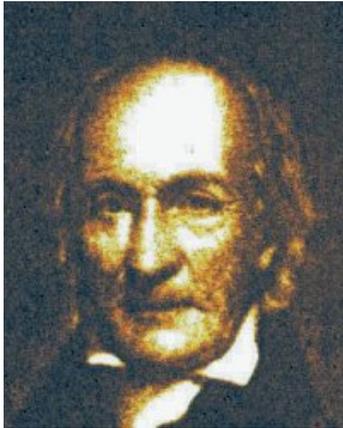


Biography Of Elder John Leland

Written by Admin

Monday, 30 August 2010 11:28 - Last Updated Monday, 30 August 2010 11:46



The following biography of John Leland is from *History Of The Church Of God, From The Creation To A.D. 1885* ; by Cushing Biggs and Sylvester Hassell.

John Leland was a pivotal American figure. While serving as a faithful minister of the gospel, he was also firm supporter of religious liberty. His influence in our country's development was crucial, with many historians crediting him with Freedom of Religion as guaranteed by the 1st Amendment.

Elder John Leland (1754-1841), a native of Grafton, Mass., was brought under conviction for sin and also concerned in regard to the ministry in his eighteenth year, experienced a hope in Christ and was baptized and began to exercise in public in his twentieth year, was married in his twenty-second year, and, during the sixty-seven years of his ministry, labored with his own hands, never solicited money for himself, went forth entirely undirected and unsupported by missionary societies or funds, preached from four to fourteen times a week, from Massachusetts to South Carolina (fifteen years in Virginia, from 1776 to 1791, and the most of the remainder of the time in Massachusetts), traveling more than a hundred thousand miles, somewhat on foot, but mostly on horseback, baptized 1,535 persons on a credible profession of faith, only one or two of whom ever attended Sunday Schools, faithfully preached the word unmixed with the doctrines and commandments of men, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, zealously opposed Sunday Schools, Theological Seminaries, a salaried ministry, and moneyed religious institutions, endured great and numerous persecutions, was an earnest advocate of civil and religious liberty, personally knew more than a thousand Baptist preachers, heard more than three hundred of them preach, and entertained more than two hundred of them at his house, wrote about thirty pamphlets and many hymns, including, "The day is past and gone,"

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and "Christians, if your hearts be warm, Ice and snow can do no harm," never could preach without getting into the third chapter of John, declaring the necessity of being born again, and more and more felt his unworthiness the longer he lived, carefully weighing himself in the balances of the sanctuary and finding himself wanting, and feeling that his soul and all his services needed washing in the blood of the Lamb, and perfuming with the intercession of the great High Priest, and that, at last, on the verge of the grave, with hoary head, and decrepit limbs, and faltering tongue, he could but cry, "God, be merciful to me a sinner! Save, Lord, or I must perish!" He preached in four hundred and thirty-six meeting-houses, thirty-seven court-houses, several capitols, academies and school-houses, barns, tobacco-houses, and dwelling-houses, and many hundreds of times on stages in the open air, having congregations of from five to ten thousand people. In 1835 he wrote: "I have been preaching sixty years to convince men that human powers were too degenerate to effect a change of heart by self-exertion; and all the revivals of religion that I have seen have substantially accorded with that sentiment. But now a host of preachers and people have risen up, who ground salvation on the foundation that I have sought to demolish. The world is gone after them, and their converts increase abundantly. How much error there has been in the doctrine and measures that I have advocated, I cannot say; no doubt some, for I claim not infallible inspiration. But I have not yet been convinced of any mistake so radical as to justify a renunciation of what I have believed, and adopt the new measures." In 1833 he wrote to the "Signs of the Times:" "In these days of novelty we are frequently addressed from the pulpit as follows: 'Professors of religion, you stand in the way of God and sinners-give up your old hope and come now into the work-God cannot convert sinners while you are stumbling-blocks in the way-sinners are stumbling over you into hell. Profane sinners, I call upon you to flee from the wrath to come-come this minute and give your heart to God, or you will seal your own damnation-God has given you the power, and will damn you if you do not use it-God has done all He can for you and will do no more-look not for a change of heart; a change of purpose is all that is necessary-to pray the Lord to enable you would be presumptuous. Some of you are mourning for the loss of a friend-I tell you your friend is in hell, and has gone there on your account-had you done your duty, your friend would now be in Heaven, but for your neglect your friend is damned. My hearers, you may have a revival of religion whenever you please-begin in the work, and the work will begin among the people-continue in it and the work will continue-keep on and the work will become universal.' Now I have not so learned Christ-I do not understand the Scriptures in that light-it is not the voice of my Beloved-it sounds like the voice of a stranger, and I dare not follow it. Societies of various kinds are now formed, with ostensible views, to extirpate drunkenness, masonry, ignorance, slavery and idolatry from the earth; and the people, from the aged to the infant, are called upon to enroll their names and take a bold stand to moralize and christianize the world. Lying, fraud, love of money, hypocrisy, gaming, dueling and licentiousness as yet seem to be considered too sacred to be meddled with, for no society is formed to check them. The missionary establishment, in its various departments, is a stupendous institution. Literary and theological schools, Bible and tract societies, foreign and domestic missions, general, State, county and district conventions, Sunday School Unions, etc., are all included in it. To keep it in motion, missionary boards, presidents, treasurers, corresponding secretaries, agents, printers, buildings, teachers, runners, collectors, mendicants, etc., are all in requisition. The cloud of these witnesses is so great that one who doubts the divinity of the measure is naturally led to think of the locusts in Egypt that darkened the Heavens and ate up every green thing on earth. This machine is propelled by steam (money), and does not sail by the wind of Heaven.

