

Lesson Thirty

The Secret Ingredient

LESSON IDEA

To show why morality is indispensable for limited, constitutional government, and what can happen if it is abandoned.

PREPARATION

Copy the 1892 and 1952 Supreme Court quotations (see page four) for each member of the family. Read the discussion portions of the lesson and prepare some examples from your own personal experience.

THERE IS a secret ingredient in the American system of government that is more important than the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and Declaration of Independence. It make the principles and provisions of those three unique documents workable. Sadly, it is rapidly being deteriorating, and unless it is revitalized, the ideals embodied in our nation's founding documents will have no more meaning than the average politician's promise.

What is this secret ingredient that George Washington called "indispensable" to our political well being? [Ask each family member for possibilities.] Those aboard the Mayflower knew the answer in 1620. So did William Penn, the Quaker leader in Pennsylvania, and George Mason, one of Virginia's most distinguished lawyers. And so did many other early American leaders.

It is our sense of right and wrong — the morality that, if properly developed, serves as a personal policing agency to govern and guide our actions. Those with such a moral compass are able to exercise personal responsibility, rather than be compelled to comply with society's rules by government force. They do not kill, steal, cheat, or commit other legal and moral offenses, because they know that such actions are wrong and behave accordingly. They are guided by such moral strictures as the Ten Commandments, and by so doing promote less rather than more government. A breakdown in personal morality inevitably paves the way for bigger government (police, courts, prisons, social programs, etc.) to cope with the

resulting social problems. The Quaker leader William Penn put it succinctly: "Those people who are not governed by God will be ruled by tyrants."

In its infancy, the United States was undeniably a religious nation whose citizens were governed more by personal conscience than by government edict. In 1892 the U.S. Supreme Court specifically stated that it was "historically true" that our citizenry was "a religious people." "From the discovery of America to this hour," the High Court held, "there is a single voice making this affirmation." And in 1952, the Court reaffirmed that "We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being."

The Court's conclusion was based on solid evidence: the colonial charters, official proclamations, and, the constitutions of every state and the Union itself. "There is no dissonance in these declarations," it asserted. "These are not individual sayings or declarations of private persons; they are organic utterances: they speak the voice of the entire people.... There is a universal language pervading them all having but one meaning; they affirm and reaffirm that this is a religious nation."

WHEN THE PILGRIMS boarded the Mayflower in 1620 for the journey that would bring them to the New England coast of Massachusetts, they recognized that some type of government would be necessary to hold them together. And they knew that it would have to be an extension of the Divine Authority that governed each individual. The "constitution" they drew up was a simple moral code called the Mayflower Compact. It began, "In the name of God, Amen," and included a solemn pledge to "combine together for the preservation and furtherance of the Glory of God and the advancement of the Christian religion."

In Pennsylvania, the Quakers had the same view of life and government. They had no doubt about the importance of God as the Supreme Ruler of each individual, and as the ultimate authority for the laws that would govern their

society. That view was reflected in the speeches and writings of many colonial leaders. George Mason, one of the outstanding lawyers of the time, placed self-government above civil government when told the General Court of Virginia:

... The laws of nature are the laws of God, whose authority can be superseded by no power on earth. A legislature must not obstruct our obedience to Him from whose punishments they cannot protect us.

Can you summarize that sentiment in your own words? [Note, especially, the significance of Mason's last sentence.]

MASON WAS AMONG those who considered constitutions to be human instruments that expressed the "laws of God which all are in conscience bound to obey." George Washington, in his First Inaugural Address, revealed his own profound faith:

It would be peculiarly improper to omit, in this first official act, my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect...

No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men, more than those of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seem to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency.

And in his Farewell Address to Congress at the end of his second term as President, Washington advised the American people:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that natural morality can prevail in exclusion of Religious Principles.

As a nation, are we following Washington's advice today? What is our current condition regarding biblical standards of morality and religion? [Ask each family member to give examples

to support his or her opinion. Areas of discussion could include music, movies, television, video games, abortion, family disintegration, and politics (including the many scandals in which President Bill Clinton was involved, some of which led to his impeachment). Briefly discuss how the disintegration of personal moral standards in these and other areas provides the excuse for bigger, more expensive, and more oppressive government to cope with the resulting social disruptions.]

Yet, even today, a hearty sense of right and wrong governs the actions, to one degree or another, of most Americans. Which is fortunate, as imagine for a moment what each day would be like if virtually everyone lacked a self-governing conscience. Suppose each was a liar, thief, and/or murderer: the grocer, druggist, service station operator, store clerk, teacher, librarian, postman, businessman, neighbor, doctor, realtor, and motorist ahead of you on the highway? How many policemen would it take to protect you and your loved ones? How many courts and prisons would be necessary to convict and incarcerate the worst offenders? Of what practical value would even a thousand formal laws be condemning assault, thievery, or murder? How many armed bodyguards would it take to assure that you arrive home unharmed each night? [Take time to dramatize such a situation, going over the family's daily routine and naming each individual you are likely to meet.]

We are exaggerating, of course, but only to emphasize that when the personal morality and

FOR SERIOUS STUDENTS

This lesson merely touches the surface of the fascinating subjects of law, government, and morality. For a brilliant statement of the proper role of government, see Frederic Bastiat's essay *The Law*. Bastiat, a French economist, statesman, and author, did most of his writing during the years just prior to, and immediately following, the French Revolution of 1848. His analysis of law and government led him to conclude that only in the United States was the form of government designed to keep government properly in check. Could he say the same today?

