



The Remarkable Role of the Bible in Early American Education

by Dr. Elizabeth Youmans

Before the North American colonies became “these United States,” colonial parents understood their divine mandate to early instruct their children. As descendants of the European reformers, who highly valued a “virtuous education,”¹ the colonials believed the education of their children was a generational duty to form the future and its leadership upon the foundation of Christ and His Word. Founding Father Samuel Adams wrote,

Let divines and philosophers, statesmen and patriots, unite their endeavors to renovate the age, by ... educating their little boys and girls ... and instructing them in the art of self-government, without which they never can act a wise part in the government of societies, great or small; in short of leading them in the study and practice of the exalted virtues of the Christian system.²

Many families who sailed west were Calvinists, whom historians later referred to as “people of the Book.” Their pastors had taught them how to reason justly with the revelation of God’s Word in the civil realm. Geneva was Calvin’s great experiment in Christian civil government. He also focused on providing a quality Christian education for Geneva’s citizens, noting that an educated laity was essential for a strong church. *Throughout the history of Christianity, wherever the Gospel has taken root, Christian education follows and literacy rises significantly with the reading of God’s Word.*

In 1620, out of concern for their children’s future, the Pilgrims departed Holland for America with the Geneva Bible under their arm. The Geneva Bible contains the marginal notes of the sixteenth century reformers who sought refuge in Geneva at that time. Those notes included commentary about civil government that so frightened King James I that he banned the Geneva Bible in England and commissioned his own translation, declaring, “There will be no marginal notes in my Bible!” Probably few users of the King James Bible are aware of this footnote in English history.

During the first 150 years as English colonies, children were home schooled. Parents took seriously their role to not only teach their children how to read, write, and cipher, but to cultivate virtuous character and Christian conscience for future citizenry. The Bible was their primer and children were catechized. John Locke characterized the reading curriculum of the American colonies as, “the ordinary road of Hornbook, Primer, Psalter, Testament, and

Bible.”³ After home education, many colonial boys attended grammar school and were taught Latin, the language of scholarship, by their local pastor.

Wealthy families often sent their sons to England to receive a more formal, classical education in their well-established academies and universities. However, as colleges were founded in North America, others availed themselves of this new option. These choices would prove influential in the building of a new nation. It is providential that *none of the Colonials schooled in England helped draft the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. These great documents of liberty were the harvest of colonial education.* John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin all had a part in drafting the Declaration of Independence (1776). James Madison, who was educated at the College of New Jersey in reformation theology, was the architect of the U.S. Constitution (1787) and the Bill of Rights (1789).

George Washington, president of the Constitutional Convention, was home schooled on his family’s farm by his father, who died when George was only eleven years old. His stepbrother taught him for several years. His only formal education was a course of instruction in surveying. In 1775, Washington’s first official act as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army was to commission a Chaplain Corps to attend to the spiritual needs of his soldiers. As “Father of His Country,” he is often called the “Moses of America.” In his lifetime, Washington wrote over forty volumes of personal correspondence, in addition to a vast number of volumes of State Papers as President of the new nation. His letters are highly inspiring, and his understanding of Christian self- and civil government was biblical. His “Farewell Address” (1796) is a lesson on the importance of religion and morality in politics and of the need of the thirteen new states to maintain unity for the future health of the United States. It is considered one of the more important historical documents of the new Republic.

Noah Webster, the colonial attorney and schoolmaster who wrote the 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, is called the “Father of American Education.” His scholarship set the standard in the new nation for many generations. Webster was also educated in the colonies. His father so prized education that he mortgaged the family farm to send Noah to Yale College! While reading for the law, he taught school and tutored youth for entrance into college. Later, he waged a long battle to see the U.S. Constitution ratified in all the new states. As he traveled, he stopped at Mt. Vernon to visit George Washington. While there, he chastised Washington for hiring tutors from England to teach Martha’s children!

At the age of fifty, Webster tackled the writing of the first American dictionary, a task that required the mastery of 26 languages. He wanted to provide the new nation with her own dictionary. He understood that words are the building blocks of ideas. The colonies had fought eight years to win independence from England in order to be self-governing under God.

