


2 SAMUEL 15:1-12

IS REBELLION EVER JUSTIFIED?

“After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, ‘From what city are you?’ And when he said, ‘Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel,’ Absalom would say to him, ‘See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you.’ Then Absalom would say, ‘Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice.’ And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

“And at the end of four years Absalom said to the king, ‘Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the LORD, in Hebron. For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, “If the LORD will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the LORD.”’ The king said to him, ‘Go in peace.’ So he arose and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, ‘As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, “Absalom is king at Hebron!”’ With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their innocence and knew nothing. And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing.”¹

“ne man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.” So goes the excuse that some use to justify civic terrorism. To be valid, such a concept must meet several criteria. The one seeking to qualify some combative individual as a “freedom fighter” must be able to justify the resort to violence. If they cannot do this, the argument fails. To qualify as a freedom fighter, the one engaging in violence must actually have suffered loss of freedom or face the probability of loss of freedom. Generally, when speaking of the loss of freedoms that would justify rebellion, we are speaking of those freedoms that are conferred on mankind by the Creator. Bear in mind that governments cannot create freedoms—governments can only recognise freedoms that the Creator has given all mankind. Let me stress this vital truth—no government can create freedom; government can only recognise the freedom that is by God’s design the heritage of all mankind. The practical impact of this concept is that government is responsible to guard and to preserve freedoms that have been divinely given. It is not government’s role either to create freedoms or to restrict freedoms which God alone can give.

Of course, I am presenting a broad statement concerning freedom; and the statement is focused on freedom as a person. Christians are free in Christ the Lord. Paul has taught us, “For freedom Christ has set us free” [GALATIANS 5:1]. However, freedom gives no liberty to rebel against government which God has instituted. Rebellion against the powers that God has established or permitted must be seen as an extremely serious matter.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The message today reviews the act of rebellion against government. Time will not permit me to be comprehensive concerning every possible justification for rebelling against the constituted authorities. What the message does endeavour to do is provide guidance for Christian conduct when we are tempted to rebel.

GRIEVANCES — The opening verse of the text begins, “After this.” This particular construction raises the question, “After what?” The answer begins with Absalom’s beautiful sister named Tamar. Those familiar with the biblical account will know that Amnon, David’s firstborn son, was consumed with lust for Tamar. He was so consumed that he employed a ruse designed by a cousin to isolate the young woman so that he could rape her. What is especially heinous about this crime is that David was responsible for sending his daughter into danger that would result in her rape. His son did deceive him; but David acted with his eyes wide open. It seems safe to suggest that the good king had grown complacent in his later years [see 2 SAMUEL 13:1-14].

After the foul deed, the Word informs us that “Amnon hated her with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her” [2 SAMUEL 13:15]. Tamar pleaded with Amnon not to send her away. If he refused to do the honourable thing and marry her, it would appear that she had seduced him, making her appear dishonourable. Amnon would not listen, ordering his servants to send her away. So, Tamar fled to her brother Absalom, her robe torn as a sign of grief and her hand on her head in the place of her veil which had been ripped away.

Tamar was devastated—her brother had raped her! In any culture, rape is degrading and devastating. Rape is never an act of love—it is violence imposed on another whom the rapist has treated as a piece of meat. The rapist’s gratification is exalted to the highest good in his own mind, even though it means he will degrade another person. Tamar’s rape was perhaps even worse, if such is possible, by the fact that the rapist was a half-brother and by the fact that her father had unwittingly exposed her to the danger. If there was redress for the crime, surely it would come from her father.

However, David did nothing—he neither comforted Tamar nor did he confront Amnon. For two years, no consequence for this horrible crime was exacted of Amnon! Because of David’s seeming indifference, Tamar would live out her life as a desolate woman. David’s inaction was a major contributor to this dreadful life choice. Her days would be spent in her brother Absalom’s house. She would never know the joy of a husband who loved her for who she was, she would never hold children whom she bore as her glory, she would never realise the respect in society that should have been hers as the happy mother of children.

Amnon must have believed that his terrible sin was a momentary mistake as he continued on track toward his ultimate destiny of being crowned king. He got what he wanted, even if he was disgusted with himself and took out his disgust on the woman he had violated. However, the Word informs us, “But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad” [2 SAMUEL 13:22a].

Then came the dark day when Absalom would exact revenge. We can only imagine that for two years he had brooded over his father’s inaction and over the cavalier manner in which Amnon had abused and discarded his sister. Tamar had been treated as a piece of trash, and her father apparently agreed with this action. If the king wouldn’t act, Absalom would take action.

