



## Rights, Privileges, and Responsibility

*[If you notice that I've said some of these things in prior newsletters, praise God! Some things are worth saying again. I hope some of it is helpful for some of you today, or someday.]*

“Rights” have been debated and fought over for many centuries. The Apostle Paul invoked his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 22). In 1215 the Magna Carta affirmed the rights of free Englishmen. On July 4, 1776, a group of British colonials bravely announced their independence from Britain, and declared,



*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.*

These are brave words, which have inspired men to go to war for two centuries to preserve America’s independence. As inspiring words, they’re superb. Unfortunately, as an exercise in logic, they don’t mean very much.

The reason these “truths” are held to be “self-evident” is that there’s no way to prove them. Search the Bible to your heart’s content, and you won’t find anything about God giving any “rights” whatever to any persons whatever. Even to His chosen people, Israel, He gives no rights. He gives them lots of privileges, such as knowing Him, worshiping Him, and being known by His name. He heals their diseases, blesses their crops and livestock, and gives them victory in war. He pours out many blessings, and the promise of continued blessings if they will serve and obey Him. But no rights, not even “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Notice how God takes away their privileges after they turn away from Him to worship other gods.

The fact is, God does not “endow” human beings with rights, inalienable or otherwise. The notion of rights is a human invention, and simply means privileges assumed for themselves by any group that is powerful enough to impose their will on those around them. Thus Roman citizens had rights, because the Roman government called the shots. American slave owners had rights, but their

slaves really weren’t even allowed to “pursue happiness;” they were permitted to go on living as long as they were submissive and productive. A remnant of the Native American population was allowed to live, in a restricted and degraded fashion. In our own day unborn children have no rights at all, though they are every bit as human as the abortionists who kill them.

The concept of “civil rights” has been used well by some—for example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—in trying to correct past abuses and injustices. Dr. King was an anointed man of God, who worked to bring out the best in both black people and white people. I have read many of his sermons, and they are solid, Bible-based Christianity, as well as powerful political statements. Dr. King’s greatest desire was equality of treatment for all, and even though he did not live to see his dream realized, his efforts brought about large and important changes in our society. All Americans owe him, and others with him, honor and gratitude.



Other leaders have badly abused the concept of “rights” as they have sought to gain power by teaching irresponsibility and dependency. Instead of helping African American citizens become fully integrated, productive and fulfilled members of society, they preach reparations, handouts, special treatment, and continued bitterness. Rather than helping people, they are hurting them, and sometimes they don’t even realize it.

Let’s get personal. I might say that I have a right to work at my job, own a home, drive a car, and vote in every election. But it is more accurate to say the Lord has blessed me with a job, which is mine only as long as the company still wants to employ me. I have no right to have a job. I am privileged to own a home, which I can keep as long as I make the mortgage payments and pay my real estate taxes. It is not mine by right; it is a gift from God, and by His grace I am (so far) able to keep it. I can legally drive a car because I passed a test, I paid for a

license, and I drive responsibly. I'm allowed to vote because my country gives me the privilege and the obligation of helping to decide who will represent me and my neighbors in government. None of these things are mine "by right." All are gifts of privilege, because I am a privileged member of a privileged society.

Many of you who are incarcerated have never had these privileges. Compared to me, you may consider yourself "underprivileged;" and so you are. I could say I am underprivileged compared to many of those who live in the more affluent areas of Maryland and D. C. I could also say you have been quite privileged compared to the average farmer in Bangladesh or Egypt. Both statements would be true, but not relevant. It is a fact that many of you have had few privileges, compared to the average U. S. citizen.

So, what? Should all of your past antisocial behavior and all possible future failures be excused based on the fact that you were "underprivileged"? Will that make everything okay? Will that help you any? No, no, and no.

"But," you say, "I didn't have a father. The man who should have taken responsibility for me as a child did not do it. I'm handicapped." True. Not having a father, or having one who does not carry his responsibility for his children, is a tremendous handicap for any child. That may help to explain much of your past behavior.

You might add, "I didn't even have a mother, really. She was working all the time." Or, "She was hooked on crack and left me to be raised by my grandmother." Both happen all too often. Life is hard for such kids. Often they get into drugs just because a pusher seems to care about them.