Webster believed it was important to provide definitions that communicated the worldview of the U.S. Constitution and its underlying Christian principles of liberty and civil governance. In addition to researching the root meanings of words, he also researched words in the Hebrew and Greek lexicons and defined them according to how they were used in Scripture. Some of his entries have as many as twenty definitions based on the fine nuances of meaning found in the Bible! (Look up the word “serve.”⁴) *Webster’s 1828 is the only dictionary in the world that includes biblical meanings of words.*

Webster founded Amherst College and fought for universal education in the nation. More than any other of his day, he understood the power of words and the consequences of ideas! Several relevant Webster quotes include:

- *In my view, the Christian religion is the most important and one of the first things in which all children under a free government ought to be instructed. . . . No truth is more evident to my mind than that the Christian religion must be the basis of any government intended to secure the rights and privileges of a free people.*⁵
- *Education is useless without the Bible.*
- *When you become entitled to exercise the right of voting for public officers, let it be impressed on your mind that God commands you to choose for rulers, ‘just men who will rule in the fear of God.’ The preservation of [our] government depends on the faithful discharge of this Duty; if the citizens neglect their Duty and place unprincipled men in office, the government will soon be corrupted; laws will be made, not for the public good so much as for selfish or local purposes; corrupt or incompetent men will be appointed to execute the Laws; the public revenues will be squandered on unworthy men; and the rights of the citizen will be violated or disregarded. If [our] government fails to secure public prosperity and happiness, it must be because the citizens neglect the Divine Commands, and elect bad men to make and administer the Laws.*⁶

Besides his American dictionary, which took him over twenty years to complete, Webster authored the *Blue-Backed Spelling Book*, grammar and history texts, catechisms, and in his later years an American translation of the Bible (1833). As an educator, Webster was interested in the connection of the Bible to all fields of study and desired an accurate translation in English. Although it is still in print today, it did not receive wide acceptance due to the continued popularity of the King James Version. For Webster, it was the work that meant the most to him, and in 1834 he published a companion piece for parents to use with their children, “Value of the Bible and Excellence of the Christian Religion: For the Use of Families and Schools.” At the conclusion he wrote:

The Christian religion exalts the intellect and perfects the human character. — The sublime views of God and of his works, which the scriptures exhibit, have a wonderful effect in strengthening the intellect and expanding its powers. ... Equally effectual are the scriptures in refining our ideas, by representations of purity and holiness of God. The more we know of God, the more just will be our concepts of what is ennobling in our own conduct; and every step we take in imitation of his perfections is an advance in elevation of character. This purity of mind, and this elevation and expansion of intellect are the beginnings of that ever increasing holiness, and that boundless enlargement of knowledge, which are to complete the character and the felicity of the children of God, in another world.

The record of colonial education in America, with the Bible as its primer, validates an important principle: the greatest foundation for building Christian culture is the knowledge of God's Word and the ability to think and reason with its truths.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

Christ-Centered Education Produces Leaders

“Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life (Joh.17.3) and therefore to lay Christ in the bottome, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.”⁷

The first call for education in the Bible is found in Genesis 18:18-19: *“Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him. For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has promised him.”* This is the heart of our Heavenly Father addressing the heart of an earthly father to train up his children in the ways of God, so that his family and future nation will be blessed and will, in turn, bless all nations. God gave the responsibility for educating children in the nurture of the Lord to parents.

The cornerstone of early American education was the belief that *“children are a heritage from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3)*. America's colonial period reflects the fruit of parents who took seriously their role to provide their progeny a godly education, as well as a Christian model for righteous living. Like the practice of the ancient Jews, education and discipleship began in the home at mother's knee and often ended in the cornfield or the silversmith's shop apprenticing with father. Most colonial families had a copy of the Bible and attended church regularly. Dr. Lawrence A. Cremin, distinguished scholar in the field of education, wrote that during America's colonial period the Bible was *“the single most important cultural influence in the*

lives of Anglo-Americans.”⁸ Parents taught the rising generation to think and reason with biblical principles, which prepared them to establish the world’s first Christian constitutional republic. Another word for constitution is covenant. The propagation of God’s covenant promises to Abraham has been dependent upon parents teaching the next generation His commandments and ways.

America's first 150 years provide a strong model of education

Eighteenth-century clergymen were also instrumental in preparing the colonists in their struggle for independence from Mother England, a monarchy whose king violated their individual rights as English citizens. It was the clergy’s vigorous preaching and active participation in the war itself that gave the religious sanction and inspiration for the writing of the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Those first 150 years produced a model of education worth replicating in the family and the church today.

As sovereign ruler of the universe and the author of human history, God governs in the affairs of men and nations. History is “His story.” A Christian history timeline is a helpful tool to trace His providential hand in His story, so a simple timeline of education has been provided for your reflection (see appendix). It begins from creation to the founding of the United States of America, her flowering as the first Christian constitutional republic, and, sadly, the erosion of her educational underpinnings and Christian character. Tracing God’s hand highlights how He has used both key individuals and nations to move the Gospel and its effect of internal and external liberty from Jerusalem to the remotest parts of the earth.

