

## Part 4: Patrick Henry's "Liberty or Death!" Oration:

### 1. Analysis

Mr. President.

**(Exordium)** No man thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism, as well as abilities, of the very worthy gentlemen who have just addressed the house.

The three Tories Henry references are Edmund Pendleton, Robert Carter Nicholas, and Benjamin Harrison.

But different men [Tories and Whigs] often see the same subject in different lights [frame of reference and scale of values]; and, therefore, I hope it will not be thought disrespectful to those gentlemen if, entertaining as I do opinions of a character very opposite to theirs [preparation versus procrastination], I shall speak forth my sentiments freely and without reserve.

**(Statement)** This is no time for ceremony. The question before the house is one of awful moment to this country. For my own part, I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery [the subject of the debate]; and in proportion to the magnitude of the subject ought to be the freedom of the debate [The graver the subject the less restraint on the speaker]. It is only in this way that we can hope to arrive at the truth, and fulfill the great responsibility [client nation status] which we hold to God and our country. Should I keep back my opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offense, I should consider myself as guilty of treason [Integrity plus loyalty equals honor] towards my country and of an act of disloyalty toward the Majesty of Heaven [God the Father], which I revere [honor, respect, submit] above all earthly kings [e.g., King George III].

**Principle:** Honor requires that a patriot remain loyal to the law of the land than to the leadership of the land when the two are in conflict.

**(Argument)** Mr. President, it is natural to man to indulge [Implies excessive compliance and weakness in gratifying another's desires] in the illusions of hope [Something that deceives or misleads intellectually].

**Principle: A population cannot be deceived when its citizens know the truth. Loss of divine guidance in the souls of a people results in slavery.**

We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth [ten years of refutations from the king, the ministry, and Parliament], and listen to the song of that siren [A reference to the Sirens of Homer's *The Odyssey* whose song sought to tempt Ulysses. Proverbs 7 is a biblical example. ] till she transforms us into beasts. Is this the part of wise men [1 Corinthians 2:5, "Your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."], engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty? Are we disposed to be of the numbers of those who, having eyes, see not, and, having ears, hear not [A quote from Mark 8:18], the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation [A Client Nation's deliverance is acquired by freedom through military victory.]? For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth, to know the worst, and to provide for it.

**Principle: A thought will make or break a person. It is what he thinks under pressure that makes the difference. Courage is manifested by accurate, rational thought under pressure. Fear is incorrect, irrational thought under pressure. ("For as he thinks within himself, so he is" (Proverbs 23:7a).**

[At this point, Henry begins phase two of his address.]

**(Statement)** I know of no way of judging the future but by the past.

[Here Henry precedes George Santayana who wrote more than a century later, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."]

**(Argument)** And judging by the past, I wish to know what there has been in the conduct of the British ministry for the last ten years to justify those hopes with which gentlemen have been pleased to solace themselves and the house?

[Next Henry reminds them of the various Acts imposed upon the colonies. This begins his ἦθος (*éthos*) approach as he reviews the character of the British ministry, the king, and Parliament.]

Is it that insidious smile with which our petition has been lately received? Trust it not, sir; it will prove a snare to your feet. Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss.

[Again Henry alludes to Scripture. The phrase “a snare to your feet” reminds us of Solomon’s warning in:

**Proverbs 29:25** The fear of man brings a snare, but He who trusts in the Lord will be exalted.

**v. 26** Many seek the ruler’s favor, but justice for man comes from the Lord.

[The most famous incident of being “betrayed with a kiss” is found in]:

**Luke 22:48** But Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”

Ask yourselves how this gracious reception of our petition comports with these warlike preparations which cover our waters and darken our land. Are fleets [British Navy in Boston Harbor] and armies [14 regiments in the City of Boston] necessary to a work of love and reconciliation [Restoration to friendship]?

Have we shown ourselves so unwilling to be reconciled, that force must be called in to win back our love?

Let us not deceive ourselves, sir. These are the implements of war and subjugation [To bring under domination or control, especially by conquest]; the last arguments to which kings resort. [*Ultima ratio regum*, “last argument of kings; resort to arms; war.”]

[Henry then moves to *λόγος* (*lógos*), the rational appeal of the Argument based on evidence presented.]

I ask gentlemen, sir, what means this martial array, if its purpose be not to force us to submission? Can gentlemen assign any other possible motive for it? Has Great Britain any enemy, in this quarter of the world, to call for all this accumulation of navies and armies? No, sir, she has none. They are meant for us: they can be meant for no other. They are sent over to bind and rivet upon us those chains which the British ministry have been so long forging.

[At this point, Henry begins a series of rhetorical questions.]

