



Held at Golfview Hotel – Hotel Lusaka on the 2nd of June 2015 (Presentation by Pukuta N. Mwanza)

Introduction

It is important to mention from the onset of the fact that the subject of human rights is widely controversial among various groups of people including among the Christians. This is largely due to the fact that these rights have taken a twist that has tampered with the need for man's obedience to God such as some of the practices that are being championed in the name of human rights that in the sight of God may be an act of disobedience.

As we look at the Biblical reflections on the church and human rights, the starting point will be what the Bible says about Human Rights. This in itself can take so much time to explore and create an understanding of the theology of human rights. The human rights we are referring to are those developed and propagated by the United Nations through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. When one looks at the list of those human rights, they are aimed at protecting individuals from danger, harm or abuse by others and ensuring that individuals enjoyed certain freedoms and liberties all across the world at all times. To be universal, it means that these rights ought to be respected all across the world and member states of the United Nations sign treaties and protocols to ensure compliance with these rights.

When states impose restrictions or limit the rights of individuals, there is usually a serious reaction into what is referred to as human rights abuses or human rights abrogation. Penalties or sanctions may be imposed by the bigger nations against the nations that may be found to have breached those rights. In order to be right, the Human Rights should be based on the word of God – the Bible and be determined by God. The major problem with the concept of human rights seems to lie in its emphasis on 'human' rather than God. We want to respect man's rights

without reference to his Creator – the God Almighty. We can only effectively talk about human rights in the context of man's obligations to God.

Man is an object of God's creation

God is the Creator of all mankind and therefore, man is accountable to God for all that he does and for what he is. God said, *"let us make man in our own image"* (**Genesis 1:27, 2:7,**)

Man in the Garden of Eden

When we read God's word – the Bible, we see that when Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden, he was given rights as well as restrictions. He had the right to eat fruits from certain trees and yet he was restricted or rather he had no right to eat from other trees. He was told to not eat from particular trees. Doing so would mean breaking the law of God or simply acting in disobedience against God which is what Adam and Eve later did (**Genesis 2:15-17**).

God placed man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it and to exercise freedom over it. But the Lord God warned him, *"you may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden – except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die"* (**consequences of disobedience**)

. The book of Genesis outlines some rights of human beings as well as setting forth clear boundary lines. Man was right to go this far but not beyond. That would be trespass or transgression.

This brings me to an argument that is made by John Stuart Mill and quoted by Johari when he says that, *"all restraints qua restraints is evil....leaving people to themselves is always better than controlling them"* (**Johari, J.C, Principles of Modern Political Science, p.29**)

This statement implies that people are naturally capable of self-control and do not require an external influence to guide their conduct. It also assumes that man has the capability to determine for himself what is right without the involvement or influence of his Maker. Unfortunately, though, man is truly incapable of doing what is right without the help of God. Man

is totally depraved and therefore unable to obey God using his own effort and strength. I argue that Mill is wrong when he prefers that man should be left without controls. Human beings are by nature sinners, born as children of disobedience with a propensity towards evil, sin, immorality, injustice, hate and wrong doing. **(Ephesians2:3b.)**

Therefore, providing unrestricted rights to human beings that have an inherent evil condition cannot result in a just and fair society because such a man cannot please God in his natural state. It is impossible that evil human beings (without the help of God) can promote rights that are in line with the will of God.

In order for the human rights to be acceptable, they must have reference to God. The United Nations Human Rights are universal meaning that they must be applied the same way everywhere in the world. It is wrong to apply universal human rights while at the same time denying the universality of human sin. "For all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) Human rights activists emphasize what human beings must be allowed to enjoy without bearing in mind what their responsibility to God stands to be. The extended emphasis of human freedom has been made to give human beings liberty to not be influenced by God. We are told to just leave man alone and in many respects, the Christian faith is an offence to those who deny the redemptive plan of the death of Christ. It is for this reason that carrying a Bible in public is an offence in some countries, offering a public prayer is offensive to some people, mentioning Jesus Christ in prayer is not allowed, because people argue that such an action will be imposing a faith on others and that this will be seen as interference with the liberties of individuals and that religion be restricted to personal practice and not to be shared with others. That is the individualistic side of human rights.