God has always placed a great emphasis on His people remembering His mighty acts and teaching the knowledge of them to the next generation (Psalm 78:1-7). Sadly, few Americans are aware that twentieth-century, revisionist historians and secular educators have robbed them of knowing their Christian legacy by *intentionally* removing from textbooks all remembrance of God and His miraculous providence in the founding and constitutional eras. This has been a deliberate act to deprive Americans of their individual liberty. The American Church, today, is in need of a “Great Awakening” from her ignorance and lethargy in order to recognize and own God’s mandate for godly education and Christian discipleship. Too often, this mandate is met in the local church with an “educational” program for children designed to babysit and entertain them. Children hunger and thirst for righteousness and yearn for instruction that transcends the mediocrity and perverseness of the popular culture to inspire their imagination to nobleness of thought and deed.

This is precisely the testimony of Samuel, the child dedicated by his mother to education under the nurture of Israel’s high priest and educator, Eli. Samuel knew firsthand the tragedy of the omission of godly education and the lack of role models in a nation. He had witnessed its effect in the moral degradation of his people. His solution, which birthed a great awakening in Israel,

was to establish schools of the prophets to restore to his whole nation the study of God's Word and the knowledge of God in all subjects—in literature, history, natural science, and the arts. In only twenty years, Samuel's restoration of biblical education turned his nation back to God and established her character and identity as God's chosen people—a nation called to be a light unto the world!

Another biblical example of the role of godly education in deliverance from sin, oppression, and ignorance of God's Word is the reconstruction project of the civil governor, Nehemiah and the high priest, Ezra. After 70 years of exile in Babylon, the "Hollywood of the ancient empires," God sent them back to the desolate capital city. Nehemiah and the returning exiles, with the help of the local Jewish remnant, rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in just 52 days! He then gathered all the families into the marketplace to listen to Ezra, the premier Jewish educator, read aloud and teach the meaning of God's Law (Nehemiah 8:1-3). Those who had been left behind in Jerusalem after the Babylonian destruction had lost contact with God's Word. As Ezra opened the scroll and began to read, the people soon wept profusely as God's living Word pierced their hearts. They cried out to God for forgiveness and repented. Nehemiah called for a festival and the people joyously celebrated, "because they could understand the words which had been made known to them" (Nehemiah 8:12). Ezra then taught them their glorious, providential history (Nehemiah 9). Their ignorance of God's miracles and guidance throughout the history of their nation had robbed them of their knowledge as a divinely chosen people. Once their understanding was illumined, they renewed God's covenant in writing. The reconstruction work was not complete until Jerusalem's families were rebuilt spiritually and her cultural institutions rested solidly on God's Law! God was consecrating His people, so that in 400 years He could send His only Son to earth to atone for the sins of the world and fulfill His eternal plan for mankind.

All the great Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century—Luther, Calvin, Knox, Zwingli, Sturm, Farel, Beza, and Melancthon—were aggressive education champions committed to Bible-centered Christian instruction and discipleship. They understood that long-term church reform required educational reform at all levels. Given their limited resources, their achievements were remarkable. Martin Luther, the young German monk who ignited the Reformation in 1517, laid the foundation for renovating the church's educational system. He was a strong advocate of Christian schools and Bible-centered learning. Luther promoted Christian education, not to gain church attendance or material wealth, but for the purpose of *preserving the integrity of the gospel of Christ*. He warned us in the sixteenth century,

Above all, in schools of all kinds the chief and most common lesson should be in the Scriptures. . . . I am afraid that the universities will prove to be the great gates of hell unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures, engraving them in the hearts of youth. I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution in which men are not increasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt.⁹

John Calvin and John Knox were the foremost leaders of the second generation of evangelical Protestant reformers. Their influence, particularly Calvin's, exceeded that of Luther. Both

visionaries wrote educational plans—Calvin’s was a city-wide system for Geneva and Knox’s was a national system for his beloved Scotland.

Early American education bears the undeniable imprint of the Bible-centric educational philosophy of Calvin and Knox. Dr. Benjamin Rush, physician, co-founder of five colleges, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and founder of the Bible Society was the first American founding father to propose free public schools. He thought children should actually read the Bible for themselves, not just have it read to them. He petitioned society that the Bible should be the primary textbook taught in public schools in his publication entitled, *A Defense of the Use of the Bible as a School Book* (1791):¹⁰

Before I state my arguments in favor of teaching children to read by means of the Bible, I shall assume the following propositions: First, that Christianity is the only true and perfect religion, and that in proportion as mankind adopts its principles and obeys its precepts, they will be wise and happy; Second, that a better knowledge of this religion is to be acquired by reading the Bible than in any other way; Finally, that the Bible contains more knowledge necessary to man in his present state than any other book in the world. . . . I believe no man was ever early instructed in the truths of the Bible without having been made wiser or better by the early operation of these impressions upon his mind.

