

Lesson Five

Individualism

LESSON IDEA

Every single person has been created as a separate and distinct individual. And the primary purpose of government should be to protect each individual's rights.

VISUAL AID

None recommended for this lesson.

Three friends were discussing the question of which system of social organization would foster the most benefits. The first contended that mankind should emulate bees. "In a hive," he pointed out, "each bee is assigned a specific task. All are expected to work for the benefit of the colony, and those that won't or can't are banished. The young are suitably cared for and trained, while the adults are assigned useful work according to their abilities. There is work for every bee, and their production of food and other necessities is enormous. In short, gentlemen, we would be better off by copying the system of the bees, since it creates one of the most efficient societies imaginable."

The second disagreed. "You may be right when you state that a bee colony is remarkably efficient," he said, "but I cannot agree that efficiency is the most important consideration. You admitted that bees that are elderly, infirm, unable to produce, or merely different are driven from the hive. It is a heartless procedure that does not provide adequate security for its most vulnerable members. What we need instead is a system in which every inhabitant is guaranteed adequate food, clothing, and shelter; where medical care and recreational facilities are available to all; where everyone has an opportunity to work, but those who cannot are cared for."

The third had remained silent. But when his associates were finished with their arguments for efficiency and security, he stated: "My friends, you have both overlooked the most essential element of all. If God had desired that man live in the most efficient system, He would have beseeched man to establish a dictatorship, where everyone is told

what to do. If He had wanted man to have maximum security, he would have created Earth as one large prison, for it is in a prison that one finds the degree of security that one of you recommended. But it was not efficiency that was to be proclaimed throughout the land. Nor was it security. You have overlooked something that is far more important to man's spiritual and material progress, and happiness than either of those attributes."

What was the ingredient that the first two men ignored? [Liberty.] Do you agree that liberty is more important for the true welfare of mankind than either efficiency or security? Why? [Encourage everyone to participate in the discussion.]

WHILE THERE may be a great deal of efficiency in a beehive, and virtually total security in a prison, both places lack individuality. The lives of both a bee and a prisoner are dominated by dull monotony: the same dress, the same work, the same daily routine. Yet one of life's greatest wonders is not the sameness of everything, but the marvelous differences. There is evidence everywhere of God's love of variety within His divine pattern. The seas and oceans teem with multitudes of distinct creatures, from the tiny algae to the massive whales. And no two plants, fish, insects, or mammals are exactly alike.

Forests spread across thousands of acres and are filled with vast varieties of flora and fauna. Each living creature is different than every other. What are some of the differences that illustrate the incredible diversity and individuality in nature? [Some examples are the varying colors of flowers, sizes of animals, shapes of clouds, and heights of mountains. So far as we know, not even two snowflakes are ever exactly alike.]

Nowhere is God's preference for individual differences more apparent, however, than among the human beings whom He made "a little lower than the angels." Let's consider, for example, the ways

that we differ from each other in looks. What are some of the differences that enable us to distinguish one from another? [They include height, weight, hair, eyes, and skin color.]

The more we learn about the way we are made, the more we realize how many differences there are. God has created us as individuals, separate and distinct from anyone else who ever lived, to the tips of our fingers. Even our fingerprints have their own unique patterns. Not only do they differ from everyone else's, but the print on one of our fingers differs from those on each of our other fingers.

The unique nature of fingerprints was not recognized until the Eighteenth Century. Today, the differences are widely used by law enforcement agencies and others to identify individuals. And scientists have also learned that your voice is as unique as your fingerprints, and can be identified as belonging to you no matter how hard you may try to disguise it. Indeed, no one else can mimic your voice precisely enough to fool the devices that measure it. In addition, science can identify every person's DNA.

While the external differences between people are many and varied, the internal differences are even more so. For it is inside our hearts, minds, and souls that God has instilled the greatest diversity of all. We differ in our talents and desires. No two of us act, think, or react exactly alike. How often have you heard someone tell a joke, only to have some in the group laugh uproar-

FOR YOUNGER AMERICANS

We recommend that all of tonight's lesson be used, even with elementary students in your Heritage Hour discussion. With only a little assistance and guidance, they will grasp quickly the importance of individualism, and the need for some government to protect the rights of every person. The subject of how much that government should be limited, and how it can best be limited, should be reserved for subsequent lessons.

To conclude this evening's program on a light note, you might encourage a short demonstration of the individuality of each participant. For example, use an ink pad and paper to let each one make samples of their fingerprints. Then compare each print with others in the family. or ask each one to draw a picture of some nearby object, or copy a brief paragraph from some book. The variety in sketches or handwriting will quickly demonstrate each person's individuality.

FOR SERIOUS STUDENTS

The early Greeks believed that, "without law there can be no liberty." Based on tonight's discussion, what have we learned that would confirm this statement? Why are some laws, or government, essential to protect the rights of every individual?

The absence of all law is called anarchy. Is it possible for society to exist and to function properly under anarchy? Anarchy amounts to a total breakdown of government. Have pockets of anarchy ever occurred in this country? What about the riots in some cities or on college campuses in recent years?

Do you think that the persons who lived in the communities that were involved enjoyed more freedom, or less, while anarchy prevailed? Could they shop, work, visit, and play, like they did before the rioting began? Why would they be so anxious to have law and order restored? And why might some demand even bigger and more powerful government than they had before?

iously while the others barely smile, if at all? How many ways can you think of that we demonstrate our differences? [Different jobs, hobbies, dress, foods, friends, occupations, sports and recreation, etc.]

