



CHAPTER EIGHT

The Fourth Amendment

The right to privacy and security

Why is privacy important?

Imagine you come home from school and discover that someone has gone through your bedroom. They opened your drawers. Read your journal. Looked through your backpack. Opened your computer. Searched your closet. How would you feel? You would probably say, "That's not right! Those things are private!" The Fourth Amendment helps protect people from unreasonable government searches and seizures. It reminds us that in America, the government must respect the privacy of the people and follow the law.

FOR THE PARENT OR GRANDPARENT

This chapter has more moving parts than the last one — a right, a warrant, and a standard called probable cause. Three sittings work well, and the search-warrant page is the one worth reading twice.

The actual Fourth Amendment

RATIFIED 1791

"The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."



What does it mean? The Fourth Amendment protects people from unreasonable searches and seizures by the government.

In most situations, government officials must have legal authority before searching a person's home or taking property. Often this means obtaining a search warrant from a judge based on probable cause, although the law recognizes some carefully defined exceptions.

REMEMBER THIS

Young people, the government cannot simply search your house whenever it wants. Usually, it must first show a judge good reasons why a search is necessary and receive legal permission. **This protects everyone from unfair treatment.**

The Amendment Protects

The amendment names four things by name. Read them again in the sentence opposite and you will find all four.

1

Your person

2

Your home

3

Your papers

4

Your belongings



Why did the Founders include it?

Before the American Revolution, British officials sometimes used **general warrants** and **writs of assistance**.

These broad search orders allowed officials to search homes and businesses for smuggled goods without naming a specific place or person.



Many colonists believed this gave government officials too much power. One lawyer, **James Otis Jr.**, argued that these searches violated the rights of English citizens.

His speeches inspired many future Patriots, including a young John Adams. The Founders wanted to make sure the new American government could not search people's homes without following the law.

WORDS TO WATCH FOR

A **general warrant** did not name a place or a person. That is exactly what the Fourth Amendment was written to stop — a warrant must now describe particularly the place to be searched.

What is a search warrant?

A search warrant is written permission from a judge allowing law enforcement to search a particular place for specific evidence.

Before issuing a warrant, a judge generally must be shown **probable cause** — facts that would lead a reasonable person to believe evidence of a crime is likely to be found. This helps prevent random or unfair searches.

A WARRANT SAYS WHERE

It must describe *particularly* the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

A WARRANT SAYS WHY

It must rest on probable cause, supported by *Oath or affirmation* — someone swears the facts are true.

Why does this matter?

The Fourth Amendment teaches an important principle: the government must obey the law just as the people must obey the law.

REMEMBER THIS

No one is above the Constitution. Not citizens. Not police officers. Not judges. Not presidents.

Everyone is accountable under the law.



Bible connection

The Bible teaches respect for other people and their property. Much of the Ten Commandments of God highlights the connection between God, His people, and their private property and land.

EXODUS 20:15, 17

"Thou shalt not steal... thou shall not covet... anything that is your neighbor's."



God also values honesty and justice. Truth and the pursuit of justice should guide every investigation.

PROVERBS 19:5

"A false witness shall not be unpunished."

The Virtues Behind the Fourth Amendment

The Fourth Amendment teaches more than legal rules. It encourages godly character. Read across each row: the constitutional principle on the left, the virtue it asks for on the right.

CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLE

VIRTUE

Respect for privacy

Respect

Honest investigations

Integrity

Following the law

Justice

Protecting the innocent

Mercy

Accountability

Responsibility

REMEMBER THIS

The Founders believed liberty survives best when **government follows the law faithfully**.



Rights come with responsibilities

The Fourth Amendment protects us from unreasonable government searches. We also have responsibilities. We should:

- ◆ Respect the property of others.
- ◆ Tell the truth.
- ◆ Obey the law.
- ◆ Cooperate with lawful authority.
- ◆ Protect the privacy of other people.

The Golden Rule applies here too.

MATTHEW 7:12

"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."