Today, many young Christians sit passively in front of computers filling in endless worksheets or drawing lines to the matching answers from curricula written by secular humanists. They have not plumbed the riches of the classics with a master teacher nor been taught the skills of composition and rhetoric. *It is writing that produces thinkers!* With a bankrupt vocabulary and no understanding of God’s hand in the history of Western Civilization, communication for the twenty-first century student has been reduced to tweets, emojis, and selfies!

Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, which contains biblical meanings of words, defines “education” as follows:

noun, [Latin: educatio, to lead out of.] The bringing up, as of a child, instruction; formation of manners. Education comprehends all that series of instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, and form the manners and habits of youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations. To give children a good education in manners, arts and science, is important; to give them a religious education is indispensable; and an immense responsibility rests on parents and guardians who neglect these duties.

Second Timothy 3:16-17 inspired this definition, which includes not only instruction but discipline. It contains four active verbs indicating that education is not meant to be the passive institution it has become in the last 100 years. With the onset of the information era, education has been reduced to memorizing facts (not truths) in order to pass the next test. This process bypasses the spirit of the mind, and information is soon forgotten. Students are left with a recognition mentality of subject content, not a mastery of the subject’s principles as in the colonial era. English apologist Dorothy Sayers wrote in her essay, *The Lost Tools of Learning*,

“although we often succeed in teaching our pupils ‘subjects,’ we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think: they learn everything, except the art of learning.”

Education as God intended is teaching and learning. Teaching and learning, first and foremost, is a relationship. It is the heart-to-heart and mind-to-mind relationship between the teacher and the student that fosters both internal and eternal consequences. Children need teachers, not computers, masters of disciplines, not self-directed workbooks. The goal of Christian education is not the impartation of facts, but changed lives! When the imagination is inspired by truth and beauty and the mind is actively engaged in thinking and reasoning that conforms to the Word of God, the Holy Spirit enlightens the student’s understanding and he joyfully learns for himself. *“There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty gives the understanding”* (Job 32:8).

Dr. Rush made a bold claim in his essay: “teaching the Bible in schools would in the course of two generations, eradicate infidelity among us and render civil government scarcely necessary in our country.”¹¹ My study of this essay years ago is what prompted me to design an enrichment program to restore to youth the lost virtues of beauty, truth, and moral goodness. This program nurtures children by reading aloud the great children’s classics, by giving them a taste of Christian history, by cultivating Christian imagination through the arts, and by providing them a Bible to read for themselves. Every lesson is built on a biblical principle, and the children are guided to reason with and rightly apply truth to their own lives.¹² Hearts and minds are inspired and the joy of learning is once again ignited. Christian imagination is cultivated to dream God-sized dreams and to wonder at His glorious creation and His overruling hand in their lives and nations. In the words of twentieth century Christian educator, Dr. Mark Fakkema:

*To educate the children of today is to construct the foundation of the nation tomorrow. Faithless teaching makes for unfaithful citizens. . . . We are in need of a nationwide education that honors God and teaches study content in the light of God’s Word.*¹³

The decay of America’s culture cries out for the Church to repent of her complacency and impart God’s mandate for *generational duty*—the obligation of this generation as guardians and stewards of the nation to form the future leadership, and indeed the future, through Christ-centered education.

The American Revolution Was Fueled by Preaching

From the mid-1600s to the mid-1800s, public schools as we know them today were virtually nonexistent. Parents, pastors, and tutors taught the rising generation how to read, write, and cipher and how to think and reason using the Bible as their primer or first book of instruction. In these 200 years, America produced five generations of extraordinary men and women who

laid the foundation for a nation dedicated to the Christian principle of liberty and the art of self-government.

The private system of education in which our forefathers were educated included home, school, church, voluntary associations such as library companies and philosophical societies, circulating libraries, apprenticeships, and private study. It was a system supported primarily by private benefactors, although there was a veneer of government involvement in some colonies, such as in Puritan Massachusetts. All was done without compulsion.¹⁴

The Old Deluder's Law of 1642 was passed in the Massachusetts colony. It stated: "All youth are to be taught to read perfectly the English tongue, have knowledge in the laws and be taught some orthodox catechism." Colonial America also had dame schools, in which neighborhood children were taught to read and write by women in their own kitchens.

Unlike modern America, in which the most influential voice in the culture is the media, in colonial America the pulpit served as the single most powerful voice to inspire the thinking and reasoning of the colonists. What fired the colonial pulpit was the influence of Reformers John Knox and John Calvin. Their teachings on the Kingdom of Christ and the authority of the Scripture gave rise to the colonial form of self- and civil government.

