

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 418

Dearest grandchild,

The Scriptures teach that we are to give honor to whom honor is due (Rom. 13:7). It is the purpose of this letter to give honor Dr. Benjamin Rush (Jan. 4, 1746 – April 19, 1813). He was an outstanding Christian and considered one of the three primary Founding Fathers of the United States along with George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. He was a physician, politician, social reformer, humanitarian, educator, and the founder of Dickinson College. He is known as the “Father of American Medicine” and his study of mental disorders led him to be also known as the “Father of American Psychiatry”. His *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*, published in 1812, was the first and for many years the only American treatise on psychiatry.

Benjamin was the fourth of seven children and was born about 14 miles from Philadelphia. His father died when he was five leaving his mother, who ran a country store, to care for her children. At the age of eight Benjamin was sent to live with an aunt and uncle that he might get an education. He was a bright student and graduated from college with a Bachelor of Arts degree at the age of 14. That college is now known as Princeton University. From 1761 –1766 he was an apprentice to Dr. John Redman in Philadelphia. Then he studied medicine for two years at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and graduated from there as an M.D. in 1768. While overseas he also became fluent in French, Italian, and Spanish. He returned to the colonies in 1769 and practiced medicine in Philadelphia while also teaching chemistry in a local university. That university is now known as the University of Philadelphia. While at the university he published America’s first text book on chemistry which included several volumes. Early American medical imprints list 65 publications under his name and he taught 3,000 students during his tenure as a professor. He was elected to the Continental Congress, signed the Declaration of Independence, and served in the field as the surgeon general and physician general in the Continental Army. In 1797 President John Adams appointed him the treasurer of the U.S. Mint. He held this office until his death.

Rush was a crusader for the education of women. He was instrumental in the founding of the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia, which was the first chartered women's institution of higher education in Philadelphia. His purpose was to guide women toward moral essays, poetry, history, and religious writings. This type of education for elite women grew dramatically during the post-revolutionary period, as women claimed a role in creating the Republic.

Rush was also opposed to slavery and in 1787 joined the Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society. For Rush, slavery was not simply unjust; it was a transgression against natural law and a blight against God. He believed that the new nation could not continue to maintain such a scourge without a reckoning. **“Remember that national crimes require national punishments,” he wrote about slavery, “and without declaring what punishment awaits this evil, you may venture to assure them that it cannot pass with impunity, unless God shall cease to be just or merciful.”** He maintained close contacts with Philadelphia’s African American community, including helping found the city’s first black church.

Rush advocated for the teaching of Christianity in all public schools and sometimes compared himself to the prophet Jeremiah. He fought for temperance, Sunday Schools, and helped found the Pennsylvania Bible Society. When many public schools stopped using the Bible as a textbook, Rush

proposed that the U.S. government require such use, as well as furnish an American Bible to every family at public expense. In 1806, Rush proposed inscribing "*The Son of Man Came into the World, Not To Destroy Men's Lives, But To Save Them.*" above the doors of courthouses and other public buildings.

According to Wikipedia "*Rush felt that the United States was the work of God: "I do not believe that the Constitution was the offspring of inspiration, but I am as perfectly satisfied that the Union of the United States in its form and adoption is as much the work of a Divine Providence as any of the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament". "In 1798, after the Constitution's adoption, Rush declared: "The only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in Religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments."*

The Scriptures teach that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). That same verse, however, teaches that we are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. So, Dr. Benjamin Rush was not saved by his many good works, nobody is! Those who hate America will surely be able to find something to denigrate his amazing life. As we have already pointed out, however, the Scriptures teach that we are to give honor to whom honor is due, and it is the purpose of this letter to honor Dr. Benjamin Rush!

Mark Twain once said: "*If you feed a starving dog it will not bite you. This is one of the principle differences between a man and a dog*".

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce