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# The Unity of the Spirit

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"In the Bond of Peace"

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Dear Fellow-believers,

Throughout the history of world the quest to understand God, his creation, and how God governs the world has been a constant goal for those who seek to know and live for God. Though the Bible progressively reveals the answers to many of these questions, others are left either partially or totally unanswered. Of course this has provided fruitful ground throughout the centuries for the arguments of skeptics who believe that any righteous or honorable God must surely justify all of his ways before men. Nevertheless, this is just what the Bible does *not* do. Instead, the Bible presents God as a sovereign and loving God who rules over all and is working out his eternal plan according to his own divine purpose and will. This is vividly portrayed in the Book of Psalms:

*The Lord has established his throne in heaven and his kingdom rules over all (Psalm 103:19)*

From the biblical perspective God is the *creator* who also rules providentially over his creation. He is guiding the world to the fulfillment of his own appointed purposes. Man on the other hand, is a *creature* of God who has been created in God's image to rule over God's creation upon earth in fellowship with God (Gen. 1:26-27; Psalm 8). These roles should

never be confused. Not only does man not understand all of God's purposes and the reasons why God does certain things in certain ways, the Bible also makes it clear that it is actually *beyond* the capability of man to understand these truths. This is clear throughout the Bible as the following verses show:

*"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." (Deut. 29:29)*

*"I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and to do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him." (Ecc. 3:10-14).*

The original temptation for mankind was to "become like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:6). In many ways, this statement could be a summary of the history of man. Whenever

man's understanding of the world and of its moral "rights and wrongs" is based upon his own perceptions, reason and logic – rather than God's created order and revealed will – he has become a "god" unto himself and enters into a realm of spiritual, mental and physical degradation which only the light of God's word can dispel. Paul's Letter to the Romans shows this degradation that comes about:

*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them to them, because God has made it plain to them.*

*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

*For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*

*Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen. (Rom. 1:18-25).*

Whenever man determines that God must justify his ways before him he has transgressed the line set by God between creature and Creator. This situation is a result of man's own free will choosing; thus, all men are "without

excuse" before God. Nevertheless, Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians sets forth the gospel solution to this dark state of "natural man":

*"Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength." (I Cor. 1:20-25)*

Who would of thought of such a solution to man's dilemma as the cross? Certainly not man in his own wisdom. But this simply highlights the incredible gap between man's wisdom and God's wisdom as exhibited in God's plan of salvation. Let us exclaim with Paul,

*"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!"*

*"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"*

*"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"*

*"For from him and through him and to him are all things."*

*"To him be the glory forever! Amen."*

*(Romans 11:33-36).*

*Richie Temple*

## Behold, the King!

By Chuck LaMattina

Chicago, Illinois

Each January both houses of Congress gather at the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. for the state of the Union address. As the event begins, a loud voice booms forth this announcement, "Mr. Speaker, the President of the United States." The announcement pierces through all the commotion in the chambers of the House and calls forth a response. *The Gospel According to Matthew*, the first book of the New Testament<sup>1</sup>, in a similar way makes a dramatic announcement when in effect it proclaims, "Ladies and Gentlemen, behold, the King!" And this announcement is intended to cut through all the commotion in our hearts and call forth a response.

The book of Matthew is the bridge between the Old and the New Testaments. It connects the two testaments together. The books of the Old Testament recorded God's law and His dealings with the people of Israel, but they were also a library of expectation and hope. The prophets saw a coming time when God would rule over the world through a king who would bring salvation, justice and peace to all. For example, Isaiah predicted this coming King when he said,

*For unto us a Child is born,*

*Unto us a Son is given;*

*And the government will be upon His shoulder.*

*And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor,*

*Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*Of the increase of His government and peace*

<sup>1</sup> Though not the first New Testament book written, it always comes first in the Greek manuscripts.

*There will be no end, upon the throne of David*

*And over His kingdom...(9:6, 7)<sup>2</sup> [NKJV throughout]*

Inspired by promises like this the ancient people of Israel had been waiting for a promised King. He would be the son of Abraham and the son of David<sup>3</sup>. He would rule in righteousness and his kingdom would have no end. Matthew's goal was to prove to the Jews<sup>4</sup> that Jesus is the promised King, the fulfillment of their hopes and dreams. He does this by demonstrating that all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah are fulfilled in Jesus.

