

Benjamin Franklin's Religion

Here's something to think about: what religion did Benjamin Franklin practice? When it comes to the Founding Fathers of our nation, people tend to think that they fall into one of two categories. Some think that they were Deists – people who believed in a God that created the world but who then stepped away from it and stopped caring about it. There might be a God, but He is very far away and doesn't involve Himself with our lives. Others think that they were devout Christians who believed in the God of the Bible.

Benjamin Franklin did not fall into either one of those categories. He instead invented a new religion for himself, which he outlined in 1728 in a document called *Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion*. What he said in that document is both fascinating and disturbing.

First, in this document Franklin tells us that he does believe that there is a God out there:

“I believe that there is one supreme, most perfect Being...”

However, Franklin believes that this God does not care about mankind. He is too great and too infinite to care about the race of men:

“...I imagine it great vanity in me to suppose, that the Supremely Perfect does in the least regard such an inconsiderable nothing as man;”

Not only does God not care about mankind, but He is also completely uninterested in receiving worship or praise from men:

“...He, the Infinite Father, expects or requires no worship or praise from us, but that He is even infinitely above it.”

We can already see that Franklin has moved very far from Christianity. Yes, it's true that the Bible teaches that there is a God. However, it also tells us that God has a great love for mankind:

John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

God has not walked away from His creation; instead He sent His Son Jesus to come into this world and *die* in order to save people from their sins and give them everlasting life. God is not distant; He is near. God does not despise our worship; instead He desires us to love Him with all of our being:

Matthew 22:36: “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.”

What Franklin is teaching is most definitely *not* Christianity. But Franklin is not yet done. Although he believes that this infinite God cares nothing for mankind, he also believes that God created a whole race of lesser gods:

“I conceive, then, that the *infinite* has created many beings or gods, vastly superior to man... and very powerful: and that each has made for himself one glorious sun, attended with beautiful and admirable system of planets.”

Franklin believes that these lesser gods are the ones who created the stars, the planets, and the men who live in the world. These lesser gods are the ones that we should worship:

“He is not above caring for us, being pleased with our praise, and offended when we slight Him, or neglect His glory.”

So what do these lesser gods want from mankind? Franklin believes they primarily want people to be happy:

“...I believe He is pleased and delights in the happiness of those He has created... And since He has created many things, which seem purely designed for the delight of man, I believe He is not offended when He sees His children solace themselves in any manner of pleasant exercises and innocent delights...”

These lesser gods are not beings of judgment and rulemaking, nor do they concern themselves about wickedness and sin. They primarily just want people to be happy, and as long as people are happy they are happy.

A brief study of Benjamin Franklin's life will reveal how he lived out these beliefs. In 1745 he wrote an appalling document entitled *Advice to a Young Man on the Choice of a Mistress*. It is about exactly what you would imagine it was about. (At one point in the document he recommends having affairs with older women, “Because there is no hazard of Children, which irregularly produced may be attended with much Inconvenience.”) Franklin not only sought after fornication, but he also had a child out of wedlock. Throughout his life he tried to do things that made him happy. That was his creed. To him fornication was just an “innocent delight” – but the God of the Bible has a very different view of the matter.

Was Benjamin Franklin a Christian? Absolutely not. It would even be difficult to call himself a true Deist, for he did believe in lesser gods that cared about mankind and wanted men to be happy. He did believe that “God governs in the affairs of men”, but his God was not the God of the Bible. If anything, his beliefs almost seem to be a sort of precursor to Mormonism, which also teaches that there is a race of lesser gods that rule over planets. But it is most definitely *not* Christianity.