CHAPTER ONE

America is a Constitutional Republic

Why was America founded as a Constitutional Republic? Here is a simple explanation.

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER

This chapter is longer than the Introduction. Two sittings work well: stop after the three branches, and pick up again at how a law is made.

Imagine three different playgrounds.

In playground #1 there is one boss who makes all the rules. It is just one child who decides every game, changes the rules whenever he wants, and no one can question him. That is like a dictatorship or absolute monarchy.

In playground #2 it is the crowd who rules by emotion. Everyone votes instantly, and whatever the loudest group wants becomes the rule — even if it is unfair to a smaller group. That is democracy.

In playground #3, however, it is the people who choose their leaders, but everyone must obey the rulebook. The children elect team captains, but the captains cannot change the rules by themselves because the playground has a written rulebook that protects every child. **That is like a constitutional republic.**

The Constitution is known as the law of the land in America.

Whereas the Declaration of Independence is considered the Spirit of the Law, the Constitution is considered the Letter of the Law.

What America is not

Nations of the earth have different government models to govern its citizens. America was founded as a Constitutional Republic as explained in playground number three. This means America is not a democracy as some people are taught today (Playground number two). A saying often credited to Benjamin Franklin puts it this way:

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

"A democracy is two wolves and a small lamb voting on what to have for dinner. Freedom under a constitutional republic is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote."

America is not a monarchy that is ruled by a king (Playground number one). After the Revolutionary War, George Washington, who later became our first President under the Constitution, was offered to become America's first king, but being a godly, principled man, he refused.

America is not an oligarchy ruled by a small group of "special" people. Neither is America ruled by the military. In a Constitutional Republic, **the people are the source of political authority.** As a result, the people and their leaders are all duty bound to protect, defend, and follow the Constitution. That keeps those who govern and those being governed accountable to the same standard of law and justice.

This means no president, judge, congressman, or majority vote is supposed to be above the law. The American system of government strives to provide equal protection and justice under the law and that law is the Constitution of the United States.

Under our Constitution, there are three branches of government.

They are the Legislative branch, the Executive branch, and the Judicial branch of government. This compares with God's government in the earth. Isaiah 33:22, states,

ISAIAH 33:22

"For the LORD is our Judge, The LORD is our Lawgiver, The LORD is our King; He will save us."

The God of heaven rules as Lawgiver, Judge, and King over planet earth. This is heaven's model of God's Kingdom authority. America adopted this model of governmental branches for our nation.

LEGISLATIVE	EXECUTIVE	JUDICIAL
Lawgiver	**King**	**Judge**

The Legislative Branch is Congress, which has two parts: the House of Representatives and the Senate. They are the Lawgiver branch. There are 435 House members that make up the House of Representatives. There are 100 Senators, two from each state that make up the Senate. These civil officers are responsible for making laws in our nation.

How is a law made in our nation?

1. **A member of the House and/or the Senate comes up with an idea.** When the idea is written down, it becomes a bill. A bill is simply a proposed law. The Representative introduces the bill in the House of Representatives, or a Senator introduces it in the Senate. The bill is given a number and shared with everyone in the House and the Senate.

2. **Committees in both Houses study the bill.** They must decide: Is the bill a good idea? Will it help people or harm our citizens? Will it cost too much? And most important for our system of government, does it follow the Constitution?

   In the process, sometimes experts come to answer questions. Sometimes changes are made. Sometimes the committee decides the bill should go no further and will never become law in our nation.

3. If the bill passes the Committee and approves the bill, everyone in the House or Senate discusses it. Members explain why they support it or oppose it. Sometimes they suggest changes. **This is called debate.**

God teaches in His Word that wise decisions come from careful discussion. Proverbs 11:14 states,

PROVERBS 11:14

"Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety."

4

Next comes the vote. After the debate, everyone votes. If most members vote yes, the bill passes that chamber. If not, the bill ends there. If the bill began in the House, it now goes to the Senate. If it began in the Senate, it goes to the House. The second chamber repeats the same process. The bill goes to another committee. There is a debate and then comes the vote. Both the House and the Senate must agree on the same wording. If they make different changes, members from both chambers meet in a conference committee to work out the differences before voting again.

This is quite a process thus far. **Why would our Founding Fathers put together such a process?** The Founders wanted laws to be considered carefully. **They believed it was better to make good laws slowly than bad laws quickly.**

5

Once both the House and Senate approve the same bill, it is sent to the President. The President has a couple of choices. He can sign it into law, or he can veto it because he doesn't think it should become law. The bill then goes back to Congress.

6

Can Congress override a veto by the President? Yes, they can. If two-thirds of both the House and the Senate vote to approve the bill again, it becomes law even without the President's signature. **This keeps one person from having all the power.**

EXECUTIVE

The next branch is the executive, which is held by a president nationally or a governor in a state. His job is to enforce the laws faithfully.

JUDICIAL

Lastly, there is the judicial branch. These are judges who interpret the laws to make sure the laws follow the Constitution and are applied fairly.

