

# Benjamin Franklin's Religion

What religion did Benjamin Franklin practice? The Founding Fathers of our nation generally fell into two categories. Some of them were Deists and believed that God created the world but then stepped away and stopped caring about it. They thought that there might be a God, but He was very far away and didn't involve Himself with our lives. Others were devout Christians who believed in the God of the Bible.

Benjamin Franklin didn't fall into either one of those categories. He invented a new religion for himself, which he outlined in 1728 in a document called *Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion*<sup>1</sup>. What he said in that document is both fascinating and disturbing.

First, he tells us that he does believe that there's a God out there:

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

However, he believes that this God doesn't care about mankind. He is too great and 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's 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

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1 Source: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-01-02-0032>

infinitely above it.”

We can already see that Benjamin Franklin has moved very far away from Christianity! It's true that the Bible teaches there is a God, but 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 hasn't walked away from His creation! Instead He sent His Son Jesus into this world to die a cruel and painful death in order to save us from our sins and give us everlasting life. God isn't distant; He's very near!

The Lord also doesn't despise our worship. Instead He commands us to love Him with all of our being:

**Matthew 22:36-38:** “Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 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. This is the first and great commandment.”

What Benjamin Franklin is teaching is most definitely *not* Christianity. But he isn't done yet. 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.”

He believed that these lesser gods were the ones who created the stars, the planets, and the people 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? He believed they primarily wanted 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 weren't beings of judgment and rulemaking, nor did they concern themselves with wickedness or sin. They primarily just wanted people to be happy, and as long as people were happy they were happy.

A brief study of Benjamin Franklin's life will reveal how he lived out these beliefs. In 1745 he wrote an appalling and vulgar document entitled *Advice to a Young Man on the Choice of a Mistress*<sup>2</sup>. It's 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<sup>3</sup>.

Throughout his life he tried to do things that made him happy. That was his creed. To him fornication was just an

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2 Source: <https://web.viu.ca/davies/H320/Franklin.advice.mistress.htm>

3 Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Franklin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Franklin)

“innocent delight” – but the God of the Bible has a very different view of the matter:

**1 Thessalonians 4:3-5:** “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:”

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