The colonial pulpit, which began with men like Joseph Cotton, 1630 Puritan pastor of Boston, remained for 150 years the primary educational influence for the colonials through the preaching of such clergymen as Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards (evangelical patriarch), George Whitefield (First Great Awakening), Dr. John Witherspoon (signer of the Declaration of Independence), Samuel Davies (pastor of Patrick Henry), Jonas Clark (Lexington, 1775), and Peter Muhlenburg ("Give 'em Watts, boys!"), to name just a few. These were giants indeed, men who faithfully led their congregations to think biblically. Some clergy even donned the garb of soldier during the American Revolution to fight tirelessly with pen and sword for the cause of Christian civilization on the North American continent. According to Yale historian, Harry S. Stout,

Over the span of the colonial era, American ministers delivered approximately eight million sermons, each lasting one to one-and-a-half hours. The average 70-year-old colonial churchgoer would have listened to some 7,000 sermons in his or her lifetime, totaling nearly 10,000 hours of concentrated listening. This is the number of classroom hours it would take to receive ten separate undergraduate degrees in a modern university, without ever repeating the same course!¹⁵

The sermon provided colonial families an excellent educational experience. Sunday morning was not only a time to hear the latest news and see old friends, but it was also an opportunity to sit under a man of God who had spent many hours preparing for a two, three, or even four-

hour sermon. Many a colonial pastor spent eight to twelve hours *daily* studying, praying over, and writing his sermon. Unlike sermons on the frontier in the mid-19th century, colonial sermons were filled with the fruits of years of study. They were geared not only to the emotions and will, but also to the intellect.

The sermon was one of the chief literary genres in colonial America. Listeners followed sermons closely, made mental notes, and discussed the message with their family on Sunday afternoon. Thus, without ever attending a college or seminary, a churchgoer in colonial America could gain an intimate knowledge of Bible doctrine, church history, and classical literature. Questions raised by the sermon could be answered by the pastor or by books in church libraries that sprang up all over the colonies. Often sermons were published, and listeners could review what they had heard on Sunday morning. They were often passed from family to family in a community, as fathers sat nightly with their families around the fireplace rereading the Scriptural references aloud and reviewing each principle with their children. Parents and pastors took seriously their role to educate both the head and the heart.

Sermons were also delivered on various public occasions, such as Days of Thanksgiving or Fasting and the election of officers of the local militia. They were often printed as political pamphlets, as pastors in the 17th and 18th centuries delivered dissertations on civil government. "The annual 'Election Sermon' — a perpetual memorial that continued down through the generations from century to century — still bears witness [1860] that our forefathers ever began their civil year and its responsibilities with an appeal to Heaven, and recognized Christian morality as the only basis of good laws."¹⁶

The years 1740 to 1790 marked an age of "mighty men of God!" — an era of remarkable patriot-preachers who, by their faithful preaching and their righteous lifestyle, laid the foundation for the American Revolution and the founding of the new Republic. "To the Puritan pulpit we owe the force that won our independence."¹⁷ England's King George III referred to the Revolution as the "Parson's Rebellion."

George Bancroft, 19th century statesman and historian wrote, "the Revolution of 1776, so far as it was affected by religion, was a Presbyterian measure. It was the natural outgrowth of the principles which the Presbyterianism of the Old World planted in her sons in the New World — the English Puritans, the Scottish Covenanters, the French Huguenots, the Dutch Calvinists, and the Presbyterians of Ulster [Ireland]. . . . The American Revolution was but the application of the principles of the Reformation to civil government."¹⁸

Presbyterian Scotsman Dr. John Witherspoon was president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) and was especially prominent in the independence movement. His influence as a pastor/educator was enormous. One crown official in the colonies wrote back to

England that the labors of such clergymen as John Witherspoon so influenced the shape of the conflict that it had very much become a religious war. Witherspoon tutored James Madison, architect of the Constitution and U.S. President, Vice-President Aaron Burr, nine cabinet officers, 21 U.S. Senators, 39 Congressmen, three Supreme Court justices, 12 state governors, and numerous ministers, lawyers, judges, and other public officials. Five of the 55 members of the Constitutional Convention were his students. He nurtured a whole generation of statesmen with the Scriptures and the Covenanter's view of civil government. He was elected as a delegate from New Jersey to the Continental Congress and served for five years. He was the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence, and during his period in Congress he served on over 120 committees. "One realizes after seeing the character of these men why it is said that the colonists treated them with the kind of reverential regard that they refused to give kings and Anglican bishops."¹⁹

The true alliance between politics and religion is the lesson that was inculcated by the colonial clergy. "The pulpit of the Revolution is the voice of the Founding Fathers of the Republic, enforced by their example. They invoked God in their civil assemblies, called upon their chosen teachers of religion for counsel from the Bible, and recognized its precepts as the law of public conduct."²⁰ They prepared the new nation for the struggle for liberty with the Word of God and a deep trust in Him in their hearts. This was the colonials' source of moral energy.

