

A Christian Patriot

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Patrick Henry (1736-1799) is remembered for one thundering idea: “Give me liberty or give me death!” Even in post-modern America where devotion to our homeland and loyalty to the ideals of the founding fathers may be unfashionable, Henry’s words still ring loudly for patriots.

God used the fiery oratory of Patrick Henry to mobilize the indecisive Virginian colonists of his day, and then God used this gifted leader in both Continental Congresses during America’s struggle for independence. He served as the first governor of post-colonial Virginia, followed by Thomas Jefferson.



Give me liberty or give me death!

Presbyterian Influence

As part of our patriotic Presbyterian heritage, we should recognize a formative influence that the Lord used in shaping this Christian patriot. A key mentor for the young Patrick Henry was the Presbyterian revival preacher, Samuel Davies. Patrick’s Anglican mother had embraced Presbyterianism during the Great Awakening, and when her son was eleven years old she first took her son to hear the Evangelist Davies. Many visits to the Hanover Meeting House followed during Patrick’s teenage years, and not infrequently did his parents call upon the lad to recite the Sunday sermon of Rev. Davies.

Young Patrick delighted as much in Davies’ rhetorical flare as in the gospel message and the message of personal freedom in Christ. Patrick Henry later revealed the beginnings of his oratorical aspirations: “I was first taught what an orator should be by listening to Davies preach.” A gifted public speaker with the noblest of messages, Davies used his gifts and organizational skills to bring the light of the gospel to America’s first colony.*

As the gospel penetrated the wilderness settlements of northern Virginia, it also liberated the soul of Patrick Henry, delivering him from the fear of man into the reverential fear of God.

* Many called Samuel Davies the “Apostle of Virginia.” We remember Davies as the author of the hymn, “Great God of Wonders.”

Freedom in Christ

Patrick Henry knew that the ground of his personal freedom was “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The assurance of that freedom was revealed in the Holy Scriptures of which he said, “The Bible is worth all other books which have ever been printed.” That is a significant statement for a well-read lawyer!

The Bible shaped his life and work, and Patrick Henry himself realized the gospel was shaping the identity of his new nation. Here is his observation in 1765 before the Virginia House of Burgesses:

“It cannot be emphasized too clearly and too often that this nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religion, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ. For this very reason, peoples of other faiths have been afforded asylum, prosperity, and freedom of worship here.”

Patrick Henry recognized that protections and prosperity grow out of freedom of conscience within society. There is no standard for freedom nor guarantee of it unless it is rooted in the fear of God and the belief that God’s will is for souls to be free in Christ.



Patrick Henry

How many today dare say, “Give me liberty or give me death”? A true Christian can utter these words because he is not afraid of death—for him, death died when Christ died and rose again. The Christian is not afraid of laying down his life or seeing it cut short, for heaven’s glory is unending. What the Christian does fear is tyranny and its repression of all freedoms.

After national independence was gained old Patrick Henry had the satisfaction of seeing America establish a constitutional government that would guarantee personal freedoms for all her citizens. He pushed for the inclusion of the Bill of Rights that made the freedom of religion, speech, and press the number one priority.

Patriot Henry’s legacy may be summarized from his last will and testament: “This is all the inheritance I can give my dear family. The religion of Christ can give them one which will make them rich indeed.” This, indeed, is a legacy for all Christian patriots.

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