Human rights must be determined by God or should be based on God's word. The danger at the moment is that proponents of human rights have taken God out of the matter. We have a growing emphasis on giving human beings freedoms and liberties that do not make them accountable to God as this is considered interference. There is a growing demand for human rights that are at variance against God. It is for this reason that we see a worldwide promotion of devious behaviour and acts of pervasion such as homosexuality. Gay rights are ungodly because homosexuality is contrary to God's creative order of human beings. Human beings are not supposed to exercise a right in an area that God has forbidden. Doing so is the breaking of the law (a transgression) and man will suffer the consequences of such disobedience.

"Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other..." (Romans 1:26-27, 1Corinthians 6:9-10)

Gay rights have become acceptable entitlements in some countries in the world. Only recently, Ireland voted in favour of gay rights in the national referendum. Gay practice is now considered a human right just as other rights. The proponents of gay rights argue that such people are born with that sexuality just like right handed or left handed individuals. There is a very serious danger that such an illogical position of legitimizing homosexuality can also lead to tolerance of other similar sexual offences such as paedophilia and the like where some will argue that such a practice is linked to their genetic makeup and that other people should accept their condition (howbeit perverted). There is a growing pressure for tolerance for people with devious behaviour in the name of human rights. Those that take a stand against such kind of perverse acts, are stereotyped as homophobic, intolerant and hurting.

The Bible warns against human beings being let to decide their own way of life without God because – *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is death".* (**Proverbs 14:12**)

Similarly, we see the issue of abortion, which is the taking away of human life before birth as becoming increasingly a woman's right to terminate pregnancy. There is a terrible contradiction in the current manner by which human rights are being propagated. While universal human rights include the right to life (United Nations Declaration of Human Rights 1948, article 3), this clearly and subtly excludes the right to be born. Such a silence has given the womenfolk an increasing strength and justification to exercise the freedom or liberty to undertake an abortion on demand for what they may call – unplanned pregnancy and for any other causes or reasons.

There is something about human rights that we can all stand on. The Bible clearly outlines the dignity of human beings because they are made in the image of God and they are given supreme authority over the creation - to manage. The Ten Commandments were given on Mt Sinai with reference to protection of human life and obedience to God. God has always been a protector of human dignity and human life. The Bible presents God as defending the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed and the fatherless and urges justice for all. Rights must provide due respect for the image of God in man and not to turn man into acting contrary to biblical morality and purity that God expects from his people.

With regard to treatment before God, those that are in Christ are treated with equality - there is no bias or discrimination based on gender, social or economic status, ethnicity or race - all are one in Christ. (Galatians 3:28) Foreigners or aliens in any nation are expected to enjoy their freedoms like the nationals, etc.

Conclusion

Human rights must be handled cautiously because they should not be an end in themselves. Rather, they should be a means to ensuring that godly values and biblical morality is enhanced and human life is protected to the glory of God. Society will be better only with sufficient and effectual application of biblical values and morality. From the Christian stand point, it is impossible for the current drive on human rights to help build a better and godly society if it continues to deny the existence of God and fails to accept the absolutes of what is right and what is wrong according to God. These are being considered relative and therefore personal convictions take precedence to biblical truths and imperatives.

We have observed that while the United Nations declaration of Human Rights has provided for religious freedom as a universal right, some countries have abrogated this right of citizens by killing and displacing many Christians with impunity while the world watches without reaction. To the contrary, we continue to see wealthier governments in the West standing up to defend homosexuality as a critical factor of human rights and governance system. This is showing a double standard in the enforcement of these rights everywhere.

When we talk of human rights, we must ask the all-important question – is it right in the sight of God? We must be warned against the irrational application of rights that do not reflect the righteousness of God. Human rights must have restraints and controls that will help guide human beings towards the fear of God and to not let them do whatever seems right in their own eyes. God must determine what is morally right and acceptable for human beings.

The author is the Executive Director of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, a Christian church umbrella organization for evangelical churches, para-church organizations, mission agencies etc.