They did their homework

As you can see, our Founding Fathers took a lot of time and thought to establish a Constitutional Republic. They did their homework. They studied the Bible, history, different governmental models. Why were some successful, while others failed? Since they were Biblical in their worldview, they knew the nature of man. Jeremiah 17:9 states,

JEREMIAH 17:9

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?"

Because human beings are imperfect, the Founders believed no person should have unlimited power. James Madison, our 4th President, is known as the Father of the Constitution. He wrote:

JAMES MADISON

"If men were angels, no government would be necessary."

Checks and balances

This understanding of human nature gave rise to establishing what is called checks and balances. Because our Founding Fathers believed what Lord Acton would later put into words, that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, they sought to spread out power. The Founders designed the branches to watch each other to hold each other accountable to the Constitution.

Think of it like a three-lock treasure chest.

Congress can pass laws.

The President can veto laws.

The Supreme Court can declare laws unconstitutional.

No branch gets all the keys.

This was very wise. This system of government encourages wisdom, accountability, and cooperation.

Why is this system wise?

A Constitutional Republic tries to protect both freedom and order. **Too much government can crush liberty. Too little government can lead to chaos.** The Constitution seeks a balanced path.

Either by the Bible or by the bayonet

Robert C. Winthrop, with incredible insight, articulated these principles. Winthrop was an American philanthropist and statesman in the 1800s. He served as a congressman of Massachusetts and as a one-time speaker of the United States House of Representatives. In a speech to the Massachusetts Bible Society, Winthrop said,

ROBERT C. WINTHROP

"All societies of men must be governed in some way or other. Men, in a word, must necessarily be controlled either by a power within them, or by a power without them; either by the Word of God, or by the strong arm of man; either by the Bible or by the bayonet."

Because men are sinful, we need to be governed.

At the same time, man longs to be free.

In this Fallen World, there has always been a tension between authority and liberty.

Only One Nation under God can successfully establish both.

One Nation under God provides a just social order on one hand and provides maximum individual freedom to its citizens on the other hand.

Here is a picture to remember.

Think of America as a ship.

- The People are the owners of the ship.
- The Constitution is the map and rulebook.
- The Government is the crew.
- The President, Congress, and Courts are different officers with different duties.
- God is the ultimate Judge over all nations.

If the crew ignores the map, the ship can drift into danger.

If the people forget the map, they may not notice when the ship is being steered in the wrong direction, **which can take away hard-fought liberties.**

“A republic, if you can keep it”

Why should this matter to you as a young person?

One day you may vote, serve on a jury, run a business, become a teacher, pastor, soldier, judge, or even a public leader. Understanding our Constitutional Republic helps you to recognize when power is being abused, appreciate the freedoms you have, participate wisely in civic life, and protect liberty for future generations.

At the time America decided to become a Constitutional Republic a woman by the name of Elizabeth Willing Powel asked Benjamin Franklin at the end of the Constitutional Convention in 1787,

“Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?”

Franklin’s response, **“A republic, if you can keep it.”** That answer “If you can keep it” is the reason for writing this workbook on our American heritage.

HERE IS A FINAL THOUGHT FOR THIS CHAPTER.

A Constitutional Republic is not just a government system — it is a trust handed from one generation to the next. If we understand the Constitution, we can recognize when liberty is being protected. If we forget it, we may not recognize when liberty is being lost.

Chapter Review

1. The Constitution is known as the law of the _____ in America.
2. George Washington was offered to become America's first _____, but he refused.
3. No president, judge, congressman, or majority vote is supposed to be above the _____.
4. The three branches of government are the Legislative branch, the Executive branch, and the _____ branch.
5. When an idea for a law is written down, it becomes a _____.
6. The President can sign a bill into law, or he can _____ it.
7. James _____, our 4th President, is known as the Father of the Constitution.
8. The Founders spread out power so the branches would watch each other. This is called checks and _____.
9. Think of America as a ship. The People are the _____ of the ship.
10. Benjamin Franklin said we have "a republic, if you can _____ it."

A CONSTITUTIONAL REPUBLIC · THREE BRANCHES

You finished Chapter One! You now know what a Constitutional Republic is, and why it must be kept.

You Be the Judge

Decide together, then write your reason in your own words.

1 A senator has an idea for a new law. She writes it down as a bill and introduces it in the Senate.

Whose job? ..... Is it allowed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Why? .....

2 Congress passes a bill. The President thinks it should not become law, so he vetoes it.

Whose job? ..... Is it allowed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Why? .....

3 The President decides he will judge a court case himself, instead of the judges.

Whose job? ..... Is it allowed? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Why? .....

LOOK BACK

1. The Constitution was written to create a government with limited .....
2. Our rights do not come from a ..... or from government.
3. When people forget their history, they often repeat their .....

★ NARRATION BREAK Why does our government have three branches?

Family Discussion

Talk these through together before you write. There is no hurry.

1 · Why do you think the Founders divided power into three branches?

2 · What might happen if one branch had all the power?

3 · How does the Constitution help protect ordinary people?

4 · Why does freedom require both rights and responsibility?

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER

Question four is the one worth lingering on. Ask the child to name a freedom they enjoy, then ask what responsibility comes with it. That exchange is the whole chapter in miniature.

My Notes

Write down anything from this chapter you want to remember.