

## The Christian and Civil Government (34<sup>th</sup>)

(The study today continues with the history of the struggles for religious freedom in the United States of America as took place in Virginia. It gives more insights regarding the times of John Leland and his influence in getting James Madison elected as a delegate of Virginia and religious freedom included in the ratification of the Constitution.)

As stated in our last podcast, we will turn our attention to some details revolving around the importance of John Leland and his influence in James Madison being selected to represent Virginia in the ratification of the Constitution and the First Amendment being in the Bill of Rights. We noted in the previous study that the Baptists opposed the ratification of the Constitution as it stood and nominated John Leland as a delegate from Orange County. This move placed him in opposition to James Madison. The day of the election Leland withdrew and put his support behind Madison. As Charles James said, “That act of his [i.e., Leland] put into the Convention the man who, above all others in Virginia, understood the new scheme of government and was best prepared to defend it against its enemies. It has been claimed that, had Madison been defeated, the Virginia Convention would have failed to ratify, and that, had Virginia refused to ratify, the whole scheme would have failed. Hence it was that Hon. J. S. Barbour, in a eulogy upon the character of Mr. Madison, referred to this incident and gave Elder Leland the credit for the ratification of the Constitution by Virginia and the triumph of the new system of government.” (*Documentary History of the Struggle for Religious Liberty in Virginia*, pages 154-155.) With this, I believe it is important to give some details regarding how it came to be that Leland withdrew himself in favor of Madison. James gives us a lengthy quote which gives these details by Leland. The Governor of Massachusetts, Hon. G. N. Briggs, was a friend of John Leland and asked him regarding the comment of Barbour. James gave Briggs’ review as found in *Annals of American Baptist Pulpit* by William B. Sprague. Briggs said that “Leland replied that Barbour gave him too much credit, and then told the story as follows:”

“Soon after the Convention which framed the Constitution of the United States had finished their work and submitted it to the people for their action, two strong and active parties were formed in the State of Virginia on the subject of its adoption. The State was nearly equally divided. One party was opposed to its adoption, unless certain amendments, which they maintained that the safety of the people required, should be incorporated into it before it was ratified by them. At the head of this great party stood Patrick Henry, the orator of the Revolution, and one of Virginia’s favorite sons. The other party agreed with what their opponents said as to the character and necessity of the amendments proposed, but they contended that the people would have the power and could as well incorporate those amendments into their Constitution after its adoption as before; that it was a great crisis in the affairs of the country, and if the Constitution then presented to the people by the Convention should be rejected by them, such would be the state of the public mind that there was little or no reason to believe that another would be agreed upon by a future; and, in such an event—so much to be dreaded—the hopes of constitutional liberty and a confederated and free republic would be lost. At the head of this party stood James Madison. The strength of the two parties was to be tested by the election of county delegates to the State Convention. That Convention would have to adopt or reject the Constitution. Mr. Madison was named as the candidate in favor of its adoption for the county of Orange, in which he resided. Elder Leland, also, at that time lived in the county of Orange, and his sympathies, he said, were with Henry and his party. He was named as the candidate opposed to the adoption, and in opposition to Mr.

Madison. Orange was a strong Baptist county, and his friends had an undoubting confidence in his election. Though reluctant to be a candidate, he yielded to the solicitations of the opponents of the Constitution and accepted the nomination. For three months after the members of the Convention at Philadelphia had completed their labors and returned to their homes, Mr. Madison, with John Jay and Alexander Hamilton, had remained in that city for the purpose of preparing those political articles that now constitute 'The Federalist.' This gave the party opposed to Madison, with Henry at their head, the start of him in canvassing the State in his absence. At length, when Mr. Madison was about ready to return to Virginia, a public meeting was appointed in the county of Orange, at which the candidates for the Convention—Madison on the one side, and Leland on the other—were to address the people from the stump. Up to that time he had but a partial personal acquaintance with Mr. Madison, but he had a high respect for his talents, his candour, and the uprightness and purity of his private character. On his way home from Philadelphia, Mr. Madison went some distance out of his direct road to call upon him. After the ordinary salutations, Mr. Madison, began to apologize for troubling him with a call at that time, but he assured Mr. Madison that no apology was necessary. 'I know your errand here,' said he; 'it is to talk with me about the Constitution. I am glad to see you, and to have an opportunity of learning your views on the subject.' Mr. Madison spent half a day with him, and fully and unreservedly communicated to him his opinion upon the great matters which were then agitating the people of the State and the Confederacy. They then separated to meet again very soon, as opposing candidates before the electors, on the stump. The day came and they met, and with them nearly all voters in the county of Orange, to hear their candidates respectively discuss the important questions upon which the people of Virginia were so soon to act. 'Mr. Madison,' said the venerable man, 'first took the stump, which was a hogshead of tobacco standing on one end. For two hours he addressed his fellow-citizens in a calm, candid, and statesmanlike manner, arguing his side of the cast and fairly meeting and replying to the arguments which had been put forth by his opponents in the general canvass of the State. Though Mr. Madison was not particularly a pleasing or eloquent speaker, the people listened with respectful attention. He left the hogshead, and my friend called for me. I took it—and went in for Mr. Madison, and he was elected without difficulty. This,' said he, 'is, I suppose, what Mr. Barbour alluded to.' A noble, Christian patriot! That single act, with the motives which prompted it and the consequences which followed it, entitle him to the respect of mankind." *Ibid*, pages 155-157

Afterwards, James wrote, "But how are we to explain Madison's call upon his Opponent? It was a very unusual, if not unprecedented, proceeding, and it is to be accounted for only on the ground of the former relations of Madison to the Baptists in their struggle for religious liberty. He had, while yet a young man, shown his warm sympathy for them in their persecutions; he had incorporated their cherished principle of religious liberty into the Bill of Rights; he had been the true yoke-fellow of Mr. Jefferson in his great work in pulling down the establishment; and then, when Jefferson was representing his country at a foreign court, he had taken his place as the political leader of the Baptists and their allies in their fight against the general assessment. And knowing, as he did, the chief ground of opposition to the Constitution, he felt that he could afford to approach their leading representative in Orange with the view of explaining that paper which he himself had framed, and relieving their apprehensions as to it bearing upon the question of religious liberty. Thus were Leland and the Baptists of Orange won over to the side of Madison, and Madison was sent to the Convention to meet and defeat Mr. Henry." *Ibid*, pages 157-158.

In 1857, Barbour gave a eulogy of James Madison and said, "That the credit of adopting the Constitution of the United States properly belonged to a Baptist clergyman, formerly of Virginia,

named Leland: 'If,' said he, 'Madison had not been in the Virginia Convention, the Constitution would not have been ratified, and, as the approval of nine States was necessary to give effect to this instrument, and as Virginia was the ninth State, if it had been rejected by her the Constitution would have failed (the remaining States following her example), and it was through Elder Leland's influences that Madison was elected to that convention.'" (*Baptist Patriots and the American Revolution* by William Cathcart, p. 96.) Cathcart went on to say, "It is unquestionable that Mr. Madison was elected through the efforts and resignation of John Leland, and it is all but certain that that act gave our country its famous Constitution."

Our time is up for today. Farewell.