The results of colonial education are most impressive. America's educational institutions—family, church, and school—produced generations of articulate, Christian men and women who could discourse on complex issues of self- and civil government. Samuel Adams, colonial patriot and father of the American Revolution, summarized the ideal of American colonial education: "To develop a wise and virtuous man, fit to be trusted with the liberty of his country."²¹

Teach Character and Understanding at Home

The first sphere of government in colonial America was the home. Home is where the foundation of character is laid and where self-government should first be learned and practiced. Man's capacity to govern himself is in direct proportion to his relationship with Jesus Christ and obedience to His Word. Childhood is the optimum time to receive Christ as Savior and when the principles of Christianity are most effectually impressed upon the mind. Much of human character and felicity depend upon the education of the young mind for both the development of its faculties and the application of truth to choices and decisions.

So it was in the colonial home where fathers and mothers taught and modeled Christian character and established home habits of civility, morality, frugality, perseverance in well doing, self-governance, and the love of learning. The Bible was their primer for character

education and the Book from which they taught their children how to read and reason with truth. Reverend Phillips, writing in 1869, described the role of the colonial American home with regard to forming the character and conscience necessary for Christian civil governance:

The Christian home has its influence also upon the state. It forms the citizen, lays the foundation for civil and political character. ... We owe to the family, therefore, what we are as a nation as well as individuals. The principle of home government is love—love ruling according to law. It is similar in its fundamentals to the government of the state and the church. It involves the legislative, judicial, and executive functions; its elements are law, authority, obedience, and penalties. The basis of its laws is the Word of God.²²

John Adams, second President of the United States, and his wife Abigail were careful parents. They lived on a farm in Braintree, Massachusetts and contributed significantly to the founding and constitutional eras of the United States. They left us a remarkable record through their lifetime correspondence of over 1,100 letters. Abigail was the daughter of a colonial New England pastor. She was home educated and spent hours reading the books in her father's library. She, in turn, home educated their five children. Their first son, John Quincy, served America for more than fifty years. He accepted his first diplomatic appointment at the age of fourteen as secretary to the U.S. minister to Russia. His first instruction was in the Word of God. So well did young Johnny commit the Word to his heart and mind that it became for him both compass and anchor in his long life of public service.

Johnny was a patriot by the age of seven. While his father served as a statesman in Philadelphia, he watched his mother melt her pewter utensils to make bullets for the Continental soldiers. He served his mother on their Braintree farm, and at the age of ten, held a post-riding job delivering mail. It was at this age that John Quincy began his habit of writing. He is known for his personal diary that he maintained all his life, which comprises over 50 volumes.

His father, John Adams, never negated his responsibility to educate his children, even though he spent long months and even years away from New England in service to the new nation. In a 1778 letter to Abigail, he penned,

Education makes a greater difference between man and man, than nature has made between man and brute. The virtues and powers to which men may be trained by early education and constant discipline are truly sublime and astonishing. ... It should be your care therefore, and mine, to elevate the minds of our children, and exalt their courage, to accelerate and animate their industry and activity, to excite in them an habitual contempt of meanness, abhorrence of injustice and inhumanity, and an ambition to excel in every capacity, faculty, and virtue. If we suffer their minds to grovel and creep in infancy, they will grovel and creep all their lives.²³

Ten years at home, under his beloved mother's tutelage, was all young Johnny would have. At the age of eleven, he traveled to France with his father to serve him in his diplomatic role. However, Abigail continued her education of Johnny through her letters. A portion of a 1778 letter exhorts,

*Improve your understanding by acquiring useful knowledge and virtue, such as will render you an ornament to society, an honor to your country, and a blessing to your parents. Great learning and superior abilities, should you ever possess them, will be of little value and small estimation, unless virtue, honor, truth, and integrity are added to them. Adhere to those religious sentiments and principles which were early instilled into your mind, and remember, that you are accountable to your Maker for all your words and actions.*²⁴

As a young adult, John Quincy served as a diplomat in various European nations, as Secretary of State for President Monroe, and as a Congressman from Massachusetts. He was then elected the sixth President of the United States. After his four-year term as president, Adams returned home and ran for a seat in Congress. He is one of only two presidents to continue public service after his term in office, which he did for eighteen years until his death.²⁵ He made many contributions as a legislator, not the least of which was his stand against slavery.

