

John Clarke and Baptist History

Psalm 33:12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.

I understand that this was written to Israel, for Israel but as we know, not all things are written to us but all things are written for us. We can learn from this and we can apply this to our nation or any nation today. A nation that honors and serves the one true God of heaven will be blessed. Anyone that has studied many of the events of the American Revolutionary War, would come away with the belief that only Divine intervention allowed for many of those events to transpire. I am not saying that God replaced Israel with America. What I am saying is that the “lively experiment” that God brought about through America was Divinely assisted at minimum.

My aim here today is to encourage excitement in the study of true Baptist history as it impacted colonial America and the formation of our government and system of jurisprudence and to introduce or reintroduce John Clarke and show how his writings, actions and efforts impacted early America. I would like to frame this with the perspective of individual soul liberty, or liberty of conscience. If we keep these thoughts at the forefront, this lesson should come to a tidy conclusion. So, before we start, does everyone understand what is individual soul liberty?

Ask to name some famous Baptist groups of antiquity, our forefathers in the faith;

Montanists, Novationists, Donatists, Paulicians, Arnoldists, Albigenses, Waldenses...

John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes – beaten for his faith, Shubal Stearns – brought the gospel to NC, Sandy Creek Baptist church, John Leland – instrumental in securing our first amendment, Samuel Harriss – not a direct convert of Stearns, but a product of it and a great missionary in Virginia, William Carey – Missionary, Isaac Backus – Revolutionary War era preacher/historian, John Taylor – wilderness preacher in WV and VA, John Gano – George Washington’s chaplain (conversion of Washington), James Ireland – faced numerous threats to his life in VA, Charles Spurgeon – prince of preachers, James Beller – Baptist historian.

My intent is not to shame anyone, but to hopefully charge and inspire you as God charged Joshua to command the Jews to set up a memorial in the Jordan river.

Read *Joshua 4:1-9*

Before God placed it on my heart to study Baptist history, I had no idea of who these groups and people were. I allowed myself to be misled by the Christian revisionists. Christian revisionists for those of you that may be unaware of this term are simply those that would lie and/or distort historical facts even against other Christians to promote their evil theology of a united church (bring the daughters home to the mother harlot, the catholic church) and a united church and state to bring the kingdom of heaven (Here is an example of individual soul liberty). A proper understanding of our history is important. Therefore, we must look at history from a Baptist perspective. The Catholic and many of the Protestant denominations are historical enemies of the Baptist. What history are the kids getting in government schools? Is your homeschool curriculum from Bob Jones or any of the groups aligned with Protestantism? Even ACE and

Abecka are heavily influenced by Protestantism. I am not saying there is anything wrong with the three R's of their curriculum, but I would be very cautious about using their history. Especially American history. Supplement it with something you come up with. There is nothing wrong with writing your own curriculum. God uniquely designed parents to teach their children. Not a popular belief these days for sure.

The same with other Protestant historians. I use Federer's God and County Encyclopedia of quotations. But I treat it like a study Bible. I read it as preacher says, from the top down and I usually don't go all the way to the bottom of the page!

David Barton and the Wallbuilders is another organization to be leery of. This is not written from a Baptist perspective. Remember in times past these people would burn us at the stake.

Let me demonstrate...a favorite of Baptist Christian Schools and Homeschools is something called *The Light and The Glory* by Peter Marshall and David Manuel. In this work, there is no mention of Isaac Backus. Neither is there mention of Leland, Harriss, Ireland or others. Is this intentionally misleading and deceptive or willfully ignorant? You be the judge.

Beware of these so-called Christian revisionists. Their ultimate goal is uniting church and state. This is contrary to Baptist principles especially that of individual soul liberty. Even God's established Theocracy, the perfect system of government, did not work due to man's involvement in it. God did not force man's behaviour because he knew what would result. The Muslim version of this is Sharia and that doesn't work. Sure, people can be coerced into doing what their law says, but is that really belief and conviction or is it mere survival? Again, individual soul liberty.

So, what follows is from a plethora of sources to include; James Beller, Ted Alexander, Jason Cooley, Jerald Finney, William Lumpkin, Isaac Backus, and our own Daniel Botterbrodt D.D. and others. I like to give credit where credit is due, but a lot of this information crosses over so it is hard to rightly attribute quotes and facts unless they are directly derived at which point, I will make every attempt to properly assign credit.

I lay the blame for America's decline at the feet of the fundamental Baptists. Fundamentalism was the worst thing to happen to the Baptist church. It has become denominationalism all over again. Because of this we are losing other freedoms. Let me explain; Baptists had been practicing ecclesiastical separation for 1900 years. In the early 1900's the Evangelical Alliance (which is as wicked as hell) was fighting the battle of German Rationalism (Just what is German Rationalism? I'm glad you asked. German Rationalism is "that manner of thought by which the human reason is considered to be the only source and the only judge of all kinds of knowledge" In other words — whatever seems reasonable to you is right! I think some call it moral relativism today. Taking a stand on certain basic doctrines, the Evangelical Alliance allowed those that adhered to those doctrines into the club. Some Baptists joined and ended the practice of separation. Compromisers. This Evangelical Alliance gave birth to the fundamentalists and their movement. This is the pragmatism we see from the like's of Billy Graham.

