

# Baptists and Religious Liberty in United States

The evidence is voluminous that Baptists have at all times in all places opposed the rule of the state over the church, or the church over the state. Both alike are grievous evils which cannot be tolerated by one who believes all the Bible. The demand of all true Baptists has been the complete separation of church and state. Let us turn our attention to the first nation under heaven who gave it's subjects complete religious liberty. We will go on to prove that this liberty was gained by the Baptists who in spite of the persecution and intolerance shown them, earnestly contended for this freedom which would not only benefit them but all who came to the shores of America.

"It is this clear conviction of the truth and equity of their principles, that has made the Baptists the pioneers of religious liberty in its full extent, both in the Old World and in the New. Before William Penn, before Lord Baltimore, before Jeremy Taylor, Milton, or Locke, even before William I of Orange, in the sixteenth century, their clear testimony is on record. And theirs is the high honor of establishing in the little colony of Rhode Island, in 1636, the first civil government in modern times which declared that conscience should be free: in which noble declaration, fifty years later, they were followed by the Friends of Pennsylvania: and since the Revolution of 1776, by all the United States. *This honor history now awards them.* But how few know what toils and sacrifices, what vigilance, patience, prayers, tears, and blood, it cost the Baptists to win this boon of freedom for all mankind." (See page 17.) *Religious Denominations of the World.* By Vincent L. Milner. Page 40. 1871.

"And today the Republic of the United States and its daughter, the Republic of Liberia, are the only two governments in the world where Church and State are completely divorced, and where perfect religious freedom exists." *A History of all Religions of the World,* by Gay Brothers and Co. Page 493. (1882) (See page 13.)

"Baptist churches are the only churches which have, during the Christian era, and until the present century, contended for separation of Church and State, and for absolute liberty of conscience.

"By their principles of liberality, of freedom of conscience and of every Christian being a priest to God and Christian ruler. Baptists have given the United States their religious freedom." *Baptist Church Perpetuity,* by W. A. Jarrel, 1894, Page 466.

"Students of American Government have been impressed with the constitutional provisions regarding religion. Writing in the closing years of the century, noted author James Bryce contrasted the idea of complete separation of Church and State found in the United States with the attitude of European governments. He asserted that 'of all the differences between the Old World and the New this is perhaps the most salient.' If this observation be true, then Baptists may claim a large portion of the

credit due the United States of America for its distinctive contribution to the science of government. That Baptists among all religious groups have been the strongest contenders for the American principle of separation of Church and State is taken for granted by many eminent authorities...

"Ten of the thirteen (13) original colonies had at one time in their history some type of state established church. Since it was not until 1833, that the last vestige of this arrangement was abolished in Massachusetts, it is seen that for more than 220 years, complete religious liberty did not exist by law. America's record of freedom in religion is not so long in years as its record of intolerance. In the long struggle for soul freedom, Baptists have consistently played a vital part." *Baptist Advance*, Published by Broadman Press, 1964, Page 385.

While the Baptists were contending for religious freedom for all, the Methodists were petitioning for the established church in Virginia. The following question makes it very clear that the Baptists did not have the sympathy of Protestantism in their struggle for separation of church and state. Note, in October 1776, the Methodists, three thousand strong, urged the assembly of Virginia to keep the established church, while at the same time the Baptists were pleading for complete separation, with no established church.

"George Shadford, 'In Behalf of the Whole Body of People commonly called Methodists in Virginia, consisting of near, if not all together, three thousand members' assembled in *General Convention at Williamsburg in October 1776*, petitioned that:

*"As we Conceive that very bad Consequences would arise from Abolishment of the Establishment, – we therefore pray that as the Church of England ever hath been so it may still continue to be Established.*

"A considerable number of the clergy of the Established Church' sent a memorial in which they represented:

"That, when they took charge of parishes in Virginia, they depended on the public faith for the receiving that recompense for their services during life or good behaviour which the laws of the land promised, that from the nature of their education they are precluded tolerable subsistence in any other way of life, . . . that *they apprehended many bad consequences from abolishing the church establishment.*

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