

Restraining Evil Begins with You and Ends with Civil Government on Human Level

by Thomas W. Jacobson (27 November 2013; revised 22 September 2014)

The sources of, and relentless war between, good and evil raises the question: How do we restrain evil? I'll answer that question within the scope of spheres of authority. The Pilgrims, who settled on the American Continent and celebrated their first Thanksgiving in 1621, built communities and systems of government with this understanding of authority and an acute discernment of the necessity of restraining evil.

Individual: Restraining evil begins within each individual, as an act of self-government. When we are tempted to do something wrong, but sense a caution within us, a battle begins in our mind; that is our sinful nature or Satan waging war with the Law of God written on our hearts. Each one of us can restrain sinful thoughts, words, and actions as we respond to our conscience; if heard correctly, it is harmonious with God's will revealed in the Bible.

Family: Self-government is learned first and best within the family, as the first human social unit created by God. A primary duty of parents is to teach children to accurately discern good from evil, and in so doing to help them develop a rightly informed conscience. Parents are to teach children to obey, respect authority, and reverentially fear the LORD (Ephesians 6:1-4). When children cooperate with parents in this mission, they usually become responsible adults who need few external restraints to keep them from doing evil.

Church/Synagogue: "The church of the living God (is) the pillar and support of truth," the teacher of the Commandments and Law of God, and proclaimer of grace, forgiveness, and salvation through Jesus Christ alone (I Timothy 3:15). It is to be a light to guide, salt to preserve, a bearer of the standards of God, and a voice for truth to restrain evil (Isaiah 11:12; 18:3; Matthew 5:13-16). If it is silenced, evil will flourish.

Business/Non-Profits/Community/Schools: Good leadership and self-governing people in all other sectors can encourage good and restrain evil if they have right discernment. When schools, community organizations, businesses, and non-profits build on the same moral foundations, then mature men and women can live with integrity and mutual respect, in harmony with their consciences, while restraining evil and preserving liberty.

Civil Government is the last resort, on a human level, to restrain evil. When an individual does not exercise internal restraint, or respond rightly to correction from parents, clergy, teachers, supervisors, or others in the community, and acts in an evil way that violates the law, that is the point at which civil government is to step in to restrain wickedness. The same is true when a husband beats his wife, or a priest or teacher molests a child, or a boss violates an employee, or a government official misuses his power.

The best way to restrain evil (and preserve liberty) is if the same standard is upheld in the family, church, school, community, and businesses, and undergirds the civil government. The only way that is possible without the use of force and without destroying liberty, is if the Commandments and Law of God are voluntarily chosen as that standard. It is the only way a person can live fully in harmony with his conscience, and be restored in a redemptive manner when he errs. Wherever such is the case, evil can be greatly restrained, liberty maximized, and the need for civil government exceptionally limited.

This is why President George Washington cautioned the nation in his 1796 Farewell Address, that, “religion and morality are indispensable supports” to free government. It is why there was limited civil government in the United States until the 1930s. But as a nation, we no longer fear God or hate evil. We have cast aside true religion and morality, and the spiritual unity that bound us together as one people for many generations. We are losing our liberties, and our nation is self-destructing. Renewal is possible, but only through humiliation, genuine repentance, and turning to God.

It is time to seek the Lord, and remember our noble beginnings!

All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.