lord what shall We do? The Doctrine was, That when a Person or People are in a state of Perplexity, and know not what to do, they ought never to do they know not what?

He brought his People into a remarkable Submission and Subjection to their Spiritual Rulers, which continues to this Day."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>"A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law," No.4, Monday, 21 October 1765, Reprinted from the *Boston Gazette, PJA: Vol. 1*, 126.

<sup>12</sup>Probably a reference to York, Maine. Further clarification can be found in *Diary and Autobiography Vol. 4*, 260.

<sup>13</sup>John Adams, York, to Abigail Adams, 30 June 1774, *AFC: Vol. 1*, 115-116.

In a selection, published in the *Boston Gazette*, entitled *To the Inhabitants of the Colony of Massachusetts-Bay*, Adams wrote an emotionally charged defense of another preacher, Dr. Mayhew, to whom he was thoroughly devoted:

"Dr. Mayhew was a Whig of the first magnitude, a clergyman equalled by a very few of any denomination in piety, virtue, genius or learning, whose works will maintain his character, as long as New-England shall be free, integrity esteemed, or wit, spirit, humour, or reason and knowledge admired. How was he treated by the press? Did not the Reverend Tories who were pleased to write against him, the Missionaries of Defamation as well as Bigotry and passive obedience, in their pamphlets, and newspapers, bespatter him all over with their filth? With equal falshood and malice charge him with every evil thing?"<sup>14</sup>

Impressed with Mayhew's solid Christian testimony, Adams also revered the patriotic tendencies here accentuated.

### **Conclusions on the Clergy**

Adams was well acquainted with most of the clergymen in New England. He knew their weaknesses and strengths, as well as their pronouncements of good and bad religious platitudes. He was not fearful of challenging or defending them should the need arise. He assumed an active role in raising up good pastors and leading the charge for dismissal of those heralded as bigots, heretics and weak on patriotism.

Adams believed that lack of sincerity by ministers was a flaw which would uproot the Cause of Liberty and discredit those who desired to have as their standard, "liberty of conscience." His thorough understanding, of ministers within the Christian denominations, came only after a personal study of the Scriptures and reflections upon its

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<sup>14</sup>Taken from "Novanglus Letters" published in the *Boston Gazette*, 6 February 1775, *PJA: Vol. 2*, 243.

precepts. He was deeply aware of the shortcomings that disallowed him from becoming a minister. Perhaps, this awareness enabled him to grasp the rampant misconduct evidenced by so many "Missionaries of Defamation."<sup>15</sup>

Testimony or lack thereof, on the part of many ministers, strengthened the faith of John Adams. Throughout his writings he recounted wonderful stories of their sermons, illustrations, and character traits. Adams was in the pew often. He lived out his Scriptural credo of "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is,"<sup>16</sup> even during ocean voyages and while traveling in foreign lands.

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<sup>15</sup>Taken from "Novanglus Letters" published in the *Boston Gazette*, 6 February 1775, *PJA: Vol. 2*, 243.

<sup>16</sup>Hebrews 10:25.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### **The Substance of Things Hoped For**

John Adams is a man often forgotten in today's revisionist history. His Presidency comes between two men more highly publicized and recognized than he, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Due to his exhaustive correspondence with Jefferson, critics often classify Adams as a Deist or a skeptic. Scholars rarely represent Adams as a born-again believer in Jesus Christ. Recognized as well-nigh of entering the ministry,<sup>1</sup> Adams' questions and knowledge of apparent hypocrisy among certain ministers, prevented him from following that course. To that end we owe a debt of gratitude to God. Adams led the founding of the United States of America with a spiritual passion that undoubtedly brought patriots, family members and friends to a saving knowledge of Christ and conversion to Christianity. He led by example and testimony.

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<sup>1</sup>Secular and many Christian historians believe he did not enter the ministry due to a lack of belief in true Christianity in its fulness. This belief is not substantiated by his writings according to this writer.

