

## Reflection on the Constitution

### Introduction:

Alexander Stephens of Georgia had written President-elect Lincoln urging him to address the South in a friendly manner that would help persuade the South to stay in the Union. At the end of the letter, Stephens wrote, "A word fitly spoken by you now would be like 'apple of gold in a picture of silver.'" This originates in the Bible in Proverbs 25:11 (Solomon): "Like golden apples in silver settings are words spoken at the proper time." In the following statement that Lincoln wrote out as perhaps a response, he explains his interpretation of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Union.

### Document:

Fragment on the Constitution and the Union  
[c. January, 1861]                      *[Italics are Lincoln's]*

All this is not the result of accident. It has a philosophical cause. Without the *Constitution* and the *Union*, we could not have attained the result; but even these, are not the primary cause of our great prosperity. There is something back of these, entwining itself more closely about the human heart. That something, is the principle of "Liberty to all" – the principle that clears the *path* for all --- gives *hope* to all --- and, by consequence, enterprize (sic), and *industry* to all.

The *expression* of that principle, in our Declaration of Independence, was most happy, and fortunate. *Without* this, as well as *with* it, we could have declared our independence of Great Britain; but *without* it, we could not, I think, have secured our free government, and consequent prosperity. No oppressed, people will *fight*, and *endure*, as our fathers did, without the promise of something better, than a mere change of masters. The assertion of that *principle*, at *that time*, was *the word*, "*fitly spoken*", which has proved an "apple of gold" to us. The *Union*, and the *Constitution*, are the *picture of silver*, subsequently framed around it. The picture was made, not to *conceal*, or *destroy* the apple; but to *adorn*, and *preserve* it. The *picture* was made *for* the apple – *not* the apple for the picture."

So let us act, that neither picture, or apple shall ever be blurred, or bruised or broken. That we may so act, we must study, and understand the points of danger.

### Activity Questions:

1. To Lincoln, what did the apple represent? The picture of silver? Which representation was more important? Why?
2. Why are gold and silver used as comparisons?
3. Why do you think Stephens and Lincoln would both use a Biblical reference?
4. Choose one or more of the words that Lincoln italicized and explain why he emphasized it.
5. Illustrate "an apple of gold in a picture of silver".