In 1811, John Quincy revealed his concern for the character of the next generation. He wrote a series of letters to his own son at boarding school on "The Bible and Its Teachings." A portion of one of these letters follows:

I advise you, my son, in whatever you read, and most of all in reading the Bible, to remember that it is for the purpose of making you wiser and more virtuous. I have myself, for many years, made it a practice to read through the Bible once every year. I have always endeavored to read it with the same spirit and temper of mind, which I now recommend to you: that I, with the intention and desire that it may contribute to my advancement in wisdom and virtue. ... My custom is, to read four or five chapters every morning, immediately after rising from my bed. It employs about an hour of my time, and seems to me the most suitable manner of beginning the day ...

You have already come to that age to know the difference between right and wrong, and you know some of your duties, and the obligations you are under, to become acquainted with them all. It is in the Bible, you must learn them, and from the Bible how to practice them. Those duties are to God, to your fellow-creatures, and to yourself. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself." ...

You will perceive that I have spoken of duties to yourself, distinct from those to God and to your fellow-creatures; while Jesus Christ speaks only of two commandments. The reason is, because

Christ, and the commandments repeated by him, consider self-love as so implanted in the heart of every man by the law of his nature, that it requires no commandment to establish its influence over the heart; and so great do they know its power to be, that they demand no other measure for the love of our neighbor, than that which they know we shall have for ourselves as well as to them, and they are all to be learned in equal perfection by our searching the Scriptures.²⁶

Colonial education successfully equipped five generations to think and reason justly with the revelation of God's Word for application in every sphere of life. It produced the Christian character and conscience required for governing the first Christian constitutional republic.

American Christian History Timeline of Education

Eternity Past

Creation	“In the beginning was the Word (logos) . . . and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1); Imago Dei:
<i>The Creation of Man</i>	“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Ge 1:26); God gave man the gift of language and the capacity to reason. Adam’s mind was in perfect unity with God’s Spirit; Revelation from divine truth governed rational knowledge.
<i>The Fall of Man</i>	Reasoning is corrupted by deception and sin. Man now ruled by rational knowledge.
<i>Pagan Idea of Man and Government</i>	Redemption promised! Nimrod (“rebellion”) erected a city and a tower: “Come, let us make a name for ourselves . . .” (Ge 11:4). Abraham is called by God to command his children to keep the way of the Lord that God might bless him and the nations.
The Law	The Eternal Law was written on tablets of stone: A picture of righteousness given. God’s instructions for the education of children imparted (Dt 6); God directed Moses to write His instructions and laws in a book (Ex 17:14).
<i>Moral Preparation for the Gospel</i> 1450 B.C.	
1100s	Samuel’s Schools of the Prophets: In 20 years Israel turned back to God.
500-400	Ezra restored God’s Word to the heart of Israel’s education as God prepared to send the Messiah; Greek logic and rhetoric formalized: Socratic method of reasoning, Aristotelian logic, the scientific method of reasoning
Jesus Christ	THE Master Teacher: “I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life!” (Jn 14:6); Taught with principles (Lk 8:11); The Eternal Law now written on tablets of flesh! (2 Co 3:3). Internal liberty! Day of Pentecost: The Holy Spirit of Truth, the Teacher, was sent by Christ to abide within the believer. Renewal of the mind now possible through regeneration; It is possible to have “the mind of Christ” (1 Co 2:16).
<i>Focal Point of History Christian Idea of Man and Government</i>	
Paul	The gospel goes westward; New Testament churches are planted; Paul reasoned from the Scriptures with the Gentiles: “See that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception.” “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” Dispersion of the Christian Jewish believers throughout the pagan Roman Empire forced establishment of Christian schools.
A.D. 60 70 - 132	
Dark Ages	The Bible in the hands of just a few scholars caused great ignorance, fear, and illiteracy among the commoners. Charlemagne revived learning in palace school of Aachen, Germany (A.D. 732); Alfred the Great (800s) established schools in England.
1225	Thomas Aquinas and scholasticism: Rationalized faith and denied the need for revelation. Intellectualism was highlighted at the cost of practical application; Rise of European university system and classical education (Greek trivium and quadrivium revived from pagan antiquity.)
1340-84	Gerard Groote: Dutch forerunner of the European Reformation: Recorded his reasoning and revelation from Bible in a spiritual diary: a book of principles; Taught with principles; Founder of the Common Life Brethren, a laity who established schools for commoners with a principled curriculum; Impacted all the great European reformers through his philosophy and methods of education: Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, Sturm, Comenius, Erasmus, à Kempis, Loyola, and the Puritans.