Constitution fun facts

- ◆ The Fourth Amendment introduced the idea that searches should generally be based on probable cause rather than mere suspicion.
- ◆ The words "persons, houses, papers, and effects" show that the Founders wanted to protect both people and their property.
- ◆ Many modern court cases involving computers, cell phones, and digital information ask how the Fourth Amendment applies to new technology.
- ◆ The Fourth Amendment helps balance two important goals: protecting public safety and protecting individual liberty.

FOUNDER SPOTLIGHT



James Otis Jr.

1725–1783. A lawyer in colonial Massachusetts. He strongly opposed the British use of broad search orders that allowed officials to enter homes without specific justification. His defense of liberty influenced many leaders of the American Revolution.

"A man's house is his castle."

WHAT HE MEANT

This phrase expressed the belief that every person's home deserves protection from unreasonable government intrusion.

Words to know

Search Looking for evidence or property.

Seizure Taking a person or property under legal authority.

Warrant Written permission from a judge authorizing a search or arrest.

Probable Cause Facts that would lead a reasonable person to believe a crime has been committed or that evidence will be found.

Privacy The right to keep certain personal matters free from unnecessary government intrusion.

MEMORY VERSE

"A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished."

Proverbs 22:3





You finished Chapter Eight!

The Fourth Amendment — four down, six to go.

BILL OF RIGHTS



4 OF 10

- 1 Looking for evidence or property is a
- 2 Taking a person or property under legal authority is a
- 3 Written permission from a judge to search is a
- 4 The right to keep personal matters free from government intrusion is
- 5 The amendment names persons, houses, papers, and
- 6 The amendment names persons, houses,, and effects.
- 7 A warrant must be supported by or affirmation.
- 8 James Jr. opposed the British use of broad search orders.
- 9 A warrant must rest on cause.
- 10 Our memory verse says, "A man foresees evil."



Fourth Amendment Word Search

Words run across, down, and diagonally — forwards and backwards. Circle each one as you find it.

P I R H G W O A T H P R R P
M U Y C A V I R P E H U E Q
M X A V Y C F S Y S B J Y A
T R U T H P I T P T X M W S
Z S N M X R T C Z S O E E L
D E I B E O N E P G I A V N
Y R U T J B A F N Q R M S L
E U R S O A R F N C S H K T
C Z V A I B R E H S T V N W
I I F W K L A R R S S E D W
T E U G U E W E S I D J D C
S S P U P C P L Z U C N E A
U J N Y N A D B R T T Y B M
J W S K P R I P Q H B J A C

WORD BANK

Search

Seizure

Warrant

Privacy

Effects

Papers

Oath

Otis

Probable

Prudent

Justice

Truth



Two of these words are not answers to anything. They are what every honest search is for, and what it must never cost.

Family Questions

Talk these through together before you write. There is no hurry.

1 • Why do you think the Founders wanted to protect people's homes and belongings?

.....

.....

2 • Why should government officials also have to obey the law?

.....

.....

3 • What does "probable cause" mean in simple words?

.....

.....

4 • Why is honesty important in both law enforcement and everyday life?

.....

.....

5 • How can we respect the privacy of others in our own family?

.....

.....

FOR THE PARENT OR GRANDPARENT

Question two is the hinge. A child who understands that the rules bind the people who enforce them has understood the whole chapter — and most of the Constitution besides.

Respecting Privacy

A family activity. As a family, talk about examples of privacy.

☐

Knocking before entering someone's room.

☐

Asking permission before borrowing something.

☐

Respecting another person's journal or personal belongings.

☐

Keeping a promise when someone shares something in confidence.

Discuss how respecting privacy builds trust within a family. Then compare that to how the Fourth Amendment helps build trust between citizens and their government.

A GRANDPARENT'S THOUGHT

The Fourth Amendment teaches that justice done right preserves freedom. The Founders understood that a government with unlimited power to search and seize could easily become oppressive. At the same time, they recognized that lawful investigations are sometimes necessary to protect the community.

The Bible teaches us to love truth, practice honesty, and treat others justly. A nation remains free when both its citizens and its leaders respect the rule of law.

God values truth. It is the only liberating force God has granted to mankind (John 8:31, 32). The Constitution values equal justice and protection under the law. Together they remind us that real freedom is protected when authority is exercised with integrity, wisdom, and accountability.