

Rebuking the Oppressors

Do We Need Another Civil Rights Movement?

“Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn’t pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children’s children what it was once like in the United States where men were free.”¹

~ Ronald Reagan

Tyranny. Despotism. Oligarchy. Usurpation. Ask most Americans to define these terms and use them in a sentence, and you would be surprised how many are unable to do so. These terms have essentially been stricken from the American vocabulary and educational system, yet they were used quite frequently by our Founding Fathers. Most Americans do not see any need for a new civil rights movement because they do not understand what these terms mean or what God, throughout scripture, has said about the eternal struggle between good and evil and the role His people are to play in this spiritual conflict. I have found, however, that when these terms and definitions are reintroduced, defined, and clarified, the need for such a movement is seen as compelling, necessary, and even as our duty to the Supreme Ruler of the universe.

British historian Lord Acton was once quoted as saying, “Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.”² This lust for power has historically led to many abuses by the ruling class over their subjects and fellow citizens. In his Farewell Address on September 19, 1796, George Washington warned of the tendency of the human heart to lust for, and abuse, government power:

It is important, likewise, that the habits of thinking in a free Country should **inspire caution in those entrusted with its (government) administration**, to confine themselves within their respective Constitutional spheres; avoiding in the exercise

¹ Ronald Reagan, “A Foot In The Door” (Speech: Illinois, May 9, 1961), Reagan Foundation, http://reagan.convio.net/site/DocServer/ReaganMomentsFeb_-_1_-_A_Foot_InThe_Door_5.9.6.pdf?docID=581

² “Lord Acton Quote Archive,” Acton Institute, 2016, <http://www.acton.org/research/lord-acton-quote-archive>

of the Powers of one department to encroach upon another. The spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create whatever the form of government, a real despotism. **A just estimate of that love of power, and proneness to abuse it, which predominates in the human heart is sufficient to satisfy us of the truth of this position.**³

Despotism is defined as: “Absolute power; authority unlimited and uncontrolled by men, constitution or laws.”⁴ Despotism results from a corruption of power in which civil authorities (our fellow man) refuse to be controlled by either constitutions or laws and seek to control and subjugate every area of life. Simply put, despotism is a reference to out-of-control government officials who have been so corrupted by power that they forget they are mere men; they begin to think they are the Supreme Rulers of the universe.

In order to generate support for a new civil rights movement, it will first be necessary both to articulate the present need for such a movement and to provide a biblical justification for the proposed course of action. A simple illustration would be helpful. Consider the story of a young boy who faces daily intimidation on his way to school; a bully insists the child surrender his milk money or face physical retaliation.

A bully may be classified as a person who is habitually cruel to those who are weaker in order to impose his will by force, intimidation or threats. As a parent, our first response may be to let the child handle the situation and be strong. A parent may tell him to stand up to the bully. Otherwise, this type of behavior will just continue. But what if your child is just 6 years old and the bully is 17? In this scenario, your child would be too weak and powerless to defend himself. Now as a father or mother, if your child appealed to you for help in order to stop the bullying, would you turn him away, or would you not take measures to ensure that this behavior does not continue? As a parent, would you not intervene in order to stop this type of oppressive and even illegal behavior?

How much more, then, would our Heavenly Father step in when we Appeal

³ George Washington, *Farewell Address*,” Essay, September 19, 1796, Teaching American History, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/farewell-address>

⁴ *Webster’s 1828 English Dictionary*, s.v. “Despotism,” <http://sorabji.com/1828/words/d/despotism.html>

to Heaven for assistance? Our Heavenly Father hates when people oppress one another. Any abuse or injustice in any society is purely artificial, man-made and not authorized by the LORD. Unfortunately, mankind has proven to have an innate desire within himself to control, dominate and oppress his fellow man, especially those individuals who are too weak and powerless to defend themselves.