So, why study Baptist History? In a nutshell, God deems it important.

For time sake we will not look at these verses, but Joshua 4: 1-6 as we read earlier, encourages us to study our history so we do not forget.

Joshua 24: 26-27 tells us that if we do not study our history, we may deny God. Do we know children that have drifted? Were they properly grounded in their history?

The Book of Acts is the history of the early church. If it was important to God to include it in His word, should we not take time to study it?

Hebrews 11 is the great chapter of faith, but I say it is a historical chapter as well.

Other verses that encourage and endorse the study of our history: Psalm 90:1-2, Psalm 44: 1-3, Psalm 78: 1-6, Jeremiah 6:16, Jeremiah 18: 15-17, and Deuteronomy 32:7.

I hope that was sufficient background because I truly want to focus on John Clarke and his impact on America's founding. Please don't mistake this for man-worship. This is impactful history that every Baptist should know.

John Clarke was born on October 3(?), 1609 (This is the date brother Alexander uses. I have seen no date given and I have seen other dates.) He died on April 20, 1676. He was born in Westhorpe, England. He attended his local school and then the University of Leyden in Holland. He was a medical doctor which was an important skill needed in the early colonies. He was a lawyer concerned primarily with civil government. This will be important to see how his religious belief formulated his thoughts on government. Clarke came to the New World with his wife in 1637. He was also a church builder and a staunch defender of the Baptist faith. Most importantly, he was a preacher of the Word.

Let's look at John Clarke's profound impact on the freedoms we enjoy...

John Clarke and Roger Williams were banished from Massachusetts. A puritan colony. (There is so much information I could give on Williams, but there is not enough time. Suffice it to say, there is some debate on whether or not he was a Baptist, Beller and Finney say yes, Alexander and others say no, but he espoused many Baptist beliefs.) In the Puritan colony the 10 Commandments were the basis for the system of jurisprudence. What is wrong with that? I am glad you asked. The first table of the law deals with man's relationship towards God or a child's relationship towards his or her parents. Two areas the government has no business in. So, when you are asked, are the 10 Commandments the basis for American rule of law, you can intelligently answer no they are not, only the second table is what American law is based upon. This is where Alabama's Supreme Court Justice Roy Moore lost his case. He incorrectly testified American law is based on all 10 Commandments. Civil government does not enforce the first table of the law. This is reserved for the churches and Pastors. (Individual soul liberty). The civil government is to protect my life, liberty and property – those items found in the 2nd table of the law. Where man affects man. This is where Separation of church and state is found. It is not that we keep God out of society or cannot use the Bible as a basis for our beliefs, but it is not allowing government to enforce the 1st table of the law.

So, what comes with banishment from a puritan colony? Again, I am glad you asked. Three things happened when one was banished;

1. You were disarmed – think 2nd Amendment - *A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.*
2. You could no longer buy and sell – think mark of the beast from Revelation 13: 16 – 18;

Revelation 13:16 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:

Revelation 13:17 And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

Revelation 13:18 Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

3. You were kicked out of the colony/banished. Usually with just the clothes on your back. With no means of self defense and no means to purchase a gun, this was ultimately a death sentence.

So, on they went to Rhode Island.

Portsmouth Compact: *The 7th Day of the First Month, 1638.*

We whose names are underwritten do hereby solemnly in the presence of Jehovah incorporate ourselves into a Bodie Politick and as He shall help, will submit our persons, lives and estates unto our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, and to all those perfect and most absolute laws of His given in His Holy Word of truth, to be guided and judged thereby.

It was signed by 23 men.

And the Providence Compact:

We, whose names are hereunder, desirous to inhabit in the town of Providence, do promise to subject ourselves in active or passive obedience to all such orders or agreements as shall be made for public good of our body, in an orderly way, by the major assent of the present inhabitants, master of families, incorporated together into a town fellowship, and others whom they shall admit unto them only in civil things.

The ideals espoused in the Portsmouth and Providence Compacts would give rise to the Declaration of Independence, the U. S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Look at the similarity to the conclusion of the Declaration of Independence:

"We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do,

in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these united Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States...; ...And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

I do feel that this is where our founding fathers erred in using generic terms for God and for aiming for the happiness of man and not the Glory of God.

