



"Suppose a nation in some distant region should take the Bible for their only Law Book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited. ... What a paradise would this region be!"

—John Adams

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What Makes a Civilization Great?

A recent trip to South Africa allowed me to compare conditions in that nation with what I remember from my two previous visits, as well as what I have read and heard about it before the African National Congress, backed by international pressure, installed itself over the government. Particularly striking were a few news items and interviews brought to my attention on the present state of education there. A once-good educational system has broken down, probably past the point of no return.

Without becoming too detailed, here is a partial list of deficiencies:

- Schools are routinely vandalized of everything useful over vacation breaks.
- Teachers are scarce and terribly underpaid. Classrooms often contain scores of children under the supervision of one teacher.
- Even public schools are too expensive for many families. When they do finally scrape up enough money to enroll their children, weeks or months of the school year have already passed, putting the children impossibly behind.
- The government cannot get textbooks to the schools. In many cases, whole classes must share one book.
- In a recent national interview, the current minister of education wore a T-shirt that read, more or less, "I do only what the little voice inside my head tells me to do."

These are hardly encouraging signs of progress. To the contrary, what is occurring in South Africa, once the continent's shining beacon of prosperity, goes beyond the educational system. It is full-fledged societal disintegration. Its murder-rate is among the highest in [the world](#), its economy is struggling, its best and brightest are fleeing to more promising climes. It is saddening to witness the double-quick dismantling of a once-great nation.

The present circumstances in South Africa reflect typically human and carnal reactions. After decades of white-rule, South African blacks are relishing their new powers and taking out their pent-

up frustrations on whites. To be frank, what is being practiced is reverse discrimination under the guise of government-sanctioned equality programs. Racial quotas are strenuously enforced, rejecting highly qualified candidates in favor of those with the "correct" skin color. In many respects, the game remains the same, but the players have just switched sides.

Yet, it is really not the same. In terms of governance, the values of the opposing sides in this clash of peoples are radically divergent, mirroring the differences between Israelite and Gentile cultures. [Jesus](#) comments on this to His disciples in [Matthew 20:25](#): "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them." *The Living Bible* catches the essence of Jesus' intent by rendering this, "Among the heathen, kings are tyrants and each minor official lords it over those beneath him." This is the direction South Africa seems to be heading, toward tyranny.

The essential difference that Jesus points out is that, generally, Gentile rulers exercise power to dominate those under them and to bring themselves even greater power. This is rule by a strongman, easily seen in Idi Amin, Robert Mugabe, Saddam Hussein, Fidel Castro, Mao, Stalin, and the like. On the other hand, cultures heavily influenced by biblical principles, as the Israelite cultures have been, tend to follow more rule-of-law, power-sharing governmental schemes, such as democracy, republicanism, constitutional monarchy, and the like. These nations prioritize principles and law over the aims and ideas of the head of government.

The latter method has shown itself superior in most cases because it curtails the excesses of the power-hungry while unleashing the creative, economic, scientific, and intellectual power of the governed. For instance, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union, ruled by strongmen like Khrushchev and Brezhnev, could not keep pace with the innovative genius of the West's scientists and engineers, having to resort to military and corporate espionage to keep their arms within sight of NATO's weapons systems. This same principle is at work in the economic war between China and the United States. While the U.S. economy has its inherent weaknesses, the Chinese economy, though seeming to expand by double digits each year, is doomed to fail before long due to its unhealthy manipulation by a few powerful figures in the Chinese government. By comparison, the U.S. economy is, in principle, more robust and resilient because it relies on the combined strength and acumen of millions of businessmen, investors, and consumers. It falters only when the government tinkers too heavily with it.

Notice how Jesus continues His instruction concerning government: "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" ([Matthew 20:26-28](#)). From this come a few principles of government that Jesus instilled within the church and which He will follow when He sets up His government on earth. The two that are most easily seen are 1) a leader must be a public servant, and 2) his primary motivation must be to sacrifice himself for the good of all.

So what makes a great civilization? A culture or a nation that employs the strongman principle of government may have a colorful history, but it will never amount to a truly great civilization. That title is reserved for those peoples who practice the principles of government set down in God's Word. However imperfectly performed, those societies that have enshrined biblical principles in their constitutions have enjoyed [peace](#), progress, prosperity, prestige, and *power* far beyond the crude dictatorships of strongmen. As Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 show, [God](#) backs up His eternal laws with both blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, and they are still in effect. The

more a society incorporates His laws of good governance into its government, the greater and more lasting its civilization will be.

Solomon wrote three thousand years ago in [Proverbs 29:2](#), "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan." How true it is.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Right Use of Power](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Of all creation, man is the only creature made in God's image and given dominion over the rest of creation. When God breathed in the spirit of man (Genesis 2:7) to enable thinking, feeling, and creating, He imbued God-like characteristics, giving mankind the capability of subduing, controlling, and directing the rest of creation—a power not given to animals (Genesis 1:26, 28). With dominion comes responsibility to maintain (Genesis 2:15). The sad history of mankind shows that he has badly mismanaged his power, bringing about disease, war, and famine. Such people will be brought into account (Revelation 11:18). God's Spirit enables us to direct this power in a responsible, godly manner.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Clash of Cultures](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Immigration is not just a problem in America. The nations of Europe have seen millions of migrants, mostly Muslims, stream into their nations over the past decade—to the point that it has become a primary topic politically. What will Europe do? Richard Ritenbaugh suggests this migration dilemma may presage the fateful "push" from the King of the South.

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