



"The highest reward for a person's toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it."

—John Ruskin

19-Sep-08

## Succeeding in the New World

In April 1607, three small English ships lay anchored in Chesapeake Bay as 104 men left their vessels to plant their feet on solid ground. They had spent the past 144 days on the open water, surrounded by an endless plane of blue, and now found themselves surrounded by towering pines and green marshes. These men established Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in the New World, launching what would become the most powerful and influential country in history.

America's beginning was humble. The settlers, led by the oft-mythologized John Smith (see *Pocahontas*), had to make their way in an alien and hostile environment. Within a month of their arrival—and despite sickness, severe food shortages, and aggressive natives—they had constructed a wooden fort, enclosing a church, several homes, and a storehouse. They also soon made [peace](#) with their native neighbors. At least eighteen previous attempts to settle along America's east coast had failed, but this one succeeded despite the desperate odds.

Jamestown suffered heavy losses over its first decade. By 1609, only around sixty of the original settlers had survived. Its continued existence depended

on several factors that would define American patriots two-hundred years later during the Revolutionary War. Each individual settler had not only to protect and provide for himself, but also to sacrifice for the community's sake. Each had to be individually and independently responsible, while choosing to devote himself to the lives of his fellow men. This self-determination coupled with sacrifice was key to the settlement's success. Historians have noted that half of the original men were of the gentry, who were unaccustomed to labor and likely thought the work of "taming nature" below them, but they chose to set aside those vain notions and give up a life of leisure for their community.

Fast-forward to the Revolution. Long after the Chesapeake Bay had been settled, and the settlements had grown into full-fledged colonies, the thirteen colonies completed a feat as unlikely as Jamestown's survival. For most of the New World's early growth, English monarchs were uninterested in the affairs of colonists thousands of miles away, but when America's industries began making a profit comparable to England's, heads turned. England began to regulate American life. The Revolution was born out of the colonists' fear of losing the autonomy they had taken advantage of in previous centuries to succeed. George Washington led a Continental Army and local militias comprised of men who were fighting for their personal land as well as their country, America. The rest is history.

Yet, men normally do not learn from history. Fast-forward again to the era of the Great Depression. The 1920s and '30s were a turning point in American political and cultural history. The decade before the Great Depression hit was a high point for America: The allies had won "the War to End All Wars" in 1918, and unprecedented prosperity followed. President Warren G. Harding credited his country's success to the individual and a free market in which privately held businesses could thrive. Harding even warned that, if the government tried to interfere with those it was created to serve and began to regulate business, success would be spoiled. Harding's warning went unheard. His successor, Calvin Coolidge, elaborated on Harding's message: "Government cannot relieve from toil," implying that Americans have to work for success. Coolidge was likewise ignored.

When Herbert Hoover attained the Oval Office, he began implementing a different kind of policy. He began to whittle away at the autonomy of

business. This led to compromising the nation's economy through raising taxes, implementing additional tariffs, and exploding the budget.

In 1933, Franklin Roosevelt took over where Hoover left off, both in the Presidency and in policy. The Depression was affecting nearly every American, and Roosevelt attempted to correct the problem through his "New Deal." This body of laws and policy changes took even more freedom from business and individuals, handing control to the federal government. Roosevelt introduced numerous programs that became responsible for tasks ranging from relieving poverty to funding theater actors to regulating schools. Many of these programs have since been abandoned, but the principle behind them—big government—still underlies America's policies.

The Jamestown settlement and the Great Depression era may seem unrelated and irrelevant to our walk with [God](#), but they share an ethical question. In that question is a crucial lesson for [Christians](#). The Jamestown settlement required a self-directed, self-governed effort on the part of the 104 settlers, as each man chose to undergo the inevitable severe trials. The Depression era made a conscious turn away from this kind of thinking in the introduction of laws founded on a contrary ethical view. Hoover and especially Roosevelt saw their fellow citizen as incapable of responsibility. At the risk of oversimplifying both events, we could characterize colonial America as *individualistic*—that each person had to rely on himself to succeed—and post-Depression America as increasingly *deterministic*—that success is decided by a greater power.

The ethical question is one of governance and will, both being issues central to a Christian's life. Whether we believe we have an individual will or a determined will shapes our walk with God, for good or ill. God answers this question unequivocally in His Word, revealing that we possess *free-moral agency* ([Genesis 1:26](#); [Deuteronomy 30:15](#)). The very quality of being free is what enables humans to develop character: Each person, after being called by God, must *choose* for himself how he will respond. Even after our conversion, when Christ knocks at the door, He waits for *us* to open it ([Revelation 3:20](#)).

However, a paradox seems to occur once we choose to accept Christ: We must give up our will for God's will. However, this only *seems* paradoxical.

While Christians do sacrifice their will for God's, they do so in order to come into complete harmony with God. In order to walk with God ([Amos 3:3](#)), we have to measure our choices against a true standard—His. Humans are incapable of providing a true standard for themselves. If they arbitrarily set up their own standard, they will, by their ungodly choices, end up on an entirely different path from the one God walks. This means that we have to choose to adopt God's way of life and with [self-control](#) endure any trials that arise, so that we may one day colonize the coming New World, the [Kingdom of God](#).

- Staff

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Self-Government and Responsibility \(Part One\)](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

A major distinguishing characteristic of mankind is his free moral agency, presenting him with choices and the right to make decisions. We need free moral agency to be transformed into God's image. The volition to do right has to come from the core of our character or nature. Paradoxically, the way to maximum freedom is to yield to God's way of doing things. Unless one has the Spirit of God, he cannot exercise the necessary internal control to be subject to the government of God. Even though the church is not the government of God (John 18:36; I Corinthians 15:50), we need to respect the ministry as well as lay members, being subject to one another (I Corinthians 11:1). The operation of God's government absolutely depends upon each person governing himself, never going beyond the parameters of the authority God has given him.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Building With Integrity](#)**

by Mike Ford

People seem to talk a lot about character and values, but finding a person or a company with integrity is a tall order. Using the example of baseball legend Ted Williams, Mike Ford describes what integrity is all about and how vital it is both for our own character growth and the growth of the church.

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