And what have we to oppose to them? Shall we try argument? Sir, we have been trying that for the last ten years. Have we anything new to offer upon the subject? Nothing. We have held the subject up in every light of which it is capable; but it has been all in vain.

Shall we resort to entreaty [an earnest and humble request] and humble supplication [to make a petition]? What terms shall we find which have not been already exhausted? Let us not, I beseech you, sir, deceive ourselves. Sir, we have done everything that could be done to avert the storm which is now coming on.

[What follows is his brilliant litany of grievances that have been rebuffed by the British hierarchy. Here Patrick employs *πάθος* (*páthos*): an effort to elicit passion from the souls of the burgesses.]

We have petitioned [A formal, written request from an inferior to a superior.]; we have remonstrated [To plead in protest by written exposition of reasons in opposition to a measure.]; we have supplicated [To petition with earnestness and submission.]; we have prostrated [To stretch out with face on the ground in submission.] ourselves before the throne, and have implored its interposition [The action of a sovereign who places himself between the citizens and the government.] to arrest the tyrannical hands of the ministry [Prime Minister George Grenville], and Parliament. Our petitions have been slighted; our remonstrances have produced additional violence and insult; our supplications have been disregarded; and we have been spurned, with contempt, from the foot of the throne!

[At this point, Henry begins his first Peroration, the conclusion of this opening portion of his oration. Here he uses conditional clauses which demand positive responses.]:

In vain, after these things, may we indulge the fond hope of peace and reconciliation. There is no longer any room for hope. If [first class condition demanding positive responses] we wish to be free—if we mean to preserve inviolate [impregnable to assault or trespass; invincible] those inestimable [of value or worth] privileges for which we have been so long contending—if we mean not basely [dishonorably, shamefully] to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object [freedom] of our contest shall be obtained—we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight! An appeal to arms and to the God of hosts is all that is left us!

Such an appeal to God in prayer is recommended in:

**Psalm 84:8** O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear O God of Jacob!

The word “hosts” translates the Hebrew noun **צְבָאוֹת** (*seva'oth*) which refers to the angelic armies under the command of Jesus Christ, who is the *Yahweh Sevaoth*, the Lord of the armies.

Moses encouraged the Israelites in the wilderness with this reference to the Lord’s divine protection of His people:

**Deuteronomy 20:1** “When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you.

**v. 2** “When you are approaching the battle, the priest shall come near and speak to the people.

**v. 3** “He shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel [**יְשָׁרָאֵל שְׁמַע** (*Shama’ Yisra’el*)], you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them,

**Deuteronomy 20:4** for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.”

[Henry now begins his third oration.]

**[Statement]** They [Again he references the Tories who counseled against arming for war: Edmund Pendleton, Robert Carter Nicholas, and Benjamin Harrison] tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable [qualities which discourage military engagement] an adversary.

**[Argument]** begins with another series of rhetorical questions and another rational appeal based on evidence presented, or the *λόγος (lógos)*.] But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week, or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house [A reference to the Quartering Act which made arrangements of housing British troops in American houses]?

Shall we gather strength by irresolution [uncertainty and vacillation] and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs and hugging the delusive [self-deception from a disordered soul] phantom [illusion or vision] of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot?

In the above paragraph, Henry illustrates by calling to mind Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Book 1 takes the hero, Lemuel Gulliver, on a voyage but shipwreck casts him into Lilliput. There he awakes to find himself, the giant, prisoner of the six-inch high Lilliputians. It is a political allegory describing the fall of two Tory ministers, Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford, imprisoned in 1715, and succeeded by Henry St. John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke and Member of Parliament. Bolingbroke's failed political intrigues resulted in him being exiled to France. The phrase, "bound hand and foot" calls to mind the fate of two Tories loss of favor in England and serving as a warning to the Tories in attendance.

**Sir, we are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power.**

Patrick Henry then pulls everything together with a masterful **πάθος (páthos)**, designed to elicit passion from the souls of the burgesses. It is a powerful, rational appeal containing irrefutable arguments cited from biblical doctrines and images that are pertinent to all nations whose God is the Lord. This is Patrick Henry's **Formula for Freedom**:

**Point 1: “Three millions of people ...”**

The stability of a client nation is supplied by the invisible historical impact of believers in Jesus Christ that are continuously moving forward in the plan of God. Those that advance to spiritual maturity provide the most powerful and lasting historical impact.

Such believers form the Pivot of mature believers. They are described by our Lord as the “preserving influence” for the client nation:

**Matthew 5:13** “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.”

The Lord issues both encouragement and warning. The former places the onus on positive believers to continue their advance while to fail in doing so would result in divine discipline to the client nation.

In the Lord's statement we see the potentiality of divine blessings as opposed to divine discipline to the client nation, the responsibility lies with positive believers.

