

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 makes 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