Columbus 1492	Opened the Atlantic Ocean for the gospel to move westward “in God’s fullness of time” when a “people of the Book” were prepared and capable of reasoning with God’s Word into the civil realm.
The Bible in English 1500s	God’s Word in the language of the commoner and accessible through the printing press birthed liberty in reasoning and thinking! New ideas and applications inspired the sciences and the arts. Wycliffe Bible, Tyndale Bible, Geneva Bible, King James Version (flowering of English language)
The Reformation “Sola Scriptura” 1517	Martin Luther and John Calvin set a high priority on the education of children; The Bible became the “first-book” of instruction. Cry of the Reformation: The Bible is the sole authority for all of life and living! Huguenots planted 2,150 Calvinist churches and Bible-centered Christian schools in France for ALL the children! Amidst the fires of persecution, denial of rights, imprisonment, and death at the gallows, Church fathers continued to make it their first care to provide the next generation with primary instruction which the Roman Church had failed to furnish their flocks.
Christian Founding 1620	Pilgrims came to America; wrote Mayflower Compact; the Bible was single most important cultural influence in colonial life; it was America’s primer of all learning and her political textbook. Colonials reasoned with the revelation of God’s Word, related its principles to all of life, especially to church and civil government; colleges founded to train ministers of the gospel; education produced highest rate of literacy in the world and a Christian self-governing character and conscience!
American Christian Republic 1776	American Revolution: Biblical reasoning tested in the civil sphere and produced great documents of civil liberty: Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights; civil government founded on God’s Law; constitutional liberty was to be for all.
Expansion and Erosion 1800s	Flowering of America; the spirit of invention and enterprise; Westward expansion; Noah Webster, father of American education and scholarship preserved America’s vocabulary of liberty; his dictionary documents biblical and governmental meanings of words; his school books and spelling primer go West with pioneers; Horace Mann, father of progressive education; God’s Word is removed from heart of education; decline of biblical reasoning
1930s	John Dewey expounds socialism in education; progressive education produces an illiterate, secular, American society.
Restoration	<i>If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Ps 11:3).</i> The need for Christians to restore God’s Word and biblical methods to the heart of education, laying Christ and His Word as the foundation of all sound reasoning and learning.
21 st Century	You! _____ (Your place in His Story!)

Eternity Future

¹ William Penn’s vision for the education of children in the colony of Pennsylvania, *Frame of Government*, 1682.

² Letter to John Adams, October 4, 1790.

³ *Thoughts on Education*, 1690.

⁴ Free online at <http://webstersdictionary1828.com>.

⁵ From the Preface of the printed version of *Webster's 1828 Dictionary*. You can access the dictionary at: webstersdictionary1828.com.

⁶ *History of United States, 1833* textbook by Noah Webster.

⁷ *First Fruits of New England*, a portion of Harvard College's Mission Statement, 1643.

⁸ *American Education: The Colonial Experience 1607-1783*, 1970, p. 40.

⁹ d'Aubigne, M. (1846). *History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century*. Baker Book House, p. 190.

¹⁰ The complete essay can be found online at:

<http://deila.dickinson.edu/cdm/fullbrowser/collection/ownwords/id/17784/rv/compoundobject/cpd/19843>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² This curriculum is available in four languages on the AMO® Program website <http://amoprogram.com>.

¹³ Slater, R. (1965). *Teaching and Learning America's Christian History: The Principle Approach*. Foundation for American Christian Education, p. xix.

¹⁴ Carson, C. (1960). *The American Tradition*. The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc.

¹⁵ Christian History Magazine, Issue 50: Christianity and the American Revolution.

¹⁶ Hall, V. (1976). *Christian History of the American Revolution*. Foundation for American Christian Education.

¹⁷ Thornton, J. W. (1860). *The Pulpit of the American Revolution*. Reprinted by Bibliobazaar (2008). Preface.

¹⁸ Bancroft, G. (1875). *History of the United States of America from the Discovery of the Continent, Vol. X*. Little, Brown and Co., p. 310.

¹⁹ Adams, J. L. (1989) *Yankee Doodle Went to Church: The Righteous Revolution*. F.H. Revell.

²⁰ Thornton, J. W. (1860). *The Pulpit of the American Revolution*. Reprinted by Bibliobazaar (2008), Preface.

²¹ Speech delivered in Boston, October 4, 1790.

²² Slater, R. (1965). *Teaching and Learning America's Christian History: The Principle Approach*. Foundation for American Christian Education, p. 19.

²³ Hall, V., compiler. (1976). *The Christian History of the American Revolution: Consider and Ponder*. Foundation for American Christian Education, p. 606.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 607.

²⁵ William Howard Taft served as President for a four-year term followed by nine years as the tenth Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 615.