One phrase that runs through the book, like a melody line in a symphony is, "...this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophets."<sup>5</sup> And as we read through the gospel, Matthew shows us Jesus fulfilling prophecy in his birth, his flight into Egypt, his childhood in Nazareth, his use of parables in teaching, where he taught, his miracles of healings, his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and his betrayal for 30 pieces of silver. The people of Israel needed to know for sure that Jesus was indeed their promised King.

But Jesus is not just the King for Israel and the Jewish people. In God's plan of salvation, the Hebrew people existed not for themselves but for the benefit of the whole world. God promised Abraham that, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed

<sup>2</sup> See also for example: Isaiah 16:5; Jeremiah 23:5, 6; Daniel 2:44; 7:13, 14; Micah 4:2, 3

<sup>3</sup> Jesus is called the Son of David more often in Matthew than in any other gospel (Matthew 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9, 15)

<sup>4</sup> Matthew also wrote to strengthen the faith of Jewish Christians. "Antioch in Syria is the most likely location for the writing of the gospel and for the church for which it was originally composed" which was "of mixed Jewish and Gentile origin (Acts 15)" New Geneva Study Bible, (Nelson Pub. Nashville), p.1503.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 1:22 See also: 2:14, 15, 16-18, 23; 8:17; 12:17; 13:34, 35; 21:3-5; 26:54, 56; 27:9, 35

(Genesis 22:18)." That seed we now know to be Jesus Christ. When Jesus began his ministry he did so as the Jewish Messiah, "to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers" but his ministry and his message was also for the whole world "that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy (Romans 15:8, 9)." The gospel or good news of the King is for all of humanity. This is made abundantly clear in Christ's command at the end of the Matthew when he said,

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19)."*<sup>1</sup>

Now that we know that Jesus is the promised King, what was the gospel or good news that he brought? What was his essential message? It was this:

*"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mathew 4:17)*

This command marks the beginning of Christ's public ministry. What does this mean? To repent is to make a decisive change in our thinking, attitudes and actions. It is a turning away from one thing to another. Biblically, it is a renouncing of worldly hopes and fears and an acceptance of godly hopes and fears. It is a radical departure from a life of sin to a life of obedience to God. Repentance means a changing of our minds so that our values, goals and ideals line up with the standards of the Word of God. It involves a movement away from an old life style to a new and better one. This call to repent was the fundamental call of Christ's forerunner, John the Baptist,<sup>2</sup> and for Christ's apostles after him.<sup>3</sup>

But why should we repent? The answer is this: "the kingdom of heaven is at hand."<sup>4</sup> This Kingdom is God's sovereign rule. The message and hope of this kingdom is stamped all across the pages of Matthew from first to

last.<sup>5</sup> But before this kingdom is fully established on the earth in the age to come, it must come to each and everyone of us as a present spiritual reality by way of God's Spirit. The kingdom must come in saving power, rescuing us from the grip and penalty of sin. The cross must precede the crown. In Matthew 16:21, Jesus began a new aspect of his ministry telling his disciples that he must,

*...suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and raised the third day.*<sup>6</sup>

But why must he die? A clue is given to us right at the start of the gospel in Matthew 1:21. An angel speaks to Joseph telling him that Mary will bring forth a son and he says,

*...you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.*

Isaiah 53 predicted this<sup>7</sup> and Psalm 22 described it. Now, all who submit themselves to the rule of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are saved from the power and penalty of sin, and will one day gain eternal life in the future kingdom of God.<sup>8</sup>

Now we must bear witness to the gospel: the good news of the kingdom of God and the victorious death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This same Lord Jesus Christ says to us "Go...and make disciples of all the nations."<sup>9</sup> and we must say to our world,

"Behold, the King!"

<sup>1</sup> See also Matthew 24:14 and John 3:16

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 3:2

<sup>3</sup> Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30; 26:20

<sup>4</sup> The phrase "kingdom of heaven" is equivalent to "the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15).

<sup>5</sup> In Matthew there are five blocks of teaching, all of which concern the kingdom of heaven. They are in chapters 5-7; 10; 13, 18, 24, 25

<sup>6</sup> From this point on Jesus tries to prepare the disciples for his death (16:21; 17:22, 23; 20:18, 19).

