

Perspective Digest

Volume 5 | Number 2

Article 5

4-1-2000

Life In All Its Fullness

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Recommended Citation

Writers and Writers (2000) "Life In All Its Fullness," *Perspective Digest*: Vol. 5 : No. 2 , Article 5.

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BY THE BAPTIST JOINT COMMITTEE AND
THE AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY*

LIFE IN ALL ITS FULLNESS

**Revival and reformation should lead
to a revival in Christian witness.**

In one short declaration of purpose, Jesus embodied the biblical picture of God's creative and redemptive love—an all-embracing love that includes all people—"I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness" (John 10:10).** These words also summarize the biblical concern for basic human rights.

Though the expression "human rights" is not found in the Bible, its essential components—freedom, justice, and peace—are at the heart of the Bible's prophetic vision. Each is central to the Bible's message, and each is grounded in God's promises. But freedom cannot thrive without human effort to safeguard such basic rights as equal and fair treatment

before the law: freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; protection from violation of our wholeness and integrity, and of our homes and families.

Following are seven categories of essential human rights.

[1] God created us free and equal
By God's design all human beings are born free and equal in dignity, rights, and freedoms regardless of race, color, sex, language, creed, social status, or ethnic origin.

"Peter began to speak: 'I now

* Issued to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights. Digested for Perspective Digest.

realize that it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis. Those who fear him and do what is right are acceptable to him, no matter what race they belong to. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, proclaiming the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all” (Acts 10:34-36).

The Lord told Moses: *“Do not mistreat the foreigners who are living in your land. Treat them as you would an Israelite, and love them as you love yourselves. Remember that you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt”* (Leviticus 19:33, 34).

“It is through faith that all of you are God’s children in union with Christ Jesus. You were baptized into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, so to speak, with the life of Christ himself. *So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:26-28).

[2] God has endowed us all with reason and conscience

By God’s design all human beings are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood.

“The Lord gave us mind and conscience” (Proverbs 20:27).

“The greatest commandment is ‘Love the Lord you God with all your

heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ . . . The second most important commandment is . . . ‘*Love your neighbor as you love yourself.*’ The whole law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

The Golden Rule: Setting the example of justice, Jesus said, *“Do for others what you want them to do for you.”* (See Matthew 22:34-40; 7:7-12.)

[3] Life, liberty, and security of person are God-given rights

All human beings have a God-given right to life, liberty, and security of person.

The Ten Commandments summarize our essential responsibilities toward God and each other. These standards must be upheld if the world is to be a place where human life is highly valued and protected.

“Respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you.

“Do not commit murder.

“Do not commit adultery.

“Do not steal.

“Do not accuse anyone falsely.

“Do not desire another man’s house; do not desire his wife, his slaves, his cattle, his donkeys, or anything else that he owns” (Exodus 20:1-17).

Isaiah’s vision (65:17-24) reveals *God’s purpose for community—per-*

sons and societies building, planting, living, and working together in peace.

In Nazareth, "where he had been brought up," Jesus "stood up to read the Scriptures." From Isaiah He read: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people." (See Luke 4:16-21.)

[4] God warns against enslavement, inhumanity, and oppression

Human beings created in the image of God are not to be held in slavery nor subjected to torture or inhuman treatment.

Moses said that runaway slaves are not to be sent "back," and they are not to be treated "harshly" (Deuteronomy 23:15, 16). "Do not," he said, "deprive foreigners and orphans of their rights, and do not take a widow's garment as security for a loan" (Deuteronomy 24:17, 18).

[5] Legal protection and asylum are part of the Bible's view of justice

Since all are equally God's creatures and objects of God's love, all have the right to be recognized as persons before the law, and to enjoy its equal protection. None should be

subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention, and all should be entitled to fair public hearings, the presumption of innocence, and asylum from persecution.

Moses said: "Appoint judges and other officials in every town that the Lord your God gives you. *These men are to judge the people impartially.* They are not to be unjust or show partiality in their judgments; and they are not to accept bribes, for gifts blind the eyes even of wise and honest men, and cause them to give wrong decisions. Always be fair and just, so that you will occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you and so that you will continue to live there" (Deuteronomy 16:18-20).

The Lord commanded Moses to tell the Israelites: "Do not spread false rumors, and do not help a guilty person by giving false testimony. *Do not follow the majority when they do wrong or when they give testimony that perverts justice.* . . . Do not deny justice to a poor person when he appears in court. . . and do not put an innocent person to death, for I will condemn anyone who does such an evil thing." (See Exodus 23:1-9.)

[6] God's Word is the basis for the rights of freedom of opinion, conscience, and religion

All human beings have the right to freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of conscience and dis-

At the royal sanctuary in Bethel, the prophet Amos spoke powerfully against a corrupt and unjust society in which the wealthy were willing to sell the poor for a pair of sandals. Though ordered to cease and get out, Amos fearlessly claimed the right to dissent and to proclaim God's fundamental opposition to injustice.

sent, freedom of religion, and freedom to assemble peaceably.

When Peter and John were ordered not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, they answered: "You yourselves judge which is right in God's sight—to obey you or to obey God. *For we cannot stop speaking of what we ourselves have seen and heard.*" (See Acts 4:13-22.)

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[7] God's Word sets standards for work, wages, and recreative rest

All human beings should have the right to some form of work, an adequate wage, some form of social security and protection against unemployment, and the benefits of holidays and

rest.

Work is an obligation. Paul reminded the church in Thessalonika: "While we were with you, we used to tell you, 'Whoever refuses to work is not allowed to eat.'" (See 2 Thessalonians 3:6-11.)

Workers should be fairly paid. "Do not cheat poor and needy hired servants, whether they are Israelites or foreigners living in one of your towns. Each day before sunset pay them for that day's work; they need the money and have counted on getting it. If you do not pay them, they will cry out against you to the Lord, and you will be guilty of sin." (See Deuteronomy 24:6-15.)

Christians "shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed." (See Acts 2:43-47.)

Holy living means caring for the well-being of all people. "When you harvest your fields," the Lord instructed Israel through Moses, leave

grain and grapes “for poor people and foreigners.” Likewise, the Israelites were not to “steal or cheat or lie”; they were not to “rob or take advantage of anyone.”

In legal cases, they were to “be honest and just”; they were not to “show favoritism to the poor or fear the rich.” “When someone is on trial for his life, speak out if your testimony can help him.”

“Do not bear a grudge against others, but settle your differences with them, . . . Do not take revenge on others or continue to hate them, but love your neighbor as you love yourself.” (See Leviticus 19:1, 2, 9-18). □

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B U R N F I R E , B U R N !

If the true spark of religious and civil liberty be kindled, it will burn. Human agency cannot extinguish it. Like the earth’s central fire, it may be smothered for a time; the ocean may overwhelm it; mountains may press it down; but its inherent and unconquerable force will heave both the ocean and the land, and at some time or other, in some place or other, the volcano will break out and flame up to heaven.”—*Daniel Webster (1782-1852), American statesman, lawyer, and orator, in an address at Bunker Hill, Massachusetts, June 17, 1825.*