And there are a hundred other excuses, all partly or completely valid. Being on welfare. Being passed around among relatives or foster homes. Being home alone while Mama works. Being of African or Native American or Hispanic descent. Having no incentive to learn in school, no early background in reading or thinking, maybe even being malnourished. Does any of this apply to you?

Okay, let's say that we know how you got where you are today. We can blame your parents, a bad childhood environment, lousy schools, and so on. Some of it was even your fault. But again, So, what? All of that is in your past, which is dead. Gone. It cannot now be fixed, period. Let it go.

The important question is, what about your future? What are you going to do about your future?

Whose responsibility is it to provide for your needs? Your family? No. Even if they failed you in the past, you need to forgive them and move on. You cannot be successful in any meaningful way by trying to collect old debts. The government? Is that what you really want, to be a ward of the state? I hope you're not that dumb. No, the two who should be your primary providers haven't been mentioned yet. They are God and you. And those two are enough, if you want them to be.

Your family and friends will let you down. Eventually they'll get tired of bearing your burdens. The government is less and less inclined to support people forever on welfare. But God will never let you down, if you'll obey Him. He may not do every little thing you ask Him to, but He will provide everything you need, and a lot more, if you will trust Him.

But the person most likely to let you down, the one person whose actions you can control, is—you guessed it—YOU.

This scenario happens over and over. Those in prison ministry have seen it hundreds of times. A man gets out of jail. He gets a job, and he doesn't like it, or it doesn't pay enough. Instead of doing the best job he can, in order to get a good recommendation for the next job, he quits, or he slacks off and gets fired. His choice. He lets himself fail. He lets himself down.

Or he goes back to the neighborhood, and his old buddies encourage him to use liquor or dope again, and he remembers how good it used to feel. For some strange reason he doesn't remember how bad it felt to get busted, or how tough it was to be in jail. And he doesn't yet know how great it feels to trust and obey God, and to resist temptation. He's easy meat, and pretty soon he lets Satan pull him down again. Nobody's fault but his, now. He knows better. He just needs to do better.

All of which applies equally to a woman.

It will most likely be that way for you, unless you take steps to prevent it. You have to prepare yourself to succeed, not to fail, when the tests come. Because they will come, lots of them. Satan does not give up easily. You will need the power of God's Holy Spirit to overcome him.

Do you want to succeed in life? To stay out of jail, stay out of trouble, and eventually have some of those privileges you've lost, or never had? Do you really want this? How much do you want it? Here's how it can happen.

First and foremost, turn your life over to Jesus Christ. This is the key to everything. After you do

this, God becomes responsible for what happens to you. You are only responsible for praising Him, worshiping Him, and obeying Him. He has promised to give you the Holy Spirit to comfort you, help you, and guide you into all the truth. Ask Him for this gift. You will need it.

After you give your life to the Lord, you are a new creation, so you are not required to repeat the mistakes of the past. The second step is to take a good look at the person you used to be, and make up your mind, once and for all that, with God's help, you are not going to be that person any more. Every time you ever took dope or got drunk or stole something, you made it easier to do it the next time. You gave yourself permission to do it again. That is not permissible for the new you. You're starting fresh. Don't allow yourself to mess up the first time, and you won't have to worry about the next time.

You know something? You cannot do what I've just said you should do. Not without God's help. So be on your knees a lot, asking for His help. "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me," said Paul. You say it, too. I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

The third step is to decide what is important. Before knowing Jesus you probably wanted money, a car, and lots of "good times." You were just like Esau, selling your future for temporary pleasures. Now I hope you're smarter, and you would rather be sober and drug-free and responsible. If you want that, you can have it. If you don't truly want it with all your heart, then forget it, it will never happen.

Would you like to be a productive, respected person? You can do it, with God's help. It will take hard work, but it's worth the effort, so make up your mind and go for it. Of course, the best thing is to want God's will to be done in your life. If that's what you want most, tell God about it, and ask Him to make it happen. He can. He will.

Step Four: Have patience. Don't demand that God give you instant results. With God, the process is the important thing, and He will keep you in it as long as you need to be in it. Don't ask Him for results, ask Him for grace to cooperate with His plan for your life. This is the prayer that never fails: "Father, Thy will be done."