In the Portsmouth and Providence Compacts and the Declaration of Independence we see the theme of consent of the governed. Here are two great questions to ask any candidate for political office; Will you support any legislation that violates my conscience and will you only support legislation that protects my life, liberty and property? As a Baptist these are great questions we need to ask before we throw our support behind any candidate. And if their actions are not in line with their answers, they need to be held accountable. This is an employee/employer relationship and any good employer would hold a willfully negligent employee responsible for their detrimental actions.

The most popular account of Clarke is of his jailing for preaching at the home of William Witter, an elderly, blind member of his church in Newport, Rhode Island who lived in Lynn, MA. Pastor Clarke, along with John Crandall a church member and Obadiah Holmes, a preacher traveled to Witter's home for a pastoral visit. Witter was known throughout Lynn, MA as a staunch Baptist and himself had been in court many times over his strongly held convictions. They held a church service in Witter's home that was broken up by the magistrates of the Puritan run state church. At their mockery of a trial they were convicted of holding an unauthorized church service, belief in believer's baptism (denying infant baptism), keeping their hats on in a Puritan church service and being against the state-run church. They were jailed and to be fined monetarily or be well-whipped. Crandall and Clarke had their fines paid. If you read *Ill Newes from New England*, you will see that neither of these men wanted their fines paid and were prepared to go the post. It is unclear why only Holmes was whipped as there was also an offer to pay his fine the he too refused. Perhaps he was deemed the vilest? Ironically, the same place where Holmes was whipped was the site of the Boston Massacre over 100 years later. For a complete and accurate retelling of this story watch the movie *As With Roses* this was the Cliff Notes Version.

But what did this series of events give rise to...?

The 4th Amendment

The fourth amendment of the Constitution which states; The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

The 5th Amendment

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or

in the militia, when in actual service in time of war or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

This also precipitated the 1st Amendment;

Show of hands - Who can name the 5 freedoms guaranteed in the 1st Amendment?

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

I don't have time to connect the dots, that is something I hope you will be inspired to do for yourself, but Roger Williams, John Clarke and others over 100 years prior to the American Revolution had influenced James Madison, Thomas Jefferson and others through John Leland, John Gano, Isaac Backus and others actively promoting Baptist beliefs and the 2nd table of the law as the basis for American jurisprudence.

Interestingly enough, or not, the Baptists were against the Salem witch trials as these trials were as much a mockery of justice as was the trial that Crandall, Clarke and Holmes were subjected to.

The Colonial Charter – How Rhode Island became a colony.

In November 1651, Clarke returned to England with the interests of securing a Charter for Rhode Island. He received the Charter from Charles II on July 8, 1663 and returned to the colony. He was elected Deputy Governor for 3 years and remained the pastor of the 1st Baptist Church of Newport until his death.

Some excerpts from the Charter:

...whereby, as is hoped, there may, in time, by the blessing of God upon their endeavours be laid a sure foundation of happiness to all America

And whereas, in their humble address, they have freely declared, that it is much on their hearts (if they may be permitted) to hold forth a lively experiment, that a most flourishing civil state may stand and best be maintained, and that among our English subjects, with a full liberty in religious concerns; and that true piety rightly grounded on gospel principles...

(Unfortunately, our Founding Fathers missed the aspect of piety, instead aiming for virtue.)

...and to secure in them in the free exercise and enjoyment of all their civil and religious rights, appertaining to them, as our loving subjects; and to preserve unto them that liberty in true Christian faith and worship of God... that no person within the said colony, at any time hereafter shall be any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question, for any differences in opinion in matters of religion, and do not actually disturb the civil peace or our said colony.

This lively experiment set the precedence of churches not being taxed. I can find no evidence of taxes being collected for the state church in Rhode Island as there was no state church. Most if not all the other colonies collected taxes for the state church. Attendance was mandated as well as infant baptism. This is in line with the doctrine of Lesser Magistrates in that God is the ultimate authority and the state or civil government is under the authority of God. So, it just makes sense that a lower ranking authority cannot tax a higher authority. It is also common sense when aligning it with Clarke's belief of not enforcing the first table of the law.

Another example from this lively experiment is how the government upheld and demonstrated their belief in freedom of conscience was in the treatment of Quakers. At the time other colonies were persecuting and executing Quakers as dissenters. The Baptists in Rhode Island refused to persecute them saying that there was no law in Rhode Island for punishing people because of their utterances concerning the things and ways of God as to salvation and eternal condition.

This a shining example of how America was intended to be governed. Separation of Church and state. Government not meddling in the conscience of man but affirming to protect life, liberty and property of the citizens.

I leave you with this;

2 Corinthians 3:17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

Titles of some references used:

Baptist Heritage Course by Ted Alexander

Baptist Heroes of the Faith by Ted Alexander

God Betrayed – Jerald Finney

America in Crimson Red by James Beller

A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists by Isaac Backus

The Hero of Aquidneck; A Life of Dr. John Clarke by Wilbur Nelson.

Ill Newes from New England by John Clarke