

Discussion Guide on Christian Responsibility in Politics



This Discussion Guide is best used for small groups. It is supported by the more detailed Discussion Notes.

How Patrick Henry Inspires Christians to Register and Vote

What responsibility do Christians have in the civic arena? We have no better example than our Founding Fathers.

On March 23, 1775, Patrick Henry, Virginia's Governor, declared the immortal words: "Give me liberty, or give me death!" That moment was the *linchpin* that turned the tide and prepared the way for the thirteen colonies to fight for their God-given rights in the War for Independence. However, we have heard that declaration so often over the years that its lost its deeper meaning.

Who would choose death over liberty? What motivated our Founding Fathers to pledge their "lives, fortunes, and sacred honor" to the preservation of liberty? ¹

America's Great Awakening

As we explored in our first lesson, early settlers in the 1600s were primarily Christians whose three-fold passion was to enjoy freedom of religion, raise their children in the admonition of the Lord, and share the Gospel with the unsaved. But by 1733, Georgia, the 13th original colony, America had lost its fire for God.

Rev. Samuel Blair of Pennsylvania, who would become the chaplain of the Congress, observed, "Religion lay as it were dying, and ready to expire its last breath of life in this part of the visible church." ^{2,3}

Jonathan Edwards: "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

In God's providence, a Protestant revival began in Edwards' church in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1733. Then, in 1741, Edwards preached his most famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Edwards was interrupted many times during the sermon by people moaning and crying out, "What shall I do to be saved?" ⁴

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George Whitefield: “Come just as you are to Christ”

In addition to Edwards, God used an incredibly gifted English preacher, George Whitefield, to help awaken the colonists from their spiritual slumber. In 1740, Whitefield, known as the “lightning rod of revival”, traveled to North America, where he preached a series of revivals that became part of the “Great Awakening.” While explicitly affirming God’s sole agency in salvation, Whitefield freely offered the Gospel, saying at the end of his sermons: “Come poor, lost, undone sinner, come *just as you* are to Christ.”⁵

The Dramatic Results of The Great Awakening

A great outpouring of God’s Spirit occurred through Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and others, that united and set the colonies spiritually aflame. Thousands were converted and churches filled. The movement impacted every area of life. Americans understood that King George had usurped God-given authority to rule them. Many ministers began teaching that there was “no King, but King Jesus.”⁶

Consider these sermon titles which account for their *civic* responsibility:

- [Civil Magistrates Must Be Just: Ruling in the Fear of God](#), Charles Chauncy, (1747)
- [Civil Government is for the Good of the People—the Character of Good Rulers, and the Duties of Citizens](#), Samuel Cooke, (1770)
- [Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers](#), Samuel Sherwood, (1774)
- [The Right of Self-Government is from God—the Divine Right of Kings Exploded](#), Samuel Langdon, (1775).⁷

The Founding Fathers who authored the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were young men during the Great Awakening. Without a doubt, this revival shaped their faith, character, and worldview, preparing them to give birth to an exceptional nation. They well understood that America was destined to become the *first* constitutional republic in history based on Christian principles. It also gave the American people at-large the qualities necessary to live in liberty,

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including self-government, morality, a Biblical worldview, regard for life, and a fear of God. ⁸

How King George Punished Pastor James Ireland

Soon, the long arm of English law forced American clergymen to obtain a license to preach. Any clergyman who dared preach on liberty, independence, or self-government was *severely* punished. ⁹

In November 1769, British magistrates warned Pastor James Ireland that he *must* obtain a license or be arrested. Pastor Ireland wrote in his diary, “I sat down and counted the cost. Freedom or prison? Having ventured all upon Christ, I determined to suffer all for Him.” ¹⁰

In Mark 8:34-36, Jesus said, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?”

