

There are basic principles found in the Constitution. These include:

1. Men Are Not Angels
2. Limited Government
3. Federalism
4. Republicanism
5. Separation of Powers
6. Checks and Balances
7. Individual Rights
8. Sovereignty of the People

Men Are Not Angels

James Madison wrote in *Federalist Paper* number 51, “If men were angels, no government would be necessary.” The Founding Fathers created the oldest living constitutional republic with the belief that people are not perfect, and in fact individuals naturally strive for power over others. The challenge in building a strong government is to give it enough power to govern, but to restrain it so it will control itself. This principle is perhaps the most important in understanding the Constitution.

Limited Government

The American Founding Fathers created a government that was limited in power. They believed that it was more important for Americans to enjoy liberty than for their government to do everything. Americans remembered how British King George III and Parliament wanted to control the colonists, so they made sure that the new Constitution would never create a government that was too strong. The structure and function of the U.S. government was designed so that Americans would have maximum liberty and the government would be small.

Federalism

Federalism is the idea that there are various state governments and one federal government, each having its own spheres of power. The founders created this system for a few reasons. At the beginning of the United States of America, 13 different and separate colonies agreed to join to fight for independence from Great Britain. The colonies differed from each other in many ways, however. It was as if 13 different countries agreed to fight a common enemy. After joining to win its independence, each state wanted to maintain as much of its freedom as possible. Also, having various state governments is a defense against tyranny. It is more difficult for an autocrat to take over America, because America is a country with a wide variety of states, people, and ways of living. With different and strong state governments, it is much more challenging for a dictator to take control. For example, under the concept of federalism, the federal government makes decisions regarding war, but each state decides laws regarding education.