<sup>7</sup> Vss. 1-11

<sup>8</sup> John 3:16, 17

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 28:20

## The Christian Identity

in

## Christ

*“Christ is all, and is in all”*

by

Richie Temple

Cary, NC

When I was growing up during the tumultuous years of the 1960's and 1970's the subject of a personal “identify crisis” became a well-known topic. It was commonly taught that each individual person must search within himself to find out whom he or she was and what their corresponding purpose in life should be. Needless to say, this led to much soul-searching on the part of many people along with a rejection of many of the accepted values of those times. No doubt this quest continues for many people today. In fact, it would probably be fair to say that this search for identity and purpose in life has always been a quest for mankind. One thinks of the quest of Socrates for truth and a splendid biblical example would be the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes in which Solomon searches for the meaning of life. Indeed, to some extent almost every person goes through this identity crisis at one time or another – sometimes more than once - whether as a teenager, as a recent college graduate, as a new parent, as someone approaching middle age or, ultimately, from the point of view of old age, with death growing ever nearer.

The Bible, of course, *does* give answers to the question of our identity as well as to the meaning and purpose of our lives. In fact, this is one of the central purposes of the Bible and the basic framework is set out right from the start in Genesis chapter 1. The most fundamental of all truths is that God is the creator of the heavens and earth and that man was created in the image of God to rule over

God's created earth in fellowship with God. Genesis 1:26-27 specifically sets forth this relationship between God, man and God's entire creation:

*“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the creatures that move along the ground.’*

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” [Gen. 1:26-27 NIV].*

Properly understanding our identity as men and women, begins with understanding that God is the creator and that we are God's creatures, created for the specific purpose of living in fellowship with God and carrying out his will upon the earth. Indeed, the Old Testament goes on to teach us our specific duties before God and that we are accountable to God for our thoughts, words, and deeds in the light of those duties. The Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes summarizes these truths:

*“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear [Reverence] God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man.*

*For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.” [Eccl. 12:13-14].*

The New Testament perspective does not contradict the Old, but it does add new and important information in the light of a changed situation due to God's redemptive work in Christ. From the Old Testament perspective man's duty before God was plain: fear, or reverence, God and keep his commandments. However, from the New Testament perspective - after Christ's life, death and resurrection and the giving of the holy Spirit – life is now looked at from the eternal perspective for the believer

in Christ. The apostle Paul sets forth the reasons for this:

*“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” [II Cor. 5:14-17].*

This truth of being a new creation in Christ is the key to understanding our identity as individuals as well as corporately as the people of God. All of the quests of mankind for identity, meaning and purpose in life will only find their fulfillment in Christ. In fact, all of history finds its meaning and purpose in God’s redemptive work in Christ. Once again, the apostle Paul set forth this truth of the eternal perspective in Christ in his second letter to Timothy:

*“So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but is has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” [II Tim. 1:8-10].*

The Old Testament perspective of the duty of man is certainly true. We are God’s creatures, created in his image, and our duty is to reverence him and keep his commandments. However, as both the Old and New Testaments

show, man was, and is, incapable of living up to the requirements of God’s commandments as found in the Old Testament Mosaic law.

Therefore, man, on his own merits, “falls short” of God’s requirements in this life (Rom. 3:22-23) and – apart from God’s redemptive work in Christ - at the final judgment when God “will bring every deed into judgment” (Eccl. 12:14) he will fall short as well. As the New Testament states,

*“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing [literally, “the deeds of”] the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin” [Rom. 3:19-20].*

The New Testament thus portrays in vivid detail that we are all under the power of sin, thus leading to a permanent “identity crisis” that can only be solved by God’s redemptive work in Christ:

*“Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.*

*Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.*

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed*

*yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise."* [Gal. 3:22-29].

God's purpose for every individual is to find his identity as a child in God's family through faith in Christ. Once a person believes in Christ he is incorporated into Christ and becomes an heir of all of God's plans for his people. From a NT perspective it matters not if we are black or white, rich or poor, male or female. All that matters is that we are part of God's family and the church of the body of Christ because for believers in Christ, "Christ is all, and is in all" (Col. 3:11).