Absalom devised a plan, executing it perfectly. Though David appeared to have misgivings about Amnon attending a festival that Absalom was hosting. It is as though David had grown incautious about the vile evil that lurks in the shadows of the human heart. At the appropriate moment, Absalom’s servants killed Amnon [see 2 SAMUEL 13:29].

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For a moment, confusion reigned. Terrified, the remainder of the king's sons rushed too their mules and fled for safety. News travelled to the palace faster than the sons of David could ride. The king, no doubt realising that his inaction was at the root of this assassination, imagined that all his children had been slaughtered. Jonadab, the cousin who had designed the plan that Amnon executed in order to rape his sister, assured the king, "Let not my lord suppose that they have killed all the young men, the king's sons, for Amnon alone is dead. For by the command of Absalom this has been determined from the day he violated his sister Tamar. Now therefore let not my lord the king so take it to heart as to suppose that all the king's sons are dead, for Amnon alone is dead" [2 SAMUEL 13:32, 33]. Had David been thinking clearly, he would have asked how Amnon knew of this and why he hadn't informed the king before this deed was carried out.

Absalom fled to Geshur, where his maternal grandfather ruled. He lived there for three years. For these years, David mourned for Absalom, though he refused to allow him to return, for to do so would be equivalent to endorsing the murder of his eldest son, Amnon. Joab devised a plan to trick the king into allowing Absalom to return. The plan worked to perfection, and David permitted his son to return, but he refused to allow him to come into the king's presence. Absalom waited another two full years without seeing his father. Though he sent for Joab to ask him to intercede, Joab would not come, until Absalom burned Joab's fields. At last, this act grabbed the warrior's attention. Finally, David permitted Absalom to come into his presence.

For seven years, Absalom had nursed his grievance that his sister was violated while his father did nothing to bring justice. Throughout these years, his anger focused on his father. Absalom appears to have determined that his father was unfit to be king. Since no one else was addressing the leadership deficit, he convinced himself that he must act, if only for the sake of his sister. Whether Absalom was even aware of what was happening is doubtful, but he had begun to exalt his own importance at the expense of trusting God. It is not unlike a church member that grows discontented with the elders and determines that she or he must rectify the problem. The disgruntled individual exalts his/her own importance without the blessing of God.

INSINUATION — "After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, 'From what city are you?' And when he said, 'Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel,' Absalom would say to him, 'See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you.' Then Absalom would say, 'Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice.' And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" [2 SAMUEL 15:1-6].

Absalom plotted to dethrone his father for years. As soon as he set his foot on Israelite soil he began to implement his plan to depose David from the throne. His plan was simplicity itself. ***He made a show before the people***—and they loved it! Long before Donald Trump began a march to seize the nomination as the Republican nominee for President of the United States, the populace knew who he was because of his brashness, his showmanship. Thus it was that Absalom secured horses and a chariot and runners to run before him. It was tantamount to flying in on his own 757 or arriving in his own helicopter with a retinue of body guards and announcers to let people know he was coming. People are easily awed by the appearance of success, whether or not there is substance to the message presented.

Without a doubt *Absalom worked hard*. He made sure he was seen by many people; and he made certain that people knew he was always on the job. God's Word describes how "Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate," greeting the people, letting them know that he was available to hear their concerns. It was the ancient equivalent of simultaneously phoning in to every morning talk show, sending out tweets to let people know he was paying attention to things that concerned them even as he was posting on Facebook. Anyone could see that Absalom was really on top of the issues of the day!

Moreover, *Absalom showed a personal interest* in everyone who came through the gate with court cases that needed to be heard. The prince showed personal interest in each individual, asking where the litigant was from and inquiring into the nature of their grievance; his interest gave the perspective that given opportunity he could ensure a positive outcome for every complaint. If only he was king, things would be different for the individual to whom he spoke. Very much like this day, people heard what they wanted to hear in his generalised message.

Absalom used flattery to his own advantage. He agreed that every litigant was correct. Had anyone taken time to think through the issue, they would have known it was impossible to please everyone. However, in the heat of the moment, most of us hear what we want to hear. The people in that ancient land were no different from us in this context.

Absalom was seen as down to earth. The text says, "Whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment." He didn't act like a prince when people came near. Why, Absalom was just like one of the gang—he understood the stress of living like the common man. He was really down-to-earth; he was approachable, unlike the king.

Employing these five stratagems, Absalom sowed seeds of doubt concerning the king. *Absalom discredited the king* in the eyes of those who witnessed his actions. His actions and his words implied that David was derelict in his duties as king. If only Absalom were king, then justice would be done. It left the impression that there was no justice in Israel. The solution to the problem, a problem that no one actually realised until Absalom pointed it out, was to elevate the prince to the throne. Then justice would be done for every man.

