

THE BIBLICAL ORIGIN OF INDIVIDUAL CIVIL LIBERTIES, AND TWO COMPETING VIEWS ON THEIR LEGITIMACY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Christopher Cone, Th.D, Ph.D, Ph.D

President and CEO, AgathonEDU / Vyrity

Research Professor of Transformational Learning and Leadership, Vyrity

ABSTRACT

The Declaration of Independence makes the audacious claim that “all men are created equal ... endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” This assertion of origin is rooted in a Judeo-Christian worldview – or more precisely, a Biblical one – and has been embraced by America’s founding fathers and their philosophical progenitors. In contrast, Plato’s ideal of Republic and its implementation in contemporary Marxist theory is rooted in an opposing understanding of the origin and scope of human rights. These two competing socio-political systems underscore the significance of human origin for practical aspects of societal structures and daily life within those constructs.

This paper examines the Biblical roots of individual civil liberties, showing the importance of interpretive method applied to key passages. In literal grammatical historical renderings, the Declaration’s unalienable rights claim is affirmed, while other hermeneutic devices allow for an ecclesiastic advocacy of the Platonic/Marxian alternative. Either system can be championed in the name of God, depending on the hermeneutic employed. This is, in the pursuit of a proper worldview, another key instance in which the importance of interpretive method is discernible, and dispensational conclusions can be seen as having much greater (positive) reach than has been traditionally assumed by their critics.

FILMER’S ASSERTION OF SCRIPTURAL DIVINE RIGHT

Richard Filmer (1588-1653) describes and opposes a common seventeenth-century view, that “Mankind is naturally endowed and born with Freedom from all Subjection, and at liberty to choose what Form of Government it please: And that the Power which any one Man hath over others, was at first bestowed according to the discretion of the Multitude.”¹ He characterizes the view as popularized by divines to minimize the king’s authority and facilitate the Church’s increasing influence and power.² By contrast, Filmer suggests, “the Scripture is not favourable to the Liberty of the People,”³ that desire for liberty was the cause of Adam’s fall, and was consequently as dangerous for moderns as it was for Adam.⁴ Filmer assigns motive to Adam (desire for liberty), employing a theological hermeneutic, going beyond what is written, and effectively supporting the divine right view by that one supposition. Nothing in the Genesis

¹ Sir Richard Filmer Baronet, *Patriarcha: Or the Natural Power of Kings* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1680), Chapter 1.

² Filmer, 1.1

³ Filmer, 2.1.

⁴ Filmer, 1.1.

text nor later texts dare assign motive to Adam. Rather the accounts and later commentary (including nine direct NT references to Adam) simply provide the historical facts of what occurred.

Filmer’s hermeneutic maneuver allows him to view authority as imbued in a parental sense. He says, “I see not then how the Children of Adam, or of any man else can be free from subjection to their Parents: And this subjection of Children being the Fountain of all Regal Authority, by the Ordination of God himself; It follows, that Civil Power, not only in general is by Divine Institution, but even the Assignment of it Specifically to the eldest Parents, which quite takes away that New and Common distinction which refers only Power Universal and Absolute to God; but Power Respective in regard of the Special Form of Government to the Choice of the people.”⁵ Authority, in Filmer’s view is through parentage, and it is not a far reach for Filmer to connect parental authority with the authority of the king: “As long as the first Fathers of Families lived, the name of Patriarchs did aptly belong unto them; but after a few Descents, when the true Fatherhood it self was extinct, and only the Right of the Father descends to the true Heir, then the Title of Prince or King was more significant, to express the Power of him who succeeds only to the Right of that Fatherhood which his Ancestors did Naturally enjoy; by this means it comes to pass, that many a Child, by succeeding a King, hath the Right of a Father over many a Gray-headed Multitude, and hath the Title of Pater Patriæ.”⁶

In Filmer’s view the king had divine authority to govern as a parent of the people. While in some cases kings were removed or deposed, such was only accomplished by Divine will, even if unrighteous acts (such as rebellion) were employed by the people to accomplish regime change. Filmer asserts that, “If it please God, for the Correction of the Prince, or punishment of the People, to suffer Princes to be removed, and others to be placed in their rooms, either by the Factions of the Nobility, or Rebellion of the People; in all such cases, the Judgment of God, who hath Power to give and to take away Kingdoms, is most just: Yet the Ministry of Men who Execute Gods Judgments without Commission, is sinful and damnable. God doth but use and turn men’s Unrighteous Acts to the performance of his Righteous Decrees.”⁷ This imbued authority was absolute and unconditional, and assured in every generation: “the Authority that is in any one, or in many, or in all these, is the only Right and natural Authority of a Supream Father. There is, and always shall be continued to the end of the World, a Natural Right of a Supreme Father over every Multitude.”⁸

Filmer provides no remedy for investable tyranny, as “The Father of a Family governs by no other Law than by his own Will; not by the Laws and Wills of his Sons or Servants. There is no Nation that allows Children any Action or Remedy for being unjustly Governed.”⁹ Still, natural law demands that the king seek to preserve his people. Thus the interests of the many

⁵ Filmer, 1.4.