Here's a summary of the steps I've described:

1. Surrender your life to Jesus.
2. Decide to live as a new creation.
3. Focus on desiring what's important.
4. Wait patiently for God to provide.

God does not give us any rights, but He gives us the wonderful privileges of knowing Him and being His children, because He loves us and gave His Son to die for our sins. And he blesses us abundantly with gifts of life, liberty, and joy in Christ. Hallelujah!

Let me leave you with these helpful words from Chapter 3 of Proverbs (NIV): I hope you will read, apply, and remember them.



*My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.*

*Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.*

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*

*Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.*

*Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.*

*My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.*

*Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.*

*My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared.*

*The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble. The wise inherit honor, but fools he holds up to shame.*

God's peace be with you all, in the name of Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

*Brother Roland*

## Words of Promise from Proverbs 3

The whole book of Proverbs could be described as “advice on the best way to live” — best, in terms of being a blessing to others and positioning yourself to receive blessings from God. Sample its wisdom from time to time— you will find it quite helpful.

### Puzzle:

P R O S P E R I T Y H F G Y M Y R Q M B L O U T S H T T B L C R  
O R N K J D Z T B C I C Y O D N T K U I M R K Y E H S H V M J S  
C W E R R V D E K N A N E K O E F E V I D T A F T A D Y B D G X  
C O V C A S H E D W G G T N T D L E F N D G J L T G C G E M X V  
X P M M I U Z W S S G N C P T T N L Y A B R A P V P H H T A D P  
U N B M M O I P T S B R I N Y U C A I D S E O A U R M L I Q G G  
E E F B A S U I P M E H T D H W M K M F H N B L A S Y G C N B S  
S Y L F D N B S P B G L Z S N W T W T E S C I C E U C I X R G B  
U E U O W Y D S X V L Z B Y F A M N Q N S N C O V H R G A E Q B  
G P M C N X Q S V E K H X E E M T J E W A E R V G B T E L V C B  
O S T R A I G H T P A T H S B J Y S E M P F J A B L F R S O L F  
L V U N G K L C P N A K H Z W Z H E R T H H J J B O C Y O G R X  
D R O L E H T N I T S U R T N N T F R E Q S N O N V E R M N Y J  
A G M A S M N R E L F W P N S S Q E D Q D Q I E Y E P I R I O D  
N E Z E E U N X S A B S E T L Q B W R U F N V R Q M K J E M M H  
D V L V J C I R V I E M I E H U B A O M L A U R U B I E S M X H  
S G E B D V N O E L H U E H K G N N L W H C I N R O T J J I V I  
I H J T M J R E B C R P R E E H G M E W J K D T I Y N E M R B F  
L Z R N L U S A D F S W D I F Z D E H U D N V F H A I B O B D X  
V I Y S Y Y T K T I I I F F I V K V T H L O O I S F G O O S M I  
E N I L P I C S I D F O D A L G E B R A L W I O L W U C C T S E  
R L J O F K R D T U N N I Y G J J L A A C L U I O D H L I A X Q  
A X N O Y I S E L O R C O H N T N D E Z M E R W Q C J O N V H D  
A I R F F J L X W D N U Z C O Q H H F A I D M O K S N Z K E K Y  
C P I Y T H B X C H B Y V G L Y D Y W N U G I Z N Q Y Z V U S Z  
K T C E X X H P Y G G B O O L V H O K T N E M G D U J D N U O S

### Words:

ACCEPT REBUKE  
ACKNOWLEDGE  
BARNs FILLED  
BE BLESSED  
BE GLAD OF DISCIPLINE  
BE HUMBLE  
COMMANDS  
CONFIDENCE  
DISCERNMENT  
FAITHFULNESS  
FAVOR  
FEAR THE LORD

FIND WISDOM  
FIRST FRUITS  
GAIN UNDERSTANDING  
GO IN SAFETY  
GOLD AND SILVER  
GOOD NAME  
HAVE NO FEAR  
HEALTH  
HONOR THE LORD  
LONG LIFE  
LOVE  
NOT STUMBLE

NOURISHMENT  
PRECIOUS  
PROFITABLE  
PROSPERITY  
RUBIES  
SOUND JUDGMENT  
STRAIGHT PATHS  
SHUN EVIL  
SWEET SLEEP  
TEACHING  
TRUST IN THE LORD  
VATS BRIMMING OVER