Thus, "Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." We wonder how Absalom was able to make such inroads toward rebellion without the knowledge of the king. How had he plotted rebellion without the king knowing what was going on? In the first place, it seems apparent that **David had grown incautious**. Perhaps he had been lulled into complacency by the fact that Absalom was his son. Amnon had been the firstborn, but Amnon was now dead. Chileab, his second born son [see 2 SAMUEL 3:3], identified as "Daniel" in 1 CHRONICLES 3:1] appears to have been somehow unsuited as ruler, and he is not heard of again. Thus, Absalom was the eldest surviving son that appeared to be capable of ruling the kingdom. No father wants to believe that his child will work to undermine his own work. David appears to have failed, perhaps even refused, to see the danger that Absalom posed to his continued reign as king.

David had perhaps been slowing with age and the press of duties arising from ruling the kingdom meant that **David appeared unconnected to day-to-day needs of the people**. People give evidence of wanting personal attention even more than effective leadership. Reality television and stars noted for nothing more than their own notoriety ensure that a charismatic, photogenic leader often appears more attractive to voters than a competent, capable statesman. So long as there is no immediate crisis, or at least no perceived crisis, people want popularity rather than competence in leadership. To some degree, this has always been the situation. This was apparently the situation in Israel as Absalom plotted rebellion.

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I wonder how David's loyal advisors had failed to be aware of the growing discontent. Had none of his advisers had concerns about Absalom's actions? Though the king's advisors were surely aware of Absalom's actions—actions that under the best of conditions were suspicious, **no advisor had spoken of his concern about Absalom's actions**. Perhaps they were uncertain how such a report would be received by the king. Perhaps they were uncertain whether they were actually witnessing acts that would lead to lèse majesté. What is apparent is that David's advisers failed to alert him to what they were witnessing.

It is appropriate to make a few observations concerning Absalom. The manner in which his actions would play out reveal that **Absalom was driven by personal ambition** rather than a desire to serve. Service is far more than occupying a position. When civic leaders, or even congregational leaders, are chosen on the basis of popularity, we cannot possibly expect them to excel at serving. Perhaps a given position can be filled by a figurehead since it is about public presentations. However, true leadership is not about the honour, the adulation, the homage rendered—leadership is defined by sacrifice, by willingness to exalt others, by a desire to see the greater good advanced even at the leader's own expense.

Absalom was unconcerned about who would be hurt through his actions. Shortly, he would engage in a most public display of sex with his father's concubines [see 2 SAMUEL 16:21, 22]. His purpose was both to assert his own right to reign over the kingdom and to utterly debase his father in the eyes of all Israel. He would play upon the suppressed anger of those who had once served his father, dividing those who had once served together [see 2 SAMUEL 16:20, 21, 23]. Much as the infamous dictum attributed to Soviet despots, Lenin and Stalin, Absalom's attitude was that one cannot make an omelet without breaking the eggs.

Such attitudes are frequently heard among church members after tensions moving toward a fracture in the fellowship. I pastored a congregation briefly that God was blessing richly. The church had been dying when I arrived. Within a matter of months, the attendance reached record levels; if one didn't arrive at least thirty minutes early it was impossible to get a seat for the service. The board, and especially a man who identified himself as "chairman of the church," was quite unhappy since the people coming in were new. Worse still, the new people, reflecting the community, were primarily first-generation Canadians. The board determined that they must assert their power and keep these interlopers from usurping their power.

When I became aware of their plans, I cautioned that such actions were against the Word of God and were surely displeasing to the Spirit of God. The board arrogantly insisted that they had to take control. Again, I cautioned that they would drive people away; I was adamant that I would not stay in a congregation that insisted on rebelling against the leadership of the Lord.

One board member said, "If the pastor leaves, we will lose many of these new people." The "chairman of the church," channeling the spirit of Absalom, boasted, "Anyone who follows this man is unwelcome here. We don't need 'em." I pleaded with the board at that point not to despise the people of God. I stated then, and I believe to this day, that no individual whom God brings into the fellowship can be casually dismissed as though he or she is unimportant. I regret every individual who makes the choice to break fellowship. Candidly, I mourn for years over every individual who chooses to leave the fellowship for less than positive reasons. Nevertheless, I will not change my doctrine to accommodate pettiness or to placate a bully.

Absalom had no way of knowing that he was headed to his death. Without divine assurance, **Absalom moved inexorably to his own demise**. Just so, when we rebel without divine permission, we must know that we are assuredly moving toward an encounter with Holy God. Surely we will shortly hear the dire warning, "Prepare to meet your God" [see AMOS 4:12].