⁶ Filmer, 1.8.

⁷ Filmer, 1.9.

⁸ Filmer, 1.10.

⁹ Filmer, 3.1.

necessarily outweigh those of the individual. The most significant implication of Filmer’s divine right theory is that there simply are no individual rights, and Filmer justifies that principle as part of a system for human governance that is built on New Testament teaching: “If any desire the direction of the New Testament, he may find our Saviour limiting and distinguishing Royal Power, By giving to Cæsar those things that were Cæsar’s, and to God those things that were God’s...We must obey where the Commandment of God is not hindered; there is no other Law but God’s Law to hinder our Obedience.”¹⁰ God limits royal power, but does not provide specific ground rules for its expression. There is a wall of separation then between God’s sovereignty expressed in the affairs of humanity and the workings of human government, all by virtue of the first hermeneutic device – a theological imputation of motive to Adam.

JOHN LOCKE’S PERSONAL FREEDOM MODEL

John Locke’s (1632-1704) model eliminates Filmer’s wall altogether, as he directly castigates Filmer’s view. Locke says after reading *Patriarcha*, that he was “mightily surprised that in a book, which was to provide chains for all mankind, I should find nothing but a rope of sand.”¹¹ In his first *Treatise* Locke seems bewildered at Filmer’s willingness to see all humanity born enslaved, and remarks early in his work that “Slavery is so vile and miserable an estate of man, and so directly opposite to the generous temper and courage of our nation, that it is hardly to be conceived that an Englishman, much less a gentleman, should plead for it.”¹²

As Locke critiques Filmer’s divine right view, he first takes on Filmer’s argument from Adam, summarizing Filmer’s case and then lamenting that “the thing is there so taken for granted, without proof, that I could scarce believe myself, when, upon attentive reading that treatise, I found there so mighty a structure raised upon the bare supposition of this foundation.”¹³ Specifically, Locke challenges Filmer’s assertion that Adam’s authority was the basis of human government. Locke lambasts Filmer for not proving his assertion, nor even really arguing for it. But by making an assertion “drawn from the authority of Scripture,”¹⁴ Filmer opened himself up to scrutiny for his exegesis. Locke responds as any good hermeneut should: “If he has in that chapter, or any where in the whole treatise, given any other proofs of Adam’s royal authority, other than by often repeating it, which, among some men, goes for argument, I desire any body for him to show me the place and page, that I may be convinced of my mistake, and acknowledge my oversight.”¹⁵

Locke further challenges Filmer’s assertion that Adam was given governmental authority over humanity at the creation, recounting in some detail the text of Genesis: “First, it is false,

¹⁰ Filmer, 3.3.

¹¹ John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government* (London: Printed for Thomas Tegg; W. Sharpe and Son; G. Offor; G. and J. Robinson; J. Evans and Co.: Also R. Griffin and Co. Glasgow; and J. Gunning, Dublin, 1823), 7.

¹² Locke, 7.

¹³ Locke, 13.

¹⁴ Locke, 14.

¹⁵ Locke 13-14.

that God made that grant to Adam, as soon as he was created, since, though it stands in the text immediately after his creation, yet it is plain it could not be spoken to Adam till after Eve was made and brought to him; and how then could he be monarch by appointment as soon as created, especially since he calls, if I mistake not, that which God says to Eve, Gen. iii. 16, the original grant of government, which not being till after the fall, when Adam was somewhat, at least in time, and very much distant in condition, from his creation, I cannot see, how our [Author, referring to Filmer] can say in this sense, that, “by God’s appointment, as soon as Adam was created, he was monarch of the world.”¹⁶ Filmer had asserted that Adam had royal authority over all *including humanity*. Locke suggests that there was no element of authority over humanity until – at the earliest, Genesis 3:16. In short, according to Locke, Filmer cannot assert exegetically that Adam had a natural sovereignty over humanity at creation. Locke adds that, “Whatever God gave by the words of this grant Gen. i. 28, it was not to Adam in particular, exclusive of all other men: whatever dominion he had thereby, it was not a private dominion, but a dominion in common with the rest of mankind. That this donation was not made in particular to Adam, appears evidently from the words of the text, it being made to more than one; for it was spoken in the plural number, God blessed them, and said unto them, have dominion.”¹⁷