Patrick Henry Witnesses Pastor Ireland's Brutal Beating

Patrick Henry, a 35-year-old lawyer, was riding into Culpepper, Virginia, where he personally witnessed the brutal beating of Pastor Ireland. He wrote, “There, in the middle of the town square, was a minister tied to a whipping post, his back laid bare and bloody with the bones of his ribs showing. I turned to someone and asked what the man had done to deserve such a beating as this. The reply was that the man being scourged was a minister who refused to take a license.”

The Founding Father recognized, like so many other patriots, the extent of England's ruthless tyranny. Henry could not shake from his mind the memory of that bleeding minister, suffering for the right to preach the Gospel. ¹¹

Patrick Henry Takes a Stand

By March 1775, Patrick Henry became increasingly annoyed with the delegates to the Second Virginia Convention. It seemed some men would rather concede freedom, afraid to displease the British crown. Such weak, compromising English loyalty repulsed Henry. ¹² He spoke boldly, saying, “Should I keep back my

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opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offense, I should consider myself guilty of treason towards my country, and of an act of disloyalty towards the Majesty of Heaven, which I revere above all earthly kings.”

At the end of his moving seven-minute speech, Henry concluded, “Is life so dear, or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!”

Virginia Delegates Vote for the War for Independence

While some Convention delegates clung to their loyalist stance—Henry’s speech tipped the scales in favor of defensive action, and the resolution passed by only a few votes. ¹³

In his book *God’s Mighty Hand: Providential Occurrences in World History*, Richard Wheeler writes, “Patrick Henry’s dramatic and courageous words have lived in the hearts of bold patriots over these many years. What is little considered is that Patrick Henry was motivated by the vivid picture of a minister dying for liberty.” Pastor James Ireland deeply moved the heart and mind of Patrick Henry. In turn, Patrick’s anointed speech persuaded the House of Burgesses to join with other colonies and break ties with England. One man can make a difference!

What is Your Christian Responsibility in the Civic Arena?

1. **Pray for our elected officials.** I Timothy 2:1-3 says, “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior.”
2. **Registered to vote.** Monday, October 5, is the last day to register to vote in the November election for President and other elected offices. The President, in turn, makes lifetime appointments to our Federal courts, leads our nation, and represents the United States to the world.

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You are eligible to vote if:

- You are a United States citizen.
 - You are a resident of the county where you submit the application.
 - You are at least 17 years and 10 months old when your register, and you are 18 years of age on Election Day, Tuesday, November 3, 2020.
 - You are not a convicted felon.
3. **Vote on Tuesday, November 3, 2020** for candidates who will legislate God-honoring policies and appoint God-honoring judges.

Discussion Questions:

1. What was the title of the famous sermon Jonathan Edwards preached in 1741, which sparked the Great Awakening?
2. How did King George III respond to the preaching of American pastors who challenged their congregations with the Christian duty to resist tyrants?
3. Considering how close the vote was to declare war on England after Patrick Henry's speech, do you have a *renewed* appreciation for the maxim "one person can make a difference"?
4. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that we are the "salt of the earth" in Matthew 5:13. What did He mean by that?

¹ Richard Wheeler, *God's Mighty Hand: Providential Occurrences in World History*, Mantle Ministries, Bulverde, Texas, p. 128.

² Joseph Tracy. *The Great Awakening: A history of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield*, Boston: Charles Tappan, 1845, p. 26.

³ WallBuilders, *Lesson 2: Colonial Period (mid-1600s to 1765)*, September 21, 2019, accessed March 13, 2020, p. 4., <https://wallbuilders.com/chw/lessons/lesson-2-colonial-period/>

⁴ Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God, *Wikipedia*, accessed March 14, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinners_in_the_Hands_of_an_Angry_God

⁵ Ernest G. Bormann, (1985), *Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press,

⁶ Richard Wheeler, *God's Mighty Hand: Providential Occurrences in World History*, p. 129.

⁷ WallBuilders, *Lesson 2: Colonial Period (mid-1600s to 1765)*, p. 4.

⁸ Ibid.

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⁹ Richard Wheeler, *God's Mighty Hand: Providential Occurrences in World History*, p. 130.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*