Apart from these truths, all searching for identity will always be in vain. Whether man searches within himself psychologically or outside of himself in the vast expanse of the universe he will always find that apart from a relationship with God, through Christ, "everything is meaningless" [Eccl. 1:2; 12:8]. Only through faith in Christ can we "overcome" and obtain "victory" over the spiritual forces of evil and the corruption of the present world due to sin [I John 5:1-5]. The apostle Paul summarized the true Christian perspective in his Letter to the Galatians. It is the only answer to man's identity crisis; all others will end in futility and despair:

*"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* [Gal. 2:20].

*"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and*

*mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God."* [Gal. 6:14-16].

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## Report

### *The Unity of the Spirit*

This Spring/Summer issue of *The Unity of the Spirit* begins again our publication after taking a year off. This past year I took a much-needed "Sabbatical" after having completed four issues per year for seven years. All of these past issues are available to be read or downloaded at:

[www.unity-of-spirit.org](http://www.unity-of-spirit.org)

I am looking forward to beginning *The Unity of the Spirit* again and as always your prayers, articles, letters, and comments are both encouraged and welcomed.

The purpose of *The Unity of the Spirit* continues to be that of building up the body of Christ and helping God's family to grow in the knowledge of the truth. As the name indicates, this is intended to be done in a way that focuses on the central truths of the Bible and examines the details in a spirit of Christian unity. The articles that will be presented are those that we believe will either edify or enlighten. In addition, much will be presented in the way of scholarly articles, book reviews, and quotations that can be helpful in gaining insight into the meaning of biblical texts, subjects or issues. This reflects one of the central reasons that this publication exists: to point truth-seeking believers to biblical scholars and writings that can help them to understand the Bible in greater depth – "so that with one heart and one mouth we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:6).

*Richie Temple*

## Notes & Quotes

### on the Bible

#### One Nation Under God?

Recently, there has been a good deal of controversy in the United States over a U.S. Court of Appeal's ruling that it is unconstitutional for public school teachers to lead their students in the Pledge of Allegiance due to the phrase in the pledge, "one nation, under God." This has long been controversial for both believers and unbelievers alike. In fact, most of the opposition to this phrase has traditionally come from Christians whose beliefs do not allow them to pledge allegiance to any nation, or for whom, "one nation, under God" conflicts with their doctrinal beliefs.

There is, of course, a good deal of validity to these views. As a Christian believer it is obvious that my first allegiance is to God my Father and my Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 8:6). My second allegiance is to God's family throughout the world - over and above any national, racial, ethnic, denominational, or other worldly distinction (Mark 3:31-35). My primary citizenship is as a member of God's royal household, holy nation and heavenly kingdom (Eph. 2:18-19; I Pet. 2:9-10; Phil. 3:20). And finally, my sole hope for true liberty and justice is the second coming of Christ and the final establishment of God's kingdom - in a new heavens and new earth, where righteousness will dwell (Matt. 6:9-10; II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-7).

All of these above truths should be "givens" for every generation of Christian believers. Christians, however, may differ as to what their relation and duties to any particular nation or government may entail. Nevertheless, the great majority of us living in the twenty first century are citizens of earthly nations, not only citizens of a heavenly new Jerusalem. And so, just as Paul was a citizen of the Roman Empire

and used his citizenship rights in advancing the gospel, so I, as an American citizen, try to do the same in my life as a Christian. Therefore, it is interesting to see the views of the U.S. "Founding Fathers" in relationship to what they believed were mankind's responsibilities in living "under God."

The United States of America was founded and built on belief in God. In fact, the legal basis for its existence and laws derives from its belief in that God. The founding document of the United States of America, written principally by Thomas Jefferson but edited and signed by all of the members of the Second Continental Congress, is *The Declaration of Independence*. It was signed on July 4, 1776 and it sets forth the following "self-evident truths" as the legal foundation for the new American republic:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that **all men** are *created* equal, that they are endowed by their *Creator* with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. To secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

How can a nation founded on the concept that the role of government is to secure the inalienable rights of men - given to them by a *Creator* - not teach in public schools that the world was *created* by that *Creator*? One would think that this "expression of the American mind" as Thomas Jefferson called it, would be the underlying philosophical basis for the laws of the United States of America. Of course, originally, this was the case. In fact, all of signers of *The Declaration of Independence* and *The Constitution of the United States of America* believed that the existence of a sovereign, loving and just God was the **only** basis for both personal morality and just government in this world.

