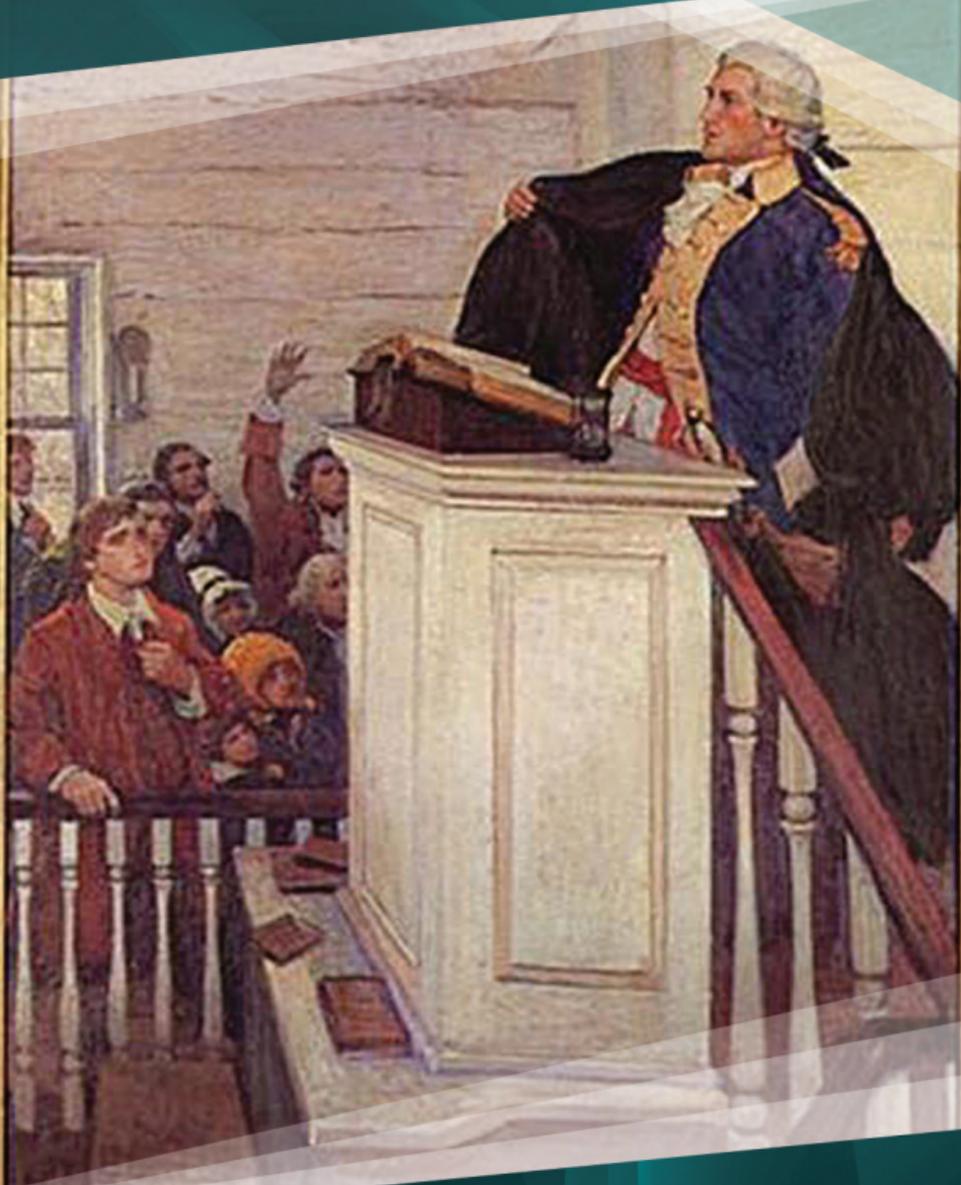
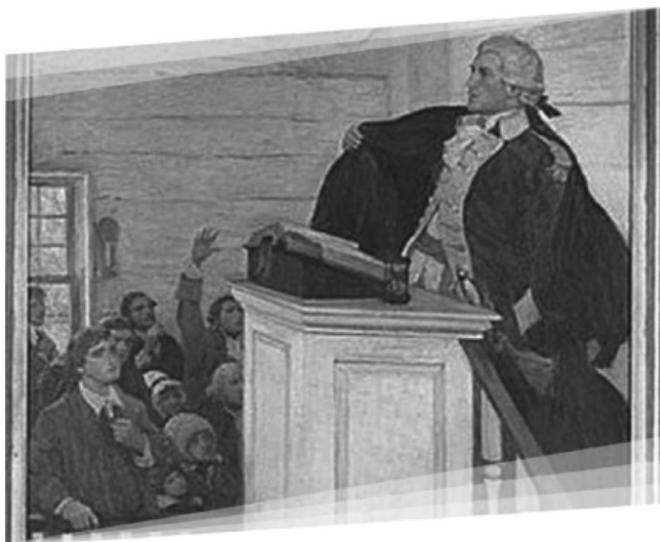