While Locke says much more against Filmer’s assertion of Scriptural justification for divine right, this particular interchange is emblematic of Locke’s approach. Whether one agrees with Locke’s conclusions or not, it is evident that Locke is approaching Scripture with a literal grammatical historical approach in these contexts – even making extensive appeal to the Hebrew vocabulary and grammar of the Genesis account – while Filmer is content to employ a theological hermeneutic allowing him to make self-justified suppositions. It is no coincidence then that Locke’s conclusion would be such a stark contrast to Filmer’s. For Locke, all humanity are equal; for Filmer, there is integral inequity, and slavery belongs to all at one point or another.

Once he had destroyed Filmer’s divine right “fatherhood” explanation of governmental authority, Locke would argue at length in his *Second Treatise* that the basis of government was rooted in natural law as given by the Creator. This natural law has embedded within it the idea of universal equality and liberty and universal responsibility: “The state of Nature has a law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one, and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions; for men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker; all the servants of one sovereign Master, sent into the world by His order and about His business; they are His property, whose workmanship they are made to last during His, not one another’s pleasure.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Locke, 16.

¹⁷ Locke, 23.

¹⁸ Locke, 107.

Locke identifies here such an important principle, that all humanity belong to God and for His own pleasure. It is because of this stewardship of life that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness have their true value. It is this foundational concept that guides Locke's perception of the grounding of authority, as this state of nature demands that all humanity collectively have "the right to punish the transgressors of that law to such a degree as may hinder its violation."¹⁹ Locke's concept of government agrees with Genesis 9:6, which provides the first direct legislation of human enforcement against unlawful activity (specifically, the violating of the image of God through the act of murder), and is consistent with Romans 13:3-4 which warns the reader that there is no need to fear authority if one does good, for authority bears the sword – as a servant of God – a punisher and wrathbringer against those who do evil.

Locke acknowledges the universal and natural freedom of all humanity, and that freedom cannot be infringed, because "This freedom from absolute, arbitrary power is so necessary to, and closely joined with, a man's preservation, that he cannot part with it but by what forfeits his preservation and life together."²⁰ Freedom under government is then that freedom to abide by a societal standard – standards agreed upon by those participating. Locke is hinting at a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Slavery was another matter, and a totally unacceptable one. For Locke this meant that people must use their ability to reason as an expression of their freedom and to protect that freedom: "The freedom then of man, and liberty of acting according to his own will, is grounded on his having reason, which is able to instruct him in that law he is to govern himself by, and make him know how far he is left to the freedom of his own will. To turn him loose to an unrestrained liberty, before he has reason to guide him, is not the allowing him the privilege of his nature to be free, but to thrust him out amongst brutes, and abandon him to a state as wretched and as much beneath that of a man as theirs."²¹ It is here that the responsibility of parental education is apparent. Whereas Filmer argued for parental rule as the foundation of government, Locke argues that parental authority is designed for education unto the appropriate use and preservation of individual liberty.

MARX'S AND ENGELS' ECONOMIC SOLUTION

Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) proposed that the human problem was borne of class struggle and the resulting oppression of one class by another.²² That oppression was expressed through four epochs of world history, all representing the struggle between oppressor and oppressed: (1) primitive and communal, (2) slave, (3) feudal, and (4) capitalist. Marx and Engels argued that a fifth era – a socialist and communist epoch – would resolve the issue once and for all, bringing in a golden age of equality and justice. This

¹⁹ Locke, 108.

²⁰ Locke, 114.

²¹ Locke, 131.

²² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Penguin Books, 1967),95.

solution was rooted in the view of all history as economic history, thus the problem was an economic problem, and the solution was likewise an economic one. That solution was “summed up in the single sentence: abolition of private property.”²³

Marx and Engels suggested that private property had already been abolished for most, as “private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths.”²⁴ The implications of the elimination of private property (as a tool of oppression) were broad, and necessitated the “abolition of the family,”²⁵ and the use of familial relations as engines of commerce. In order to rescue children from the evils of oppression, education would be made public and removed from the ruling class and their privatized education.²⁶

The summary focus of this economic solution – socialism and communism – “abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis.”²⁷ These ends “can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.”²⁸ Because the problem is diagnosed simply as economic, there is no focus on the tethering of justice to anything other than an economic system – no justification of *why justice matters*. There is only an appeal to those dissatisfied by their current conditions to overthrow the economic powers of the day in order to seek their own betterment. Marx and Engels advocate a system that was in their time a modern expression of Plato’s ideal city state governance – rule by the enlightened few to ensure that the common people are protected from themselves. “Communism sets out to free the human condition from the greed that so entangles us and that ultimately facilitates our own enslavement. Communism is most ambitious in its diagnosis of the human condition (greed, oppression) and in its prescription for redeeming the human condition (the abolition of all private property, and the dissolution of every societal force promulgated by the existence of capital). In communism, morality (albeit entirely redefined) is legislated to the utmost.”²⁹

Because the communist ideal views the proper state of nature as the appropriate economic conditions to ensure the absence of oppression, individual liberties are not advocated. It is the very expression of those liberties that is perceived as creating the oppressive conditions. Rather than allowing people to independently and from parents learn to reason and express their freedoms and responsibilities well, the socialist communist agenda co-opts parentage and education in order to ensure that none pursue individualistic interests. Private property – that very thing that Locke considered as a means of personal preservation and the preservation of liberties – cannot have a place if the collective is put before the

²³ Marx and Engels, 96.

²⁴ Marx and Engels, 98.

²⁵ Marx and Engels, 99.

²⁶ Marx and Engels, 100.

²⁷ Marx and Engels, 103.

²⁸ Marx and Engels, 120.

²⁹ Christopher Cone, “The Inherent Limitation of Government” in *Biblical Worldview Applied* (Fort Worth, TX: Exegetica Publishing, 2016), 195.

individual. Of course the *Manifesto* makes no appeal to Scripture for its claims, for if it did, it would have to contend with the likes of Locke who would challenge the reliability of the exegesis and encourage the reader to use their own reason to assess and critique the system – choosing for themselves whether to participate or not.

ADAM SMITH'S PROPERTY AS EXPRESSION OF FREEDOM

Building on Locke's foundation, Adam Smith (1723-1790) viewed property and wealth as a necessary expression of individual liberty, not only for subsistence but for the well-ordered life: "Neither is wealth necessary merely because it affords the means of subsistence: without it we should never be able to cultivate and improve the higher and nobler faculties. Where wealth has not been amassed, every one being constantly in providing for his immediate wants has no time left for the culture of the mind; and the views, sentiments, and feelings of the people become alike contracted, selfish, and illiberal...The acquisition of wealth is, in fact, quite indispensable to the advancement of society in civilization and refinement."³⁰ Smith recognizes that society is able to flourish when the appropriate handling of wealth is in place. He suggests that, "The number and eminence of our philosophers, poets, scholars, and artists have always increased proportionally to increase of the public wealth, or to the means of rewarding and honoring their labors."³¹ Smith even acknowledges that the concept of free trade allows the sharing of wealth, and that God spread out the resources of the planet so that there would be global and free trade among all: "For the God of heaven and earth, greatly providing for mankind, would not that all things should be found in one region, to the end that one should have need of another; that, by this means, friendship might be established among all men, and every one seek to gratify all."³² Because of this principle, Smith advocates for only minimal regulation of commerce. He postulates that "Had government been able to act according to its sense of what was most for the public advantage, without being influenced by the narrow views and prejudices of the manufacturing and commercial classes, there seem to be good grounds for thinking that there would have been, comparatively, few restrictions on industry."³³

While Locke focused on the basic premises of government, Adam Smith delineates the expressions of appropriate government in economic contexts, specifically related to property and wealth. Smith's conclusions are directly contrary to those of Marx and Engels, as Marx and Engels are working from a Platonic platform of the elite making choices for the populace, while Locke and Smith are working from an altogether different platform that *the individual* rather than the collective is most important, because individuals are imbued by God with His image, and consequently, possess certain rights.

³⁰ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black and William Tait, 1837), xv-xvi.

³¹ Adam Smith, xvi.

³² From a 1553 letter to Sir Hugh Willoughby and Richard Chancellor, in Adam Smith, xxv.