The cadre of positive, advancing believers in the client nation is called the “pivot,” defined as “a person having a major or central role, function, or effect.” When the pivot is enlarging, then the nation is blessed but, when it shrinks, loss of blessings occurs and, if the downtrend continues, the nation enters into the five cycles of discipline.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Freedom through Military Victory*, 4th ed., ed. R. B. Thieme III (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 2003), 16fn13.

Should the nation be destroyed, those of the pivot that survive are referred to in the New Testament as the **λεῖμμα (*leímma*): “remnant,” or surviving pivot.**

**Romans 11:5** There has also come to be at the present time a **remnant** [ **λεῖμμα (*leímma*): pivot** ] according to God's gracious choice.

The word “remnant” (*leímma*) in Romans 11:5 refers to the collective body of positive believers whose positive volition to Bible doctrine forms the glue that holds a client nation together, also called the pivot.

When the client nation is in a period of prosperity, the pivot provides the “staying power” for blessings. When the nation is in historical decline, the pivot survives the cycles of discipline to either restore the nation or become a diaspora that carries pivot power elsewhere.

Either way, the pivot is described by our Lord in Matthew 5:13 as “the salt of the earth,” a term that became an idiom and still used today:

The Salt of the Earth. The best or noblest of their kind. The metaphoric term was used by Jesus for those who were persecuted for being loyal to him (Matthew 5:13) and has been repeated ever since.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, the Pivot is that unseen cause which preserves a Client Nation in history.

**Point 2: “... armed in the holy cause of liberty ...”**

Henry addresses the fear of some that believed the colonies could not hope to overcome the military power of England which ruled the world on both land and sea.

The word Pivot is used to describe the accumulation of mature believers who function under a civil government. It is populated primarily by mature believers and those who have advanced to the sophisticated spiritual life.

The effective Christian influence in a national entity is spiritual and its impact is the accumulation of a Pivot that possesses invisible historical impact.

<sup>21</sup> Christine Ammer, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997), 556.

David sang these lines after being delivered by the Lord from Saul's army:

**Psalm 16:2** "The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

**v. 3** I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies."

Henry knew that Scripture supplied several instances in Jewish history where God insured victory for the Jews against more formidable foes. A good example is found in Genesis 14 which describes the Jordan Valley Campaign under Chedorlaómer, King of Elam. The campaign consisted of a series of eight battles culminating at the Battle of the Valley of Siddim near Zoar. Among the subsequent POWs was Abram's nephew, Lot.

Abram formed an army in coordination with Mamre and his brothers Eschol and Aner. Their military array consisted of 318 "trained men" plus a few hundred more "recruits." This group pursued Chedorlaómer's allied army, overtaking them near Damascus. In a dramatic night assault, Abram divided his forces that confused the enemy and led to victory.

The Book of Numbers documents the Lord's instructions to Moses to conscript an army from each of twelve tribes. The resultant number of men recruited was 603,550.

**PRINCIPLE: Freedom through military victory.**

**Point 3: "... and in such a country as that which we possess ..."**

Client Nations throughout history are those national entities which have been appointed by God to be custodians of His Word. Such a nation has several responsibilities under this divine appointment:

- (1) Preservation and custodianship of the canon of Scripture.
- (2) Evangelism of the lost within the Client Nation.
- (3) Biblical instruction of the saved within the Client Nation.

- (4) **Evangelism of the lost outside the Client Nation through the function of missionaries.**
- (5) **Provide a haven of refuge for the Jewish Diaspora.**

**Shrinkage of the Pivot reduces the size of the unseen cause to which Jesus Christ refers in His control of history. When believers become reversionistic, then their restraining influence on the unbelieving population is reduced.**

**As a result, reversionism in the nation reaches a critical point. When this occurs national discipline results as a grace warning to positive believers.**

**If these grace warnings are not heeded, then the Lord implements Operation Catharsis.**

**William Butler Yeats, an Irish poet and dramatist of the early twentieth century, understood this principle. In 1921, not long after the horrors of the trench warfare of World War I, he penned the poem, “The Second Coming,” and his first eight lines have been a certain warning to Client Nation America ever since.**

Turning and turning in the widening gyre<sup>22</sup>  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart: the center [Pivot] cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.<sup>23</sup>

**The people of the American colonies constituted an embryonic client nation. The word “client” refers to those who use the services of a professional. In ancient Rome, a plebeian was under the protection of a patrician. The population of the colonies formed a collection of states dependent upon another more dependable and powerful overseer for their protection. Therefore, the believers of the American colonies placed their confidence and trust upon the protection and deliverance of Almighty God.**

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<sup>22</sup> “Gyre \jīer\; To move in a circle or spiral” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “gyre.”)