A BIBLICAL VIEW ON
**PATRIOT
PREACHERS**



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PATRIOT PREACHERS



One of the perennial questions is how involved pastors and churches should be in speaking to the moral and political issues of their day. If you look at the founding of America, you find that pastors took a very important role in educating and leading their congregations. Churches were often the center of intellectual life in a community. Pastors had a key role in providing a biblical perspective on the issues of the day.

How did pastors in the 18th century during the founding era address the growing conflict between England and the colonies?

Here are a few examples that you can read about in more detail in the books listed as resources at the end of this booklet.

Historical Perspective

Historians in the past often talked about the boldness of these pastors and preachers. Frank Moore in *The Patriot Preachers of the American Revolution*, explained that “The preachers of the Revolution did not hesitate to attack the great political and social evils of their day.”

John Wingate Thornton, in the preface to his 1860 book, *The Pulpit of the American Revolution*, talked about what the pastors believed about political involvement:

The Fathers did not divorce politics and religion, but they denounced the separation as ungodly. Indeed, the clergy were generally consulted by the civil authorities; and not infrequently the suggestions from the pulpit, on election days and other special occasions, were enacted into laws. The state was developed out of the church. The annual

election sermon bears witness that our Fathers even began their civil year and its responsibilities with an appeal to heaven and recognized Christian morality as the only basis of good laws.

Alice Baldwin explains that the New England preachers taught principles of life, liberty, and property long before they appeared in the Declaration of Independence:

No one can fully understand the American Revolution and the American constitutional system without a realization of the long history and religious associations which lie back of these words; without realizing that for a hundred years before the Revolution men were taught that these rights were protected by divine, inviolable law.

Sadly, so much of the history of the influence of the clergy in the founding of this country and the framing of this republic has been lost or forgotten.

Historical Portraits

There are many examples of the boldness

of the patriot preachers, but let's briefly look at the stories of three pastors: Peter Muhlenberg, Jonas Clark, and James Caldwell.

John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg was a Lutheran pastor who also served in the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg, Virginia. With a heavy heart, he announced that he was going off to war and would preach his last sermon to his church in Woodstock, Virginia on January 21, 1776. His great nephew wrote that on that day, Muhlenberg preached on Ecclesiastes. When he got to Ecclesiastes 3:8 ("A time for war, and a time for peace"), he announced that the time to fight had now come. After the sermon, he took off his preaching robe to display his military uniform and then called for the men of the church to join him in the American Revolution. He and his men fought with George Washington all the way to Yorktown. Later, he and his brother (who was also a minister) served in Congress.

An interesting side story is the debate he had with his brother, Frederick Muhlenberg, who (at the time) accused him of "trying to serve two masters." Peter Muhlenberg

answered this charge in one of his letters: "I am a clergyman, it is true, but I am a member of society as well as the poorest layman, and my liberty is as dear to me as to any man. Shall I then sit still, and enjoy myself at home, when the best blood of the continent is spilling? Heaven forbid it." Later he added: "Do you think then, if America should be conquered, I should be safe? On the contrary, and would you not sooner fight like a man than die the death of a dog?" Apparently, Frederick Muhlenberg changed his mind because he also served in Congress and even became the Speaker of the House.

We all remember the midnight ride of Paul Revere. We might ask where was he going? He was riding to the home of Pastor Jonas Clark in Lexington, Massachusetts. On the night of April 18, 1775, he was entertaining two special guests: Samuel Adams and John Hancock. During the meeting, they asked Pastor Clark if the Minutemen would fight. Clark responded, "I trained them for this very hour; they would fight, and if need be, die too, under the shadow of the house of God."

These men were actually trained by Captain John Parker (a member of the church). He gave the order to the men, "Stand your ground, don't fire unless fired upon. But if they mean to have a war, let it begin here." At one point, the British commander ordered them to throw down their arms in the name of the king of England. Captain Parker and his men responded, "We recognize no sovereign but God, and no king but Jesus."

They fought that day on Lexington green, and some died "under the shadow of the house of God." A year later (April 19, 1776), Pastor Jonas Clark preached this sermon: "The Fate of Blood-thirsty Oppressors, and God's Tender Care of His Distressed People."

