The Christian and Civil Government
(26th)

(The study today continues with the history of the struggles for religious freedom in the United States of America. It provides some background of the Baptists and their connection and influence regarding the general Congress and the war with England along with aid of Isaac Backus.)

We ended the previous study with Isaac Backus going to Philadelphia in 1774 on behalf of the Warren Association to petition for religious freedom to be established in the new government. The certificate given to Backus by the association reads as follows:

> To the Honorable Delegates of the several colonies in North America, met in a general Congress in Philadelphia:
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> HONORABLE GENTLEMEN: As the Antipædobaptist churches in New England are most heartily concerned for the perseveration and defence of the rights and privileges of this country, and are deeply affected by the encroachments upon the same which have lately been by the British parliament, and are willing to unite with our dear countrymen, vigorously to pursue every prudent measure for relief, so we would beg leave to say that, as a distinct denomination of Protestants, we conceive that we have an equal claim to charter-rights with the rest of our fellow-subjects; and yet have long been denied the free and full enjoyment of those rights, as to the support of religious worship. Therefore we, the elders and brethren of twenty Baptist churches met in Association at Medfield, twenty miles from Boston, September 14, 1774, have unanimously chosen and sent unto you the reverend and beloved Mr. Isaac Backus as our agent, to lay our cast, in these respects, before you, or otherwise to use all the prudent means he can for our relief. *History of New England Baptists* by Isaac Backus, Volume II, p. 200.

You will notice that while they first designated themselves as "Antipædobaptist churches" they later identified them as "Baptist churches." (For those who may not be aware of the meaning of antipædobaptist, it is anti or in opposition to pædobaptism or child baptism. This term is often used synonymously with Anabaptist.)

We also previously mentioned that the Philadelphia Baptist Association was there, too. In the century sermon delivered at the association in 1807, by Samuel Jones, he said the following:

> When the first Congress met in this city, I was one of the committee under the appointment of your body, that, in company with the late Rev. Isaac Backus, of Massachusetts, met the delegates in Congress from that State, in yonder State House, to see if we could not obtain some security for that liberty, for which we were then fighting and bleeding by their side. It seemed unreasonable to us, that we should be called upon to stand up with them in defence of liberty, if, after all, it was to be liberty for one party to oppress another.
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> But our endeavors availed us nothing. One of them told us, that if we meant to effect a change in their measures, respecting religion, we might as well attempt to change the course of the sun in the heavens. *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association from 1707 to 1807*, edited by A. D. Gillette, pp. 459-460.

The Philadelphia Association is the oldest Baptist Association in America. As noted from the previous podcast, it was John Adams, who later became the second President of the United States, which expressed the impossibility of securing religious freedom in the new government for North America.

Nevertheless, the Baptists supported the war against England. Even the Baptists in England supported the American's hoping that it would provide greater liberties for them in their country. In 1784, John Rippon (a prominent Baptist minister in England and pastor of the Carter Lane/New Park Street congregation for sixty-three years after John Gill and twenty years before Charles Spurgeon became pastor of the same congregation) wrote to James Manning showing that the Baptists in England favored the colonies in their cause against the Crown of England. He wrote the following:

> I believe all our Baptist ministers in town except two, and most of our brethren in the country, were on the side of the Americans in the late dispute. … We wept when the thirsty plains drank the blood of your departed heroes, and the shout of a king was amongst us when your well fought battles were crowned with victory. And to this hour we believe that the independence of America will for a while secure the liberty of this country; but if that continent had been reduced, Britain would not long have been free." *History of New England Baptists* by Isaac Backus, Volume II, p. 198.

To give a preview of some of the things the English Baptists were enduring at this time I will quote from the book by William Cathcart entitled *Baptist Patriots and the American Revolution*, pp. 28-30.

> Never were Baptists more cruelly used than by James II., King of England. He was the most defective sovereign in moral worth that ever polluted a throne. Becoming a Romanists, he issues a decree dispensing with all penal laws against Dissenters and Catholics. James had no authority to alter any law of England. To secure himself from the vengeance of the next Parliament he abrogated the charters of several cities and that of London among the rest, that he might appoint borough magistrates who would return pliant members to the House of Commons. William Kiffin was the most influential Baptist minister in England, and he was a wealthy London merchant. James sought to bribe him by making him an alderman of London, an office then held in high esteem and still regarded with great favor; he supposed also that by this act of royal favor the Baptists would be disposed to support his usurpation, even though they well knew that he had only ceased to be persecutor for the special benefit of the Papal Church. Kiffin was brought to the palace, and James made his proposition with as much grace of manner as his natural rudeness permitted, and Kiffin immediately and absolutely rejected it. He knew that James had the might but not the authority to make him an alderman, and he refused an honor that came from usurpation. John Bunyan had spent twelve years of his life in prison for preaching Christ; the laws were still in force that had handed him to the jailer, and James needed Bunyan's popularity to aid him in his assault upon the liberties of his people and upon the established Church, and he intimated to him that he had an office for him that would show the world the king's estimate of the illustrious dreamer. But Bunyan turned his back upon the hand that offered him liberty and an office, because it was the hand of the regal burglar who stole the gifts which he offered.

In the previous podcast we noted that Backus preached a sermon to his congregation supporting the break with England and the war against her. In fact, most of the Baptists supported the war and many of the ministers, like Backus, served as chaplains in the American army. To show the strength

of the ministers in support of the American cause, Morgan Edwards, a prominent Baptist minister, sided with the Tories. Henry C. Vedder, in his *A Short History of the Baptists*, p. 316, said of him, "He was almost, if not quite, the only Tory among the Baptists clergy during the Revolution, and so found himself isolated among his brethren."

Our time is up for today and, the Lord willing, we will continue the history of religious freedom in America revolving around Isaac Backus. Farewell.