³³ Adam Smith, xxv.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE: THE NECESSITY AND PRIORITY OF RIGHTS

The Declaration of Independence attributes the rights of individuals and government to “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.”³⁴ By virtue of all humanity being created equal,³⁵ all equally are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.”³⁶ These rights are integral to human existence, and their description as unalienable means they *cannot* be removed from the individual. The Declaration orders the rights by logical priority: “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”³⁷ Without life, one cannot have liberty, and without liberty one cannot pursue happiness. The order of these rights is no coincidence, and it is by failing to recognize the order of importance in priority that they are often violated. For example, the pro-choice platform argues that “the government should not intrude into an area of intimate, private decision-making...Instead, the government should remain neutral on the issue of childbearing and allow people to make their own decisions.”³⁸ This thinking emphasizes the woman’s personal liberty, which is at first glance a wonderful thing. However, the grave error is that it prioritizes the woman’s personal liberty over the unborn’s right to life. The current Democratic Platform includes this right to choose as an inherent need for the flourishing of women: “We believe that comprehensive health services, including access to reproductive care and abortion services, are vital to the empowerment of women and girls.”³⁹ On the other side of the aisle, the Republican Platform affirms that, “The Constitution’s guarantee that no one can “be deprived of life, liberty or property” deliberately echoes the Declaration of Independence’s proclamation that “all” are “endowed by their Creator” with the inalienable right to life. Accordingly, we assert the sanctity of human life and affirm that the unborn child has a fundamental right to life which cannot be infringed. We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and legislation to make clear that the Fourteenth Amendment’s protections apply to children before birth.”⁴⁰

The order of these rights matters immensely, and violating the order of these rights violates the Declaration and the Constitution which guarantees and protects the three unalienable rights. Consequently, any violation of those rights represents tyranny, and reasonable justification for peoples to “dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another.”⁴¹ By implication no governing authority has the right to violate these rights and

³⁴ The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription, viewed at <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

³⁵ Declaration of Independence.

³⁶ Declaration of Independence.

³⁷ Declaration of Independence.

³⁸ ACLU, “The Right to Choose at 25: Looking Back and Ahead” viewed at <https://www.aclu.org/other/right-choose-25-looking-back-and-ahead/>

³⁹ The 2020 Democratic Party Platform, 82, viewed at <https://www.demconvention.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-07-31-Democratic-Party-Platform-For-Distribution.pdf>.

⁴⁰ The 2020 Republican Party Platform, 13, viewed at https://prod-cdn-static.gop.com/docs/Resolution_Platform_2020.pdf.

⁴¹ Declaration of Independence.

any authority that does so represents political bands which may rightly dissolved. In acknowledging these bands, the Declaration is asserting that no person has the right to rule over another in a way that violates these rights. Based on self-evident natural law created by God, the three essential human rights are the necessary condition for governmental authority. Natural law supersedes governmental law, as governmental law is (or ought to be) an outworking of natural law.

Because God as Creator supersedes natural law, lack of submission to governmental powers that usurp these inherent human rights imbued by God is no violation of legitimate authority, and thus the Declaration can call upon people to “throw off such Government, and to provide new guards for their future security.”⁴² This is revolution without rebellion. The Declaration advocates governmental overthrow, and its authors knew full well Paul’s mandate that “every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities”⁴³ Perhaps they also understood the passage to come with an important qualification. Those who are governing (ὑπερεχούσας) are not necessarily authoritative. Only those who are governing and actually *are* authorities (ἐξουσίαις) are subject to this kind of submission. Paul says nothing of tyrannical rulers or those who are usurping authority, but rather he addresses those who actually are authorities as having authority established by God Himself.⁴⁴ Therefore, the one resisting the authority (τῆ ἐξουσίᾳ) is resisting God Himself.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, we cannot read Romans through the lens of the Declaration, instead we must view the Declaration through the lens of Romans.

BIBLICAL ASSERTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL CIVIL LIBERTIES

It is evident that Paul wrote his Letter to the Romans during a time of tyranny and unjust rulership. He wrote the letter in 56-57,⁴⁶ during Nero’s rule – one of the most oppressive administrations in Roman history. While he generally set a submissive and respectful tone, the trajectory of his entire ministry was impacted by a continuous civil disobedience on his part. First, before he became a believer in and follower of Christ, he was an enforcer against those who were violating the law in following Christ.⁴⁷ After his conversion, Paul was proclaiming the gospel of that very Christ, was imprisoned for doing so, and kept proclaiming the good news of Jesus anyway.⁴⁸ He encountered state and civil sanctions on numerous occasions,⁴⁹ yet remained undeterred. Like Peter who said, “We must obey God rather than men,”⁵⁰ Paul’s own

⁴² Declaration of Independence.

