

Human Rights, Part 1 -Inalienable

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HUMAN RIGHTS, part 1- INALIENABLE

The Bill of Rights says, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

"Inalienable" means = incapable of being alienated, surrendered, or transferred

"The doctrine of natural rights was the hard core of Revolutionary political thought; the possession of natural rights was the essence of being human." So says Clinton Rossiter in his "Political Thought of the American Revolution" (p.104) Natural Rights were defined as "those rights which belong to man as man" (ibid) in the nature of things.

Specifically, it was held that there are five major rights:

1. Life (corollary: self-preservation)
2. Liberty, i.e.- freedom and power to act as one pleases (corollary: to move and live wherever one pleases)
3. Property, free use and sole disposal of one's tangible possessions (Note: Liberty and Property are inseparable)
4. Happiness (Happiness here and now, not salvation)
5. Conscience (to believe whatever an individual wanted to believe- especially freedom of Religious belief)

These five rights were considered, by our Revolutionary Forefathers, to be what a person needed, to be complete. All were considered to be absolute and inalienable.

Revolutionary theorists based much of their argument for Human Rights upon what they considered to be Man's Original State. For example, the argument goes, in Paradise Adam and his sons owned, developed and disposed of their land as they wished. The government did not own land. There was no government! Private property pre-dated government. Thus, the Colonialists argued, private property is a natural human right. Ownership is not a privilege to be given, controlled or taxed by government.

Today, political theorists do not use the Natural State as the basis for their thought. Human Rights are espoused more than ever, but now it is held that these "rights" are determined and bestowed by Society- by the demand and consensus of "the people", by legislation or by the Courts- mostly, the Courts: rights are what the courts say they are! They are no longer considered absolute, inalienable, natural or God-given. Nevertheless, most Americans firmly

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believe in the Rights as preached by our Colonial Forefathers. The original five Rights, plus corollaries derived from them, remain fundamental to the American Creed.

What is the Christian to believe about this subject? Do human beings have inalienable rights? What are they? Are the Rights of the American Creed (expressed in the Declaration and in the Bill of Rights) Biblical? Is there any truth to the Natural State theory?

The phrase "Human Rights" is not found in the Bible. (Some modern translations do use the word "rights" occasionally. see below) Phrases such as "right to life/to die", "equal rights", "women's rights", "gay rights", "animal rights" are not found in Scripture. The word "rights" commonly means deserved privileges, entitlements: Such and such is "due" to me or others. It is owed to me or them. It is our right, our due to receive or enjoy what is owed or due to us

Those things that we consider our "due" are usually what we believe to be our "Rights". Obviously, no Society could be well-ordered or healthy if it operated on that basis. (Judges 21:25) There is an ever expanding list of rights being claimed in our Society. Who or what determines exactly what "rights" are right? What determines whose rights prevail when they conflict?

1. On Biblical and historical grounds, Christians reject the prevailing answer today that rights are defined by "Society" through consensus, legislation or the Courts. Every totalitarian society is a testimony to what happens when the State dictates what are and what are not the rights of its citizens. It is never good.
2. On the other hand, can we agree with the common, ascending view that human rights are whatever is essential to life as a human being? Such are my, or their, rights, it is said, because "we are human beings"- "they are natural, inalienable, intrinsic" to who we are as humans. For many, this is the ultimate argument. "Don't kill us. We are human beings"!! Is there truth to this argument? Is it Biblical?