The American Founding Fathers - men such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin,



Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John Adams - did not believe in a merely formal or ceremonial “deism” – that is, in a God who was thought to have created an orderly universe and then withdrew from it to let the world run on its own – like a great clock. Instead, almost to a man the American Founding Fathers believed in a creator God who also providentially governed the universe and cared for his people. As the last line of the Declaration of Independence states,

“And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.”

Though men such as Franklin, Jefferson, and even Washington were at times accused of being deists, the historical record makes it clear that this was not the case. They each believed in God’s providential rule of the world. Though somewhat influenced by deistic thought of the Enlightenment, they were far more influenced by their own study of the Bible, and all openly professed some form of Christianity. In fact, all of these men became increasingly more interested in the things of God as they aged and as they had to deal with the huge pressures and burdens of public life. “Unorthodox” by some standards they may have been, but deists they certainly were not. Let’s look at some of their beliefs and then leave it to God to decide their true orthodoxy.

Most important of all was the great American hero and first President of the United States, George Washington. Washington set out his religious views, and their importance to the life of the infant American republic, in his famous *Farewell Address to the Nation*, at the end of his second term of office. In this address he stated,

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert

these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked: Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

“It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule, indeed, extends with more or less force to every species of free government. Who that is a sincere friend to it can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?”

John Adams, the second President of the United States was a devout Christian and expressed his views as follows,

“One great advantage of the Christian religion is that it brings the great principle of the law of nature and nations, love your neighbor as yourself, and do to others as you would that others should do to you – to the knowledge, belief and veneration of the whole people. Children, servants, women as well as men are all professors in the science of public as well as private morality...The duties and rights of the citizens are thus taught from early infancy to every creature.” [Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People*, p. 208].

Thomas Jefferson, who was often called a deist, or even atheist, forcefully denied this and instead claimed,

I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus [David Barton, *Original Intent*, p. 144].

Like most serious people Jefferson grew over time in his search for the truth. But his opposition was always forceful against religious hypocrisy, institutional religion's position of political power and tyranny, and especially, against the legal establishment of a national or state religion as with the Anglican Church in England as well as in colonial Virginia. For a time he was influenced by deist thought but he was too independent of mind to be forced into an established system of belief whether that of deism or of established Christian denominations. In his excellent book *Thomas Jefferson, A Life*, William Randall sets forth Jefferson's search for certainty in religious belief:

"The attacks on his religious views during the 1800 campaign had wounded him ... As the Federalists kept up their attacks on him as irreligious and an enemy of Christianity, Jefferson studied the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, marking the passages that he thought represented the simple beliefs of Jesus Christ and ignoring those he considered later corruptions ... He became convinced that early Christians most closely resembled the [biblical] Unitarians of the early nineteenth century and he found that his concept of God most closely resembled theirs." [p. 555-556].

In a letter to John Adams after his Presidency was long over, Jefferson professed to believe in,

"the pure and unsophisticated doctrines such as professed and acted on by the unlettered apostles, the Apostolic fathers and the Christians of the first century." [Ibid, p. 556].

Most of the Founding Fathers mentioned in this article would have agreed with these sentiments to a great degree because the biblical Unitarianism of that time – unlike the Universal Unitarianism of today – was one of the most biblically based of all the Christian denominations of that day. The *Theological*

*Dictionary* of 1823 described Unitarians as follows:

"In common with other Christians, they confess that He [Jesus] is the Christ, the Son of the Living God; and in one word, they believe all that the writers of the New Testament, particularly the four Evangelists, have stated concerning him." [*Original Intent*, p. 314]

These men were not interested in the post-biblical Christian arguments over creeds and doctrinal issues. Instead, they

"reject all human creeds and articles of faith, and strictly adhere to the great Protestant principal, "the Bible – the Bible only;" [Ibid].

In short, many of the founding fathers who adhered to these beliefs simply desired to live upright lives according to the simple truths of first century biblical Christianity, as they understood it.