⁴³ Romans 13:1a.

⁴⁴ Romans 13:1b.

⁴⁵ Romans 13:2.

⁴⁶ Christopher Cone, *A Concise Bible Survey: Tracing the Promises of God*, 4th Edition (Fort Worth, TX: Exegetica Publishing, 2012), 216.

⁴⁷ Acts 8-9.

⁴⁸ E.g., Acts 16.

⁴⁹ 2 Corinthians 11:23-26.

⁵⁰ Acts 5:29.

actions help provide context and qualification of his exhortation that believers be submissive to governing authorities. Paul understood both the Source and the nature of true authority, and he recognized that those two concepts were intertwined with the idea of individual liberties – both by nature, and in Christ.

Humanity was created uniquely in the image of God, and as such enjoyed a different relationship to nature than the rest of creation.⁵¹ Animals were not described as being morally accountable for how they treated each other, but they were held morally accountable for their treatment of human life.⁵² Further, humanity was mandated to enforce the sanctity of the *imago dei* in humanity.⁵³ It is in this context that we find the first mandate for human government, and it is directly connected with the sanctity of life *for every individual human*.

Within the Mosaic Law not only was God concerned with national interests, but He also paid close attention to individual interests. The last six of the Ten Commandments dealt with actions toward individuals.⁵⁴ In fact, God was so considerate of individual liberties – after establishing the individual’s right to life, that He even protected their “right” to possess, without molestation, their own personal property.⁵⁵

While God is sovereign over governments,⁵⁶ He also works through the vessels of human governments, appointing kings and holding them accountable.⁵⁷ When Jesus instructed His listeners to render to Caesar what was Caesar’s, He wasn’t taking a *laissez faire* approach to human government, rather He was illustrating how people could recognize the limitation of human government, not of His own. As had been prophesied long prior, there would be no end to His government.⁵⁸ In that future kingdom economy there is individual responsibility and individual blessing – happiness.⁵⁹

In the present age individual liberties are expressed in the phrase “Love does no wrong to a neighbor.”⁶⁰ Love cannot infringe on one’s Biblical right to life,⁶¹ nor on one’s personal liberty (or freedoms) except their own freedoms on behalf of another,⁶² nor on one’s pursuit of happiness – if happiness is defined as blessing, which comes from right relationship with the Lord and proper application of that position in relationship with others.⁶³ Even in the body of Christ which is one, there are many members, and each play a vital role,⁶⁴ and each have a

⁵¹ Genesis 1:26-28.

⁵² Genesis 9:5.

⁵³ Genesis 9:6.

⁵⁴ Exodus 20:12-17.

⁵⁵ E.g., Exodus 20:17b – “or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

⁵⁶ Job 12:23, Psalm 22:28, 47:8, 75:7,82:8, Isaiah 40:15-17,

⁵⁷ E.g., 1 Samuel 13, Daniel 4, etc.

⁵⁸ E.g., Daniel 2:44-45.

⁵⁹ Jeremiah 31:29-30, 34-35.

⁶⁰ Romans 13:10.

⁶¹ Genesis 9:6.

⁶² 1 Corinthians 11:23-24, 31-33.

⁶³ E.g., Matthew 18:6, 19:14.

⁶⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the common good.⁶⁵ As Peter later explains, each believer is gifted for the purpose of glorifying Him through serving one another.⁶⁶ There is an incredible balance between personal liberties and personal responsibilities. Without the one, the other cannot be met.

In taking these passages at face value, we recognize that God first provides a platform wherein we can understand what He has said and what He intends (epistemology), then He has revealed to us the realities of which He wants us to be aware (metaphysics). Once we understand the realities and have confidence that we have understood Him, we can understand what we should do about all this (ethics), and how we should interact with each other (social political thought). For Plato, Filmer, Marx, Engels, and other thinkers who are not beginning with God as authoritative (Filmer begins with God, but enthrones himself as interpreter of Scripture), their understanding of the nature of the individual and their rights and liberties is distorted. On the other hand, with the literal grammatical historical understanding of Scripture, we end up with similar conclusions as Locke, Smith, and the writers of the Declaration – these who recognize that all humanity possesses unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of fulfillment and blessing by knowing God and utilizing that which He has given to us.

⁶⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:7.

⁶⁶ 1 Peter 4:10-11.