<sup>23</sup> William Butler Yeats, “The Second Coming,” in *The Literature of England: An Anthology and a History*, 3d ed., George B. Woods, Homer Watt, and George K. Anderson (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1948), 2:1051.

These three components: (1) a dominant Pivot, (2) the laws of divine establishment including the ability to muster a raw but willing military force, and (3) the divine protection of client nation status under the ultimate Patron, Jesus Christ, Who controls history, formed the composite of Patrick Henry's formula for freedom:

Definition of the term "client":

**Client:** one that is under the protection of another; a person who engages the professional advice or services of another.<sup>24</sup>

**Client:** among the ancient Romans, a citizen who placed himself under the protection of a patrician, who was called his patron. A dependent; one under the protection or patronage of another.<sup>25</sup>

**Client:** An organization using the services of a professional person. In ancient Rome, a plebeian under the protection of a patrician. Origin: late Middle English: from Latin *cliens*. The term originally denoted a person under the protection and patronage of another, hence a person "protected" by a legal adviser.<sup>26</sup>

**Client:** Roman Antiquity: A plebeian under the patronage of a patrician, in this relation called a patron (*patrōnus*), who was bound, in return for certain services, to protect his client's life and interests. One who is under the protection or patronage of another, a dependent.<sup>27</sup>

The Personality described in the definitions of "patrician" and "patron" is God. He provides "protection" for His client's "lives and interests."

As Patron, God functions as the "guardian, protector, and supporter" of client members. Each of these members are "freed slaves" from the slave market of sin over whom the Patron "retains rights" defined in Scripture.

The responsibilities mentioned for personalities occupying the "pivot" requires each member to "engage the professional advice or services" of the Patron.

<sup>24</sup> Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed., s.v. "client."

<sup>25</sup> Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language: Unabridged, vol. 1, s.v. "client."

<sup>26</sup> The New Oxford American Dictionary (2001), s.v. "client."

<sup>27</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary, vol. 1, s.v. "client."

God as Patron dispenses advice through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Services from the Patron are rendered through the grace pipeline directed to the imputed righteousness of God.

The divine claim as Patron, first to the Jewish race and ultimately to the Gentile, is mentioned in both the Tanakh and the New Testament:

Protection and deliverance of the Jews is the subject of:

**Exodus 19: 3b** “Thus you [ **Moses** ] shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel:

**v. 4** ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle’s wings, and brought you to Myself.

**v. 5** ‘Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant [ **responsibilities of a client** ], then you shall be My own possession [ **obligation of the Patron** ] among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine;

**v. 6** and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation [ **Client Nation status** ].’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”

Patrick Henry understood these principles and with that confidence he pressed his attack:

“... are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us.”

Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us.

**PRINCIPLE: Jesus Christ controls history! Henry understood the principle of the Pivot, the unseen cause which preserves client nations in history. It is the final determination in all of Christ’s dealings with a people who are “His own possession”:**

**1 Peter 2:9** You are a chosen race [ **royal family** ], a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellences of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone [Great Britain]; it is to the vigilant ["Be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).], the active ["Be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and election a spiritual reality for by doing so you will not stumble" (2 Peter 1:10).], the brave ["Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed because of the king of Assyria, nor because of all the multitude which is with him; for the one with us is greater than the one with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles" (2 Chronicles 32:7–8)]. Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base [cowardly] enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable--and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come!

Henry has now arrived at his final Peroration bringing a conclusion to his tour de force that sparked Virginia to muster an army to take on King George III and his army and navy gathered and primed for war.

It is in vain [blind arrogance], sir, to extenuate [lessen the seriousness of the offense] the matter. Gentlemen may cry, 'Peace, Peace'—but there is no peace [A quote from Jeremiah 6:14, "They offer only superficial help for the harm my people have suffered. They say, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace."].

The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field ["Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses" (Nehemiah 4:14b)! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear [Implication: physical life has a greater priority than liberty], or peace so sweet [material prosperity is to be chosen in the face of Fabian encroachment], as to be purchased at the price of chains [unjust laws] and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!

**The oratorical skills of Patrick Henry accomplished two extraordinarily important things in the founding of our nation. First, his arguments and perorations within his Liberty or Death speech resulted in the Virginia Convention of March 1775 voting in the affirmative to conscript and arm the colony's militia and prepare for war against the British.**

**Secondly, his oratorical skills likewise forced delegates at Virginia's convention for ratification of the Constitution to demand the inclusion of amendments to the document once the first congress was seated.**

**His stentorian arguments warned the delegates that without certain added amendments the Constitution would enable the Federal government to become as domineering to the individual States as England had been to the colonies.**