

90.3 A Glimpse at the Heart of George Washington

I wonder how many books and articles people have written about the “*Father of Our Country*,” **George Washington**. The more I have looked into his life, the more I am impressed with his character. Like everyone else, Washington was imperfect, but he could run circles around most of us with his ethics and a sense of justice.

We honor George Washington along with Abraham Lincoln on “**Presidents Day**.” Washington was born on February 22, 1732, and had an exemplary life which he attributed to the influence of his mother. He was the unanimous selection as the **Continental Army’s Commander-in-Chief** in 1775, the **President of the Constitutional Convention** in 1787, and the first **POTUS** in 1789. One of the most outstanding actions of the new President came after his inauguration. He led Congress to a “*divine service*” in New York City’s St. Paul’s Chapel, conducted by Senate Chaplain **Samuel Provoost**.

George Washington gave himself to the service of his country. As a young Virginia Militia officer, he served with the British in the war against the French and Indians. He earned the reputation as “bulletproof,” and the Indians named him “*The Man God Would not Let Die*” at the Battle of Monongahela. No doubt, the providence of God protected him that day.

We could cite numerous examples of God’s providence in our War for Independence, such as the evacuation of Long Island in August 1776 and the concluding battle at Yorktown. Washington saw these and more and believed the hand of God had served the American cause and often spoke about providence and our dependence on God. Listen to this excerpt from a letter to **Pastor John Rodgers** on June 11, 1783:

“Glorious indeed has been our Contest: glorious, if we consider the Prize for which we have contended, and glorious in its Issue; but in the midst of our Joys, I hope we shall not forget that to divine Providence is to be ascribed the Glory and the Praise.”

I ran across a controversial story recently about Washington’s adult baptism, which, if accurate, reveals his heart towards God. Listen to this **Time Magazine** article from 1932¹:

When he was almost two months old, Washington was sprinkled in the "orthodox Episcopal manner." At 33 he took oath to conform to the doctrine of the Church of England "as by law established." Throughout his life he was seen regularly in church though he did not often kneel in prayer or partake of communion. Washington's reputation . . . is one of coolness and moderation in religion. But through his time swept a hot blast of evangelism, chiefly in the Methodist and Baptist faiths. General Washington one day went to Rev. John Gano, a chaplain in the Continental Army, and exclaimed: "*I have been investigating the Scripture, and I believe immersion to be baptism taught in the Word of God, and I demand it at your hands. I do not wish any parade made or the army called out, but simply a quiet demonstration of the ordinance.*" In the presence of 42 witnesses George Washington was immersed in the Potomac; but he did not give "personal testimony" which would have made him a member of the Baptist Church.

I hope the story is true as I have a high view of baptism, and some would say, too high. While we cannot EARN our salvation through baptism, we want to comply with the will of God and see its purpose in passages like **1 Peter 3:21-22** (NKJV):

²¹ There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

¹ "Religion: Washington's Baptism." , Time, 5 Sept. 1932, content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,744297,00.html.

George Washington expressed a sincere and good conscience toward God in his desire for Chaplain Gano to immerse him.

We know Washington was a man of prayer as well as action. During the winter encampment in **Valley Forge**, Washington felt the burden of caring for his army. Like our Savior, the General often went to isolated places to intercede for his soldiers. Here is the abbreviated account of Washington's Valley Forge Prayer by Isaac Potts:

"In that woods, I heard a plaintive sound as of a man at prayer. I tied my horse to a sapling and went quietly into the woods, and to my astonishment, I saw the great George Washington on his knees alone, with his sword on one side and his cocked hat on the other. He was at Prayer to the God of the Armies, beseeching to interpose with his Divine aid, as it was ye Crisis, and the cause of the country, of humanity, and of the world. 'Such a prayer I never heard from the lips of man. I left him alone praying. 'I went home and told my wife. I saw a sight and heard today what I never saw or heard before, and just related to her what I had seen and heard and observed. We never thought a man c'd be a soldier and a Christian, but if there is one in the world, it is Washington. She also was astonished. We thought it was the cause of God, and America could prevail.'"

People love to criticize the flaws of our forefathers. This is an unfair practice because they are not here to explain or defend their actions so that we can sit in a one-sided judgment of them. It is dangerous because we set ourselves up to be judged by the same standards we judge, as Jesus declares in **Matthew 7:1-5** (NKJV):

"Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Let me illustrate. People look down their noses at Washington for enslaving people in the eighteenth century. We would agree but fail to research and find that the War changed his attitude toward that evil institution. There are more enslaved people today than ever in the history of man. The question I want to ask critics is, *"What are you doing to free modern slaves, such as children who are trafficked and abused?"* Another question is, *"What are you doing to stop the abomination of the murder of innocent babies in the womb?"* It's easy to criticize others, and acting with a similar issue before us is another thing. Future generations will judge us with the same standards we condemn past generations.

George Washington was God-conscious in his personal life, and in his first inaugural address, he warned: *"(T)he foundation of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality; ...the propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained..."*

I am grateful that a man like George Washington set the pace for the American presidency and people. He had a high sense of morality because he sensed the nearness of God. Yes, we will give an account to God for our behavior.

Keep The Light of the Example of Our God-Seeking Ancestors Burning!