The Law is available for \$2.95 (add \$2.00 for shipping and handling) from American Opinion Book Services, P.O. Box 8040, Appleton, WI 54912.

responsibility of even one individual break down, sundry social problems increase to some extent. And when many individuals suffer such a break down, the problems can become so overwhelming that they lead to a massive increase in the size and scope of civil government. In very real sense, those who would transform our limited-government republic into a vast collectivist system have a vested interest in promoting, rather than discouraging, the erosion of personal morality.

Suppose, on the other hand, that everyone was self-governed by their own moral conscience. Would your life be more or less secure and pleasant? Should you be involved in an automobile accident, for instance, would it be more or less likely that someone would stop to help you, rather than harm or rob you?

If everyone lived morally perfect lives, there would be no need for laws, including constitutions. But is that possible? Why not? [Encourage discussion, pointing out that there has never been a society of perfect people since the fall of Adam and Eve. Explain why it is necessary for fallible human beings to be restrained by some degree of civil government, to protect life and property, but how such fallibility itself often leads evil men to impose excessive government to achieve wealth and power for themselves. Examples could include Adolph Hitler, Josef Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, [preferable to use other spelling? — rwl] and Fidel Castro, among many others. Discuss some of the signs that a similar trend toward excessive, un-Constitutional government is underway in the United States (growth of the federal regulatory bureaucracy, rule by Executive Orders, involvement in undeclared wars, erosion of states' rights, increasing subservience to the United Nations in both foreign and domestic policies, etc.)]

THE SIZE AND QUALITY of a country's government depends, in large part, on the morality of the citizenry. In a nation where the vast majority of individuals are governed from within, only small, limited government is required to keep the criminal minority in check. But should most people become immoral, or extensively condone immorality, government itself tends to become a criminal entity — a "legal" super-criminal that begins doing virtually everything common criminals do, but on a vastly larger scale.

Stealing (through inflation and excessive taxation) quickly becomes the norm. And in the worst instances, murder and concentration camps are employed to eliminate and incarcerate "enemies of the people," which actually means enemies of the ruling despots.

IN THE 1700's most Americans were self-governed, basically moral individuals who required only limited civil government. The Constitution and Bill of Rights served them well. Government was not expected to make Americans good, prosperous, or happy. Those were not its functions. Its role was to hold vices in check while protecting virtues. The prosperity, order, and opportunity that became America's hallmark were produced, not by the Constitution or the government it created, but by the day-to-day interactions of an essentially moral people.

Self-governing morality was the secret ingredient that made America great and enabled the Constitution and Bill of Rights to work. The abandonment of individual morality will lead to the collapse of the United States as a free nation despite the Constitution.

Why is that so? [Ask for opinions. Cite examples of the results of moral breakdown from today's headlines. Again, emphasize how less personal responsibility increases the demand for more government.]

When someone abandons the responsibility of governing his or her own affairs, including coping with one's own problems with compassionate assistance from friends and family when necessary, the response is often, "Let the government take care of it. That's why we pay taxes." But consider the implications of that attitude. Suppose Paul favors a social program that will provide him benefits, and wants Peter to contribute to it by paying taxes. If Paul can persuade Congress to authorize the program, and increase taxes to fund it, he can receive the subsidy with a reasonably clear conscience, since it is all "legal." That being the case, he will be inclined to ask for more programs, entailing ever-higher taxes, until Peter's resources are exhausted.

There are now millions of Pauls and Peters involved in such transactions without fully recognizing the extent to which the process is predicated on theft. If the greedy Pauls were to extract

money from unwilling Peters without the complicity of government, they would face fines and imprisonment as criminals. Indeed, most Pauls would not do so due to the moral restraints of their consciences. Why, then, do they condone the practice when government serves as instigator and enforcer? [In part, because they feel little guilt and there is no risk of being caught and penalized.]

Once set in motion, robbing Peter to pay Paul inevitably increases the growth of government and erodes the conscientious responsibility of a people. It is a vicious circle that can lead to moral anarchy and end in political dictatorship.

Concluding Thought

The secret ingredient of the American success story is the morality that enables citizens to be restrained more by conscience than by government. Moral integrity and limited government go hand in hand. If we abandon the former, we must also give up the latter, and the Constitution will become little more than a worthless piece of paper.

Looking Ahead

The Pilgrims aboard the Mayflower may have been the first Americans to realize the practical benefits of self-governing morality. During the first critical year after their arrival at Plymouth, they abandoned individual responsibility for a collectivist economic arrangement. Next week, we will recall the hard but invaluable lesson that they learned.

DURING THE WEEK

Ask each member of the family to clip newspaper articles about recent events that indicate good — or bad — moral behavior (good deeds, heroism, crime, drug abuse, etc.). Discuss them during the dinner hour and at other times when the family is together. Urge that the excerpts from the 1892 and 1952 Supreme Court decisions be memorized, so they can be readily cited to convince classmates and others of our nation's religious heritage.

FROM 1892 SUPREME COURT DECISION

"... this [the United States] is a religious people. This is historically true. From the discovery of America to this hour there is a single voice making this affirmation." (Church of Holy Trinity v. United States, 143 U.S. 457)

FROM 1952 SUPREME COURT DECISION

"We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being." (Zorach v. Clauson, 343 U.S. 306)