

The Genius of Washington's Farewell Address

by
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President George Washington's Farewell Address to the nation was read, studied and admired for about one hundred years. If you have never read it, you should. What did Washington say would lead to political prosperity? Step inside the mind of President Washington.

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness – these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. Promote then, as an object of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge.”

What did Washington say would lead to political prosperity? Yes, “religion” and “morality.” Next he says that you cannot call yourself a patriot if you “subvert these great pillars of human happiness.” Meaning, you cannot separate religion and morality from politics. Both the “politician” and the “pious man” ought to revere them. Your “property, reputation and life” are in danger without “religious obligations.” Morals cannot be maintained without religion. And he warns us, that you cannot be a moral person without religion, and that we cannot be a moral nation, or “national morality” without religion. Clearly Washington is advocating that we remain a religious people! Why was he so adamant about this? He like most of the Founders was raised in the Bible. And he knew, all crimes come from the heart, and that the Bible is the great protector of good morals. As Founder John Jay said, “The Bible is the best of all books, for it is the word of God and teaches us the way to be happy in this world and the next. Continue therefore to read and regulate your life by its precepts.” And Noah Webster who said, “The Bible is the chief moral cause of all that is good and the best corrector of all that is evil in human society; the best book for regulating the temporal (secular) concerns of man.”

And so it was for over 200 years that our nation remained religious. Not so sure about that today. All crimes, corruption, etc. come from the heart. Maybe people should start reading their Bibles? As our students learned their alphabet for 200 years out of the New England Primer, letter H, “My book and heart must never part.”

With a drawing of the Bible inside a heart. Washington was correct!!