## Witness to Jefferson

One incident particularly demonstrates Adams faith; based on a fellow patriot's statement about his character:

"There is not upon this earth a more perfectly honest man than John Adams. Concealment is no part of his character; of that he is utterly incapable. It is not in his nature to meditate anything that he would not publish to the world. The measures of the general government are a fair subject for difference of opinion, but do not found your opinions on the notion that there is the smallest spice of dishonesty, moral or political, in the character of John Adams; for I know him well, and I repeat that a man more perfectly honest never issued from the hands of his Creator."<sup>2</sup>

This quotation by Thomas Jefferson, stated in the midst of a "heated campaign noted for much name-calling and mud-slinging,"<sup>3</sup> demonstrates a deep respect along with acknowledgment of an anchored friendship.

However, to view Jefferson and Adams as coming from the same religious perspective is foolishness. Though they admired one another, and were considered friends at different times throughout their lives, it is clear from correspondence that they hold different views about God. A letter from 14 September 1813 clearly demonstrates this truth: "No prophecies, no miracles are necessary to prove the celestial communication. This revelation had made it certain that two and one make three, and that one is not three nor can three be one."<sup>4</sup> Adams attempts to show Jefferson the truth that there are absolutes. There are two reservations about these statements: 1) disbelief,

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Jefferson in David C. Whitney, *Founders of Freedom in America*, (Chicago: J.G. Ferguson Publishing Company, 1964), 33.

<sup>3</sup>Footnote from David C. Whitney, *Founders of Freedom*, 33.

<sup>4</sup>John Adams, to Thomas Jefferson, 14 September 1813, *Correspondence of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson*, 80.

or 2) that the rest of natural creation already proves the truth as the Book of Romans evidences.<sup>5</sup>

In the conclusion to the letter Adams writes:

"Now my friend Jefferson, suppose an eternal, self-existent being, existing from eternity, possessed of infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, in absolute, total solitude, six thousand years ago, conceiving the benevolent project of creating a universe! I have no more to say at present. It has been long, very long, a settled opinion in my mind, that there is now, never will be, and never was, but one being who can understand the universe, and that it is not only vain but wicked for insects to pretend to comprehend it."<sup>6</sup>

The thought here is that man is insufficient to understand what God has done.

Man has evidenced these many attributes of God; demonstrated and proclaimed in the created universe, through the Lord's revelation, of these things to man. The letter concluded with a human understanding of the verse that says: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."<sup>7</sup> This is a reference to the Almighty as Superior to man in all ways regardless of our pathetic education imparted by men of renown.

When it came to being a witness of the truth, Adams understood his need to be a faithful minister of the Word. He was not afraid to speak the truth in love.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Romans 1:20.

<sup>6</sup>John Adams, to Thomas Jefferson, 14 September 1813, *Correspondence of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson*, 85.

<sup>7</sup>Isaiah 55:8.

<sup>8</sup>Ephesians 4:15.



## **Adams' Faith Understood Correctly**

At this point, the questions to ask skeptics and the ignorant historian are, "If Adams is not a Christian, what is he; and if he believes in a God that intervenes in the universe at present, can he be a Deist?"

Due to the ignorance of chronicled facts and the inability to discern spiritual things, many beliefs about Adams' faith are false. The truths of Scripture are a mystery to the unbeliever and they misunderstand their relevance. As regards researched materials by the writer, there is no evidence that Adams lacked faith in God or the work of the cross. There is no reputable evidence to the contrary in his writings and it would be a complete fabrication to state otherwise. There were no substantial claims that Adams was an Atheist, Agnostic, Deist, or proponent of any false religious belief system.

The only system Adams referred to, and demonstrated faith in was to a Biblical system built on the Rock. This system confirmed that all men were sinners in need of repentance; substantiated the existence of future of rewards (in Heaven) and punishments (in Hell).

The beliefs held by Adams are notably Christian. He believed in a personal God who desired an intimate relationship with him. Adams was a proponent of faith that is the "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Hebrews 11:1

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