Reverend James Caldwell served as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Elizabethtown, New Jersey. He was known as "The High Priest of the Rebellion" by the British. There was a price on his head, and when he was away, someone dressed in a British uniform shot his wife through their window. He was able to recover her body

under a white flag and had to do her funeral. This is just one example of the heavy price many paid for opposing the British crown. Later he was also killed.

One famous story about James Caldwell took place in Springfield, New Jersey. The soldiers ran out of wadding for their muskets. Caldwell went to the Springfield Presbyterian church, picked up the church hymnals from the church, and encouraged the men to tear out the pages and use them for wadding. Many of the hymns were written by Isaac Watts. So as he was tossing the soldiers the hymnals, he said "Give 'em Watts, boys."

Caldwell was a Presbyterian, and so were many of the other patriot preachers. That is why King George II called the American Revolution a "Presbyterian Rebellion." The Prime Minister's son, Horace Walpole lamented, "There is no use in crying about it. Cousin America has eloped with a Presbyterian parson."

The British often referred to these pastors and preachers as "the Black Robed Regiment."

They were called the black regiment because their preaching robes were black. They were considered a regiment against the British crown because they preached liberty.

Key Figures in the American Revolution

Who was most responsible for the American Revolution? John Adams served not only as the first Vice-President in America but also as its second President. In 1818, he wrote an essay about "The Meaning of the American Revolution" to explain why it began. He said, "The Revolution was effected before the War commenced. The Revolution was in the mind and hearts of the people: and change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations."

In the essay, Adams listed the men responsible for the revival of American principles that led to the American Revolution. Two he mentioned were Dr. Samuel Cooper and Dr. Jonathan Mayhew.

Samuel Cooper was the pastor of Brattle Street Church. John Hancock and John

Adams attended his church. He was a close friend of Samuel Adams and corresponded regularly with Benjamin Franklin. Samuel Cooper preached an election sermon based on Jeremiah 6:14. One of his most notable lines was, "Peace, peace, we ardently wish, but not upon terms dishonorable to ourselves, or dangerous to our liberties; and our enemies seem not yet prepared to allow it upon any other."

Jonathan Mayhew was called "The Father of Civil and Religious Liberty in Massachusetts and America." He was famous for his 1750 and 1754 election sermons espousing the cause of liberty and the right and duty of the colonists to resist tyranny. He is the person who made the phrase "No Taxation Without Representation" famous in a sermon. He opposed the Stamp Act and urged the colonists to work to secure liberty.

His most famous sermon was on "A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers." Christians wondered whether it would ever

be appropriate to declare independence since that would be civil disobedience. Mayhew provided a biblical response to that, and his sermon was reprinted and distributed throughout the colonies. He argues that a Christian has not only the right, but the duty to oppose unjust rulers.

One more pastor is worth mentioning. John Witherspoon was a minister and President of Princeton (at that time it was called the College of New Jersey). Although he was a minister, he was also a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

His influence was profound. For example, he taught James Madison (often called the architect of the Constitution) as well as 77 members of Congress and three Supreme Court justices. He is also known for a famous sermon he preached just before America declared its independence in July 1776. Witherspoon preached about the "Dominion of Providence Over the Affairs of Men" on May 17, 1776. In the sermon, he argued that: "There is not a single instance in history in

which civil liberty was lost, and religious liberty preserved entire.”

One time after Witherspoon gave a rousing speech for independence, he sat back in his seat. Then another delegate rose to declare, “We are not ripe for revolution.” At that point, Witherspoon replied, “In my judgment, Sir, we are not only ripe but rotting.” Some wonder if the comment by Horace Walpole that “Cousin American had eloped with a Presbyterian parson,” was directed at John Witherspoon, the Presbyterian parson.

This history of the patriot preachers in the 18th century should serve as a model for pastors and preachers today. They were bold in their proclamations and dedicated to applying biblical principles to every area of life. If you would like to read more about their lives and ministries, I would encourage you to look at the resources that tell their stories and even provide some of their powerful sermons from the founding era.

Additional Resources

David Barton, *The Role of Pastors & Christians in Civil Government*, Aledo, TX: Wallbuilder Press, 2003.

Dan Fisher, *Bringing Back the Black Robed Regiment*, Mustang, OK: Tate Pushing, 2015.

David Gibbs and Jerry Newcombe, *One Nation Under God*, Seminole, FL: Christian Law Association, 2003.

David Hall, ed. *Election Day Sermons*, Oak Ridge, TN: The Kuyper Institute, 1996.

Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era*, Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press, 1991.

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