In the Old Testament, whenever the man of the house passed away, it was the tendency of wicked and unjust men to oppress and otherwise take advantage of his widow and children because they were left with no one to defend them. For this reason, the LORD had to issue a command for men *not* to treat their fellow man in this manner. As a matter of fact, God calls this type of treatment evil. “Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.”⁵

Scripture teaches that our Heavenly Father not only sees such wickedness and oppression, but He will also intervene in the lives of the petitioner and deal with the wicked. “The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked He turns upside down.”⁶ Scripture also teaches that “the LORD executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.”⁷

Jesus spoke about the gentile’s political leaders (rulers) and their unrighteous tendency to oppress or tyrannize their fellow man: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great **exercise authority** over them.”⁸ The phrase “exercise authority” means: “to control or to subjugate.” This is the very definition of tyranny. The Amplified Bible translates it in this way: “And Jesus called them to Him and said, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men hold them in subjection [tyrannizing over them].”⁹

As God’s people, we are forbidden from oppressing the weak and powerless, but we are also not to sit by quietly and idly while these abuses are taking place. We are commanded to **rebuke** those that are committing such atrocities: “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, **Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.**”¹⁰

⁵ Zech 7:10 NKJV

⁶ Ps 146:9 NKJV

⁷ Ps 103:6 NKJV

⁸ Matt 20:25 NKJV

⁹ Matt 20:25 AMP

¹⁰ Isa 1:16-17 NKJV

God's people are commanded to stand up and defend those who are too weak politically, socially or economically to defend themselves against those who are using their political positions of power and authority to oppress their fellow man. This duty to rebuke the oppressors even extends to our political leaders. Jesus was telling his disciples that because the Gentiles did not know God or His ways they did not understand God's directives in this area, and, therefore, must be admonished by those who did have this knowledge.¹¹ Rebuking the oppressors must be done by those who understand from scripture that we are all God's creation, and that it is contrary to the will of God for the rich and powerful to suppress, control or subjugate the weak and powerless.

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?¹²

In a practical sense, this rebuke can only occur when a person or a group of people, who are in possession of both faith and courage, rise up and declare to the powerful oppressors: "Just because you are rich or more powerful does not give you the divine right to treat people who are weaker than you in this way!" There is no group of people with a greater capacity—or the faith, courage and the divine authority—to take the lead in this endeavor than the church of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, the Christian church has lost its place and seems to have abdicated both its political and its divine authority. This "divine authority" was given by God the Father to His Son Jesus Christ, who in turn gave it to the church.¹³ This is what it means to be the "salt" and the "light."¹⁴ Until now, we in the church have lost the idea that we have been given this authority to "exhort, and rebuke with all authority," or have been too timid, reluctant or complacent to operate by this authority.¹⁵

¹¹ Romans 2:14, Gal 4:8, 1 Thess 4:5 NKJV

¹² James 2:5-7 NKJV

¹³ Matt 28:18 NKJV

¹⁴ Matt 5:13-16 NKJV

¹⁵ Titus 2:15 NKJV

Isn't the church's primary responsibility to tell *every soul* to repent when they violate the doctrine of higher authority, the rules of eternal justice, and to scold those who trifle with the moral law of God? Since when did government officials become exempt from this? If the Christian church will not remind and rebuke the civil leaders, and remind them that they are not at the top of the universal chain-of-command, then who will?

Those who say that Christians should not be involved in rebuking political leaders when they defy the laws of God must explain the following biblical accounts. In every case, God made known what his divine will was. These government leaders refused to comply, and God had to send a prophet to rebuke them.

Moses rebuking Pharaoh, an example of a government leader being rebuked - Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, "*Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.'* And Pharaoh said, '*Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go.*'"¹⁶

Elijah rebuking King Ahab, an example of a government leader being rebuked – "*Then Elijah said, 'As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today.'* So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah. Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah that Ahab said to him, '*Is that you, O troubler of Israel?*' And he answered, '*I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals.*'"¹⁷

John the Baptist rebuking of King Herod, is another example of a government leader being rebuked – "*But when Herod heard, he said, 'This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!'* For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. Because John had said to Herod, '*It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.*'"¹⁸

Jesus' rebuking of the Sadducees and Pharisees was a rebuking of government leaders – One of the chief objections from those who think the church should not be involved in politics is that "Jesus never got involved in politics!" This is fundamentally untrue. These statements come from a biblical ignorance of the

¹⁶ Ex 5:1-2 NKJV

¹⁷ 1 Kings 18:15-19 NKJV

¹⁸ Mark 6:16-18 NKJV

make-up of the Jewish political system.