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Immense donations and contributions have already been cast into the treasury; and we see no end to it, for the solicitors and mendicants are constantly crying 'Give, Give,' with an unblushing audacity that makes humble saints hold down their heads. But I forbear. The subject sickens. I close in the words of God Himself, 'Stand ye in the way, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls'" Jer 6:16. Among the other remarkable and excellent sayings preserved in his writings are the following: "That God is good, and that men are rebellious-that salvation is of the Lord, and damnation is of ourselves, are truths revealed as plain as a sunbeam." "God sits upon a great white throne, free from every stain." "When I was a boy, I could not understand Pedobaptist orthography; they spelt circumcision, and pronounced it baptism. And I observed that they put the cart before the horse; instead of, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,' they would have it, 'He that is baptized and believeth shall be saved!'" "Some say, 'If you will pay me well for preaching and praying, I will do them, otherwise I will not.' Such golden sermons and silver prayers are of no great value." "There is no danger of your being damned, if you see yourselves bad enough to be saved wholly by grace. He that has raised you out of the grave of carnal security will loose you and let you go. He that has opened your eyes to see your dungeon and chains will also bring you out of the prison-house and set you free." Referring to the text which many preachers seemed to take, "Schools, Academies and Colleges are the inexhaustible fountains of true piety, morality and literature," he said that he had never been able to find it in the Bible. "In my travels I have heard much said about a Savior by the name of 'Old Mr. Well's You Can,' but I have never seen him, and almost despair of ever finding him below the sun. If the salvation of the soul depends upon our doing as well as we can, who can be saved? If a man falters once in his life from doing as well as he can, the chance is over with him. Those who place the greatest hope for Heaven on doing as well as they can, are more negligent in good works than those who detest themselves as the vilest of the vile, and trust alone in the mercy of God, through the blood of Christ. Pharisees may boast of good works, but humble penitents perform them." "The only true Missionary Society ever founded on earth was that established by Christ in Galilee more than eighteen hundred years ago, His church, to whom he said nothing about collecting money for the spread of the gospel." "Missions established on Divine impression are no ways related to those formed by human calculation. When the Apostles traveled from Judea to Gentile regions, they collected from the Gentiles, and brought the alms to the poor saints in Judea; but now the poor saints in Judea are taxed to aid the missionaries when they go." In 1829 he wrote: "In 1755 Daniel Marshal and Shubal Stearns, moving southward, preached and formed a church of sixteen members on Sandy Creek, Guilford County, N. C. In the south part of Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee and Kentucky, there are more than a thousand Baptist churches, now existing, which arose from that beginning. These missionaries had neither outfit nor annuity. The providence of God, the prayers of the saints, and the benevolence of those who were taught by them, carried them through." "Children are now exhorted to cast their mites into the missionary treasury, with encouragements that every cent may save a soul." "Bibles, Tracts and Magazines are much more abundant now than formerly; but it is a serious question whether Biblical knowledge is equal to what it was fifty years ago." "Sabbath Schools are very fashionable, and are considered by many as the great lock-link which unites nature and grace together; but those among whom I live and labor are without them; and they say that, if the Sabbath is holy time, it ought not to be profaned by acquiring literature." "I would never worship a day, and make a Savior of it; but worship the Lord, in spirit and truth, every day; and publicly assemble as often as duty called and opportunity served."

