

# The Christian and Human Rights

The world has always been rampant with human rights abuses ranging from whole groups of people being exterminated such as in the holocaust to peoples' basic freedom being taken from them in slavery. Then there are many who don't have their basic needs of life such as food and water met due to corrupt governments that line their own pockets with money that should have gone to providing for the needs of their people. The list of human rights and the abuses of those rights could carry on. As Christians we are living in a fallen world and are confronted with human rights issues all the time. At times we are confronted with others around us being subject to abuse of their human rights and at other times we ourselves are subject to them. As citizens of the kingdom of God how do we deal with human rights issues in this fallen world that we live in?

Genesis 1: 26 – 30

## 1) What are human rights?

- Human rights have been around since the creation of man. Since it was God who created mankind in His image and likeness, making them equal, blessed them and commanded them to rule over creation – not over each other. He gave them the right to eat from the trees of the earth.
  - Before the fall of mankind it didn't need to be called human rights because these rights were never abused
  - It was only after sin entered the world that man ruled over man and abused others calling for human rights to be upheld.
  - John Stott quotes Thomas Paine in stating that the origin of human rights is creation. Man never acquired them. Nor has any government conferred them. Man has had them from the beginning. He received them with his life from the hand of his Maker.
- According to John Stott there are 3 words that sum up human rights from a Biblical perspective
  - Dignity
  - Equality
  - Responsibility
- Due to the many human rights abuses in the world with people being oppressed both as individuals and as whole groups the eventually started reacting to these abuses during the second world war.
  - In June 1941 President Roosevelt made his speech highlighting 4 essential freedoms in the world that he looked forward to:
    - Freedom of speech and expression
    - Freedom of every person to worship God in his own way
    - Freedom from want
    - Freedom from fear
  - The United Nations was formed in 1945 and such statements were made:
    - We, the people of the United Nations, are determined to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small
    - The promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedom for all without distinction as to race, sex language or religion.

## 2) Human rights and morality

- As we have defined human rights from biblical and secular perspectives we need to ask ourselves what the outcomes of humans rights are and to what extent should a Christian uphold human rights
- If we look at human dignity when one person's rights degrades another
  - Giving a man the right to watch pornography necessitates the degrading of women
  - When freedom of expression degrades someone else we cannot uphold the right to such expression
  - Missionaries have been opposed by secular and anti-Christian forces for "imposing" their religion and culture on uncivilised tribes as they have the right to live as they did.
    - One tribal chief in Fiji was questioned by an atheistic merchant why he accepted the Bible and Christianity. He responded by telling the merchant to look at a stone in the corner of the room. He said that before they would crush the heads of others with it. He then told him to look at the oven at the other end of the room. He said that they would then cook their victims in that oven before eating them. Then he said that if it were not for the missionaries he – the merchant – would have suffered that fate.

- The aspect of human equality could be twisted out of proportion
  - In the case of equality and freedom of religion there have been cases where Christians have been sued for putting gospel tracts with trick or treat items during Halloween
  - Proponents of equality are promoting for equal rights to practise anything from homosexuality to Satanism to prostitution
- Time does not allow us to go into more detail than this but as we can see there are certain aspects of life that secularism would dictate to us that are human rights but certainly are not from a kingdom perspective.

### 3) The Christian Response to Human Rights

- So then what is the Christ response to human rights?
  - The principles of the Bible are the groundwork of human freedom.  
HORACE GREELEY (1811–1872)
- There is the issue of human responsibility
  - We are called to stand up for the rights of others even if it means losing our own rights to do so
  - Proverbs 31: 8 – 9 "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."
  - Luke 9: 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.
  - We might see someone at work or school being ostracized or mistreated in some way. Do we look the other way or do we stand up for that person?
  - So often we hear people say "Don't get involved" or "It's none of your business". Remember that 6 million Jews were exterminated during the second World War when the West had that attitude.
  - What if Jesus had had that attitude concerning the problem of human sin leading humanity into an eternity in hell?
- The Christian only defines human rights according to the parameters set by God in His Word and rejects all other as fallen human desire
  - When human rights contradict godly morality then it cannot be considered a human right as that is not the way God had created human beings
  - An example is that God had not created men to lust over naked women and degrading them by doing so thus pornography may be considered a human right by the secular world but by God's – an therefore the Christian's – standards it is not a human right
  - Government officials may consider it their right to buy a car for R1 million rand but when people they are supposed to be serving don't have a house to live in and food to eat then that car isn't a right
- The Christian community as an example of human rights
  - When we come to faith in Christ we become part of the community of Christ where our dignity, equality and sense of responsibility is restored
  - Our dignity is restored in the fact that we are love and accepted by God and loved and accepted by the Christian community
    - John 13: 34 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.
  - Our equality is restored in that Christ sees all as one and all are equal in the Christian community
    - Galatians 3: 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus
  - We carry out our responsibility towards each other in practise
    - James 2: 15 – 16 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?
- The World needs to know that they have a right to become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross
  - John 1: 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God

God has called us to be proponents of human rights within the godly parameters of His Word and it needs to start within the community of believers in a way that glorifies God.