The Jews did not have a congress (i.e. lawmakers) as we do in America today. The heart of Jewish law (civil, moral and ceremonial) had already been given by God through the hand of Moses. And in Jewish society, any new laws had to be consistent with this original foundation; they could not nullify the commandments delivered through Moses or obscure the original intent of the Ten Commandments—the spirit of the laws, which as Jesus said, is to love God and love our neighbor. Jesus' strongest rebukes were against lawyers, political and religious leaders.¹⁹

It was in fact the Pharisees that were given the authority to sit in Moses' seat.²⁰ They were the judges and elders who would defer to God's law in order to determine what was both legal and moral in Jewish society. However, like the judges of old, they were supposed to be acting under a **delegated authority**. Unfortunately, the corruption of this political power took its toll on these leaders like all others. Jesus' biggest confrontations and rebukes were leveled at these three groups (Sadducees, Pharisees and Lawyers) because they were using their political power and distorted interpretations of the divine law to enslave the Jewish people under a plethora of traditions, legislation, and ungodly interpretations of the law.²¹

This was handled by an assembly or high council known as the Sanhedrin, which was created during the time of Moses, was made up of seventy elders (priests, scribes, lawyers), and was led by the High Priest.²² It was the responsibility of this political and judicial council or assembly to interpret and enforce all aspects of the Mosaic Law, which consisted of not only sacrificial and ceremonial law, but also the or governmental civil laws.

At the time of Christ, this post was occupied by Caiaphas, and during the time of Paul, it was occupied by Ananias. During the Roman occupation of Israel, both were political appointments made by Rome. The American governmental body most resembling the Sanhedrin would be the U.S. Supreme Court, with the Chief Priest serving as president or Chief Justice of this “high council.”

All of the members of the Sanhedrin belonged primarily to one of two dominate political parties: The Sadducees and the Pharisees. These two groups were essentially political-religious groups that were somewhat like today's political

¹⁹ Matt 23, Luke 11 NKJV

²⁰ Matt 23:2 NKJV

²¹ Matt 23:1-36 NKJV

²² Num 11:16-17, Ex 24:1-2 NKJV

parties. A person could be a scribe or a lawyer by profession and a member of the Pharisees' party.²³

During the time of Christ, the Sanhedrin was dominated by a Pharisee majority with a Sadducee (Caiaphas) acting as High Priest. These two groups despised one another except when their political power was threatened.²⁴ Then they are seen teaming up against Jesus in order to test and discredit Him.²⁵ And like the U.S. government today, the Sanhedrin's unrighteous interpretations of the law tended to cause oppression, rather than protect the people from government oppression.

Similarly, it is rather ironic that the Federal government has a website titled [stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov), defining bullying as “*An Imbalance of Power: Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others.*”²⁶ What happens when these bullies grow up and seek to use the power of government and controlled media to control the lives of the American people though these same tactics? The only difference between a bully and a tyrant is the bully begins to use the power of government (police, military or the courts) to enforce his or her unlawful edicts, using force, intimidation or threats. The word “tyranny” could, therefore, be defined as “government sanctioned bullying.” As we have seen from past history, the only way to combat this flagrant abuse of power and injustice is through peaceful resistance, which is accomplished by rebuking the oppressors, defying their illegal rulings and then appealing to our Heavenly Father for assistance.

²³ Matt 22:34-36, Acts 23:9 NKJV

²⁴ Acts 23:1-10 NKJV

²⁵ Matt 16:1 NKJV

²⁶ “What is Bullying?” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/index.html>