Benjamin Franklin, like Jefferson, seemed to become more and more concerned with the things of God as he grew older. Like Jefferson, he dabbled in Deism but came to regard it as morally corrupting and "not very useful" [H.W. Brands, *The First American*, p. 94]. Franklin followed the ethical precepts of Christ, first and foremost, and came to revere a God who was both the creator of the world and providentially at work in the world. His famous speech at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 best exemplifies his belief in a God who is active in the world. Addressing the President of the Convention, George Washington, Franklin asked for the assembly to have daily prayers asking for God's aid. Then he stated,

"I have lived, sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth – that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, sir, in the Sacred Writings, that 'except the Lord build the House, they

labor in vain that build it.' I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel: we shall be divided by our little partial local interests; our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and byword down to future ages." [Quoted from *Original Intent*, p. 111].

And this from the most famous of all Americans at that time, indeed; the foremost Enlightenment scholar of the world!

This speech was recorded by James Madison. Madison, who is often called the Father of the U.S. Constitution and who was the fourth President of the United States, was a great student of history and somewhat of a protégé of Jefferson and Franklin. Though ardently against any form of a legally established national or state religion he was also a student of the Bible and a strong proponent of the right of individuals and groups to freely exercise their religious beliefs. He expressed his basic belief in God as follows:

"Belief in a God All Powerful, wise and good is so essential to the moral order of the World and to the happiness of man, that arguments which enforce it cannot be drawn from too many sources. [Ralph Ketcham, *James Madison*, University of Virginia Press, p. 667]

Madison did *not* believe in a separation of *God* from state. Instead, he was instrumental in changing the old phrase "toleration of religion" - derived from England where the Church of England increasingly agreed to "tolerate" other Christian denominations - to the American concept of "the free exercise of religion" which gave all individuals and religious groups the *equal right* to practice their religious beliefs according to their own conscience rather than being forced to acknowledge a national "establishment of religion" such as the Church of England. This became an important right spelled out in the First Amendment to the U.S.

Constitution which was written primarily by Madison. It states;

'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...'

In his remarkable book, *A History of the American People*, the British Christian historian, Paul Johnson, does an excellent job of summarizing the original understanding of this "religion clause" of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

"This guarantee has been widely, almost willfully, misunderstood in recent years, and interpreted as meaning that the federal government is forbidden by the Constitution to countenance or subsidize even indirectly the practice of religion. That would have astonished and angered the Founding Fathers. What the guarantee means is that Congress may not set up a state religion on the lines of the Church of England, 'as by law established.' It was an anti-establishment clause. The second half of the guarantee means that Congress may not interfere with the practice of any religion, and it could be argued that recent interpretations of the First Amendment run directly contrary to the plain and obvious meaning of this guarantee ...

"In effect, the First Amendment forbade Congress to favor one church, or religious sect, over another...The next day it passed, by a two-to-one majority, a resolution calling for a day of national prayer and thanksgiving.

"It is worth pausing a second to look at the details of this gesture, *which may be regarded as the House's opinion of how the First Amendment should be understood*. The resolution reads:

'We acknowledge with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peacefully to establish a

constitutional government for their safety and happiness.’

“President Washington was then asked to designate the day of prayer and thanksgiving, thus inaugurating a public holiday, Thanksgiving, which Americans still universally enjoy. He replied,

‘It is the duty of **all nations** to acknowledge the providence of almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His mercy, to implore His protection and favor ... That great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that ever will be, that we may then unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people.’ “ [pp. 209-210].

So let us finally ask: is it right for the United States of America to proclaim itself as “one nation, under God”? Yes, because it accurately reflects the original intent of the founding principles of *The Declaration of Independence* and the U.S. Constitution. This statement is not an “establishment of religion” since it does not set up a legal established

national religion. Nor does it express any sectarian or denominational belief as opposed to others. However, *all* of the Founding Fathers believed that the United States should be “one nation, under God.” But better yet, perhaps we should go all the way with Washington and the U.S. Founding Fathers who believed not only in “one nation, under God,” but in the “self-evident” truths that:

1. “**all men** are created equal” and that
2. “it is the duty of **all nations** to acknowledge the providence of almighty God” and “to obey His will.”

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[For further study on this topic two books are highly recommended: *A History of the American People* by Paul Johnson and *Original Intent* by David Barton. The former book is one of the best histories of the United States I know of and the latter book is an outstanding compilation of the religious underpinning of the U.S. founding documents and the individuals who were most influential in the founding and establishing of the American Republic].

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