REBELLION — “At the end of four years Absalom said to the king, ‘Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the LORD, in Hebron. For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, “If the LORD will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the LORD.”’ The king said to him, ‘Go in peace.’ So he arose and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, ‘As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, “Absalom is king at Hebron!”’ With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their innocence and knew nothing. And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing” [2 SAMUEL 15:7-12].

Absalom decided that it was time to spring the trap. He would go to Hebron, the city where David had been received as king by Judah [see 2 SAMUEL 2:1 ff.]. David had reigned in Hebron for seven and one-half years. At last, it was at Hebron that all Israel journeyed to make David king following the murder of Ish-Bosheth [see 2 SAMUEL 5:1 ff.]. Hebron had great significance in the history of the Davidic reign; the city would be recognised as a royal city. If Absalom was proclaimed king in this city of kings, it would lend legitimacy to his claim to the throne. Moreover, from a more personal point of view, Hebron was Absalom’s natal city. Absalom had been born to Maacah while David was living in Hebron [see 2 SAMUEL 3:2, 3].

However, the prince could not simply go on his own to Hebron as that would arouse the king’s suspicion—his plan required deception, a surreptitious implementation; the plot was built on treachery. Therefore, Absalom employed deceit to go to Hebron without alarming the king. He sought and received his father’s permission to go to the city, saying that he had made a vow to the LORD while living with his grandparents. In other words, he was saying that he had vowed to the LORD God that he would serve Him if God brought him back to Israel. David was a godly man, thus, he would be eager to encourage any spiritual inclination his son demonstrated.

Secret messengers had been recruited to go throughout kingdom. At the appropriate time, they would announce the coup d’état. Because of the distance between Hebron and Jerusalem, it would be *fait accompli*—David would be helpless in the face of what had occurred. Two hundred of the leading citizen of Jerusalem had been invited to accompany Absalom to Hebron. Their presence would signal overwhelming support of the powerful within the kingdom. Ahithophel, an influential adviser to the king, was invited. Absalom knew Ahithophel nursed a grudge against David and could be persuaded to join in the rebellion.

Let me step aside and point out why I say that Ahithophel nursed a grudge.² The name “Ahithophel” is the father of one of David’s Mighty Men—“Eliam [was] the son of Ahithophel of Gilo” [2 SAMUEL 23:34]. Eliam had a daughter at home, a beautiful young woman who fell in love with a warrior under her father’s command. True, the man this young woman married was not an Israelite, he was a Hittite named Uriah. However, Uriah was as brave and as loyal to David as any Hebrew could have been. His ability as a warrior and his courage had carried him to the highest echelons of the six hundred, men who had followed David from earliest days when he had come from Gath to Hebron. Uriah was clothed with well-deserved honour beside Eliam, son of Ahithophel. Uriah loved the daughter of Eliam, the beautiful young woman, Bathsheba; and Eliam fulfilled the desire of Uriah’s heart when he gave his daughter in marriage.

² Background for this contention is found in Alexander Whyte, **Bible Characters: Ahithophel to Nehemiah**, 3 (Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, Edinburgh; London n.d.), 11–14

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A dark day came when David set his heart of possessing the young wife of Uriah. It was at a time when Uriah and Eliah were fighting the king's wars. David would not be dissuaded; he would take what he wanted. He was, after all, the king. So, David took Uriah's wife, who happened to be Ahithophel's granddaughter. We do not require a detailed account to inform us how Ahithophel had taken the ruin of his granddaughter and the murder of her husband. It would have been impossible for him to go to the House of the LORD with the man who had brought such evil upon his household. Ahithophel left the king's court and returned to his home. Had Eliah and Ahithophel remained in David's service, it would have been as though they winked at the outrage he had perpetuated. It would have been as though Eliah and Ahithophel approved of adultery and even consented to murder.

At the time of the revolt, Ahithophel was no longer at the king's court since he was summoned from his home in the city of Giloh [see 2 SAMUEL 15:12]. He had returned to his home. Perhaps he didn't know that God had sent Nathan to rebuke David almost as soon as he had left the king's court. What remained for Ahithophel was bitterness arising from the king's betrayal. Perhaps he did not know that David had been warned, "Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you *out of your own house*. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but *I will do this thing before all Israel* and before the sun'" [2 SAMUEL 12:11, 12]. Ahithophel could not know that he would be the instrument, imperfect as he was, to bring about the judgement of God on the king.

Ahithophel's counsel was highly regarded. The Word is almost effusive, informing us, "In those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the Word of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed" [2 SAMUEL 16:23]. How apropos the counsel Ahithophel gave to Absalom, "'Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened.' So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof. And Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel" [2 SAMUEL 16:21, 22].

The chickens came home to roost. We may imagine that we can sin with impunity; but God knows what is