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"Some seem to say, 'The eleventh and great commandment, on the observance of which hang all religion and good order, is, 'Remember the first day of the week, and keep it hypocritically: the six following days may labor, laughter, lying, cheating, drinking, gaming, reveling and oppression be done, by day or by night, according to the inclination of the individuals; but on the first day of the week shall no labor or recreation be done, save only that men may salt their cows in the morning, sleep in time of service, talk about politics, fashions and prices at noontime, read newspapers after service, and pay their addresses at night.'" "For many years of my life I drank no spirits. During recent years, with increasing infirmities, I have used about a gallon per year. A spoon-bowl full is as much as I use at a time, and the times of drinking are not frequent." "Internal religion is always the same, and always will be. So many religious novelties have lately sprung up that I have often exclaimed, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.' But this alarm has been quieted by, 'What is that to thee? follow thou Me.'" In 1827 he writes: "I now have eighty-two descendants living, including children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. A few of my posterity have died at their respective homes; but I have never had a coffin or a death at my house." In 1830 he writes: "Every child has left me; myself and wife keep house alone. We have neither Cuffie nor Phillis to help or plague us. My wife is seventy-seven years old, and has this season done the housework, and from six cows has made eighteen hundred pounds of cheese, and two hundred and fifty pounds of butter." In 1831 he writes: "We have nine children, seven of whom have made a profession of religion." "When convicted of sin, I found that I could no more believe, come to Christ, and give up my whole heart to Him, than I could create a world; that, unless I was drawn by the Father, all the exertions of my natural powers of body and mind could not bring me to the Son; that, unless I was born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, and saved by grace, I must sink into hell." In 1836 he writes: "Would not a new translation of some passages in the New Testament, according to our present dialect and customs, be acceptable? In Mt 10:7 read thus: And as ye go, preach to the people, Your money is essential to the salvation of sinners, and, therefore, form into societies, and use all devisable means to collect money for the Lord's treasury; for the Millennium is at hand. In Mr 16:16 read: He that has attended Sunday Schools, had his mind informed by tracts, contributed to support missions, and joined in societies to support benevolent institutions, shall be saved; the rest shall be damned. In Mt 10:17 read: Be ye wise as serpents in your guile to deceive men; keep out of sight that ye have to receive part that you collect for your mendicancy; show great concern for poor benighted heathen, but let your neighbors have none of your prayers, exhortations or alms; but strive to appear harmless as doves; put on gravity and holy awe; make others believe that ye are too devotional to labor for a living, and that they must labor to support you; for if you do not appear uncommonly holy, you will not deceive the simple and get their money. In Ac 4:34-36 and Ac 6:3 read: The convention appointed a board of directors; any man who would cast into the fund one hundred dollars should be one of them for life, to dispose of the money at discretion, and mark out the destination of the missionaries. In Ac 13:1-4 read: Now there was at Antioch a convention of Christians, and among them five directors; and as they fasted and prayed, they were moved to select two of them as missionaries; and when they had supplied them with a good outfit, and promised them liberal supplies, to make Christianity appear honorable among the heathen, they sent them away. As for Ac 20:33-35, 'I have coveted no man's silver or gold; ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities and to them that were with me; I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak,' etc.-these sentences are so little used in this day of great light, that a new

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translation is unnecessary. The new version of Mr 16:15 would read: Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature-if they will give you three hundred dollars a year they would want two or three or more times that amount now. Ac 5:42: And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ-for five dollars a week. Ac 11:26: And it came to pass that a whole year they assembled themselves, and taught much people-for a stipulated sum of two hundred and fifty dollars each, for the year. Ac 9:38: They sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them-and they would handsomely reward him." "If any grades of collegiate education are essential prerequisites to the ministry, why does God not call those who are already in possession of those prerequisites? Is it reasonable to believe that a wise God would call a man to preach, when He knows that he cannot do the work until he has studied how to decline nouns and conjugate verbs three or four years?" "In this day of boasted benevolent institutions, which cost hard labor and millions of dollars to support (called the morning of the Millennium), but little reliance can be placed on the words of the seller, and less on the promise of the buyer." "For nearly fourscore years I have heard a continual lamentation among the aged, crying, 'O the times! O the manners! the customs and manners of the people are greatly depreciated from what they were when we were young.'" Elder Leland was providentially blessed with a wife of great industry and patience, faith and fortitude, trained in the school of adversity from two years of age. Her trials were many and severe, especially during the Revolution, when she was often left alone for weeks with her little ones, far from neighbors, her husband gone, with very little prospect of pecuniary reward, and while abandoned characters were roaming through the country. "Many a long hour she plied her needle by moonlight to prepare clothing for her little ones, fearful lest the ray of a lamp from her window might attract a bloody foe." She died in 1837. On January 8th, 1841, Elder Leland preached, from #1 John 2:20 1Jo 2:27, his last sermon-a very sound and spiritual discourse. He was taken ill that night with pneumonia, and lingered six days, though with little pain. The day of his death his prospects of Heaven were clear; they had been clouded the day before. To a young preacher who called early in the evening, and said that they were going to hold a prayer-meeting, and asked whether he had any advice to give, he said: "If you feel it in your hearts, I am glad. Forms are nothing." To the same preacher he said: "Bury me in a humble manner. I want no enconiums; I deserve none. I feel myself a poor, miserable sinner, and Christ is my only hope." He passed away in perfect peace, January 14th, 1841.