Yes, we have each been created as an individual who differs from anyone else who has lived, is living, or will ever live. Why is this individuality so important? Would we be happier if such differences did not exist and we were as alike as bees in a hive? [Encourage everyone to offer their opinions on this point.]

There are some people who agree with one or the other of the first two friends mentioned earlier. They believe that mankind would be better off if all of us were treated alike, and organized as efficiently as bees in a hive and with as much security as inmates in a prison. They are convinced that government should assume the responsibility of directing everyone's life and work. It may come as a surprise to learn how many individuals, groups, and movements have sought to implement this notion.

Looking back at the early years of our country, it is readily apparent that our pioneer forefathers had a remarkably sound concept of the proper role of government. The early settlers established government to help meet their aspirations; it was not imposed upon them. Let's look for a moment at the type of government they selected.

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IN THE DAYS of the so-called “wild, wild west,” when the frontiers of this country were first being explored and settled, the protection of the individual was largely a very personal matter. In those days, when a family loaded all of its possessions into a covered wagon and began the long journey to new territory, a rifle and ammunition were as essential as food and clothing. And the rifle was not merely for hunting, but also to protect the family from animal or human predators should it become necessary. As the settlers cleared land for their homes, their firearms were kept close at hand. And the homes themselves were designed as much for protection against attack by hostile Indians and outlaws as for shelter from the elements.

The settlers found it could be very difficult for men to work all day providing food and other necessities for their families, while also taking steps to protect themselves and their loved ones. So as more settlers moved into the area and outposts became towns, they began hiring the first sheriffs and marshals to work full time to protect the communities. This enabled the settlers and their families to go about their daily activities without worrying as much about their personal safety.

What the townspeople said, in effect, was: “You protect us, and maintain law and order in the community, and we will pay you for doing it.” The sheriff did not have to worry about growing crops, or hunting game, or raising a herd of cattle. Each of his neighbors contributed such necessities for him by paying him, and he in turn made it possible for them to devote all of their time and energies to their own occupations.

What were some of the other officials this pioneer town would need to hire to safeguard their individual rights? They had someone to enforce the laws, but how would they determine what the laws should be, or what penalties for violating them should imposed?

The next step was the election of officials to administer the budding government. A town council, perhaps, and a mayor. Initially, none were full-time jobs. The town council might include a barber, farmer, doctor, and blacksmith. The owner of the general store might be elected mayor. Their assignment was to draft the community’s laws.

But there was yet another crucial government

post to fill. To assure that the laws were enforced consistently, fairly, and as the townspeople intended, an independent judge was needed. Usually, when someone was arrested by the sheriff or marshal and brought to trial, a jury of his or her peers would listen to the evidence and determine guilt or innocence. If found guilty, the judge would interpret the pertinent law(s) to determine the town council’s intent and the penalty to be imposed.

It is interesting to note that government in those frontier days was not placed in the hands of a single person or group, but was carefully divided into separate parts, or branches. The town council served as a legislative branch, with responsibility to enact laws; the mayor headed an executive branch to administer the laws, assisted by the sheriff and other law enforcement personnel who were authorized arrest or otherwise thwart lawbreakers; and the judge, who headed a judicial branch responsible for determining the intent of those who had passed the laws, and the penalties to be imposed for infractions. Why do you think these pioneers thought it necessary to divide their government into various parts? What might the danger have been if had one person, or one group, been given the power to write, interpret, and enforce the laws?

The primary purpose of separating the key categories of government was to prevent those running any one of them (or all of them together) from threatening individual rights and the well-being of society. In those days, the people recognized that the purpose of government was to protect them, not to direct them.

The storekeeper didn’t expect government to tell him what he must sell, the price he must charge, or whom he must hire. The farmers and ranchers did not expect the town council to tell them where they could live, what they could grow, how large their herds could be, or when and where they could sell what they produced. The barber, dentist, and hotel owner didn’t expect the sheriff to tell them what hours they could be open for business, whom their customers could be, or how much they could charge for their services. Any government attempting to rule and regulate the lives and affairs of its citizens in that manner would have been resisted and promptly replaced.

Concluding Thought

The early pioneers recognized that some government was necessary to protect their liberties from infringement by others. But they did not want government to tell them what they could (or could not) do in areas unrelated to such infringement. They believed that if someone tried to interfere with their rights, government should intervene to protect them. Indeed, that is why they instituted government in the first place.

They believed that the proper role of government was to protect the individuals in their persons and property. They did not want to live in communities where everyone was free to do as he or she wished, regardless the harm it might do to others. They knew that some government was necessary to safeguard their freedoms.

Looking Ahead

In future lessons we will see how these same principles guided the Founders who drafted the Constitution of the United States and established our federal government. We will learn why they strictly limited the power of government.

During the next few lessons, however, we will take a closer look at some of the rights we possess, and discuss why they are important. For example, most of us desire to be creative, so to what extent is creativity enhanced in an environment of freedom and inhibited where freedom is absent? Is there a reason why the people of the United States have been so much more productive and inventive than those of other countries? And has our own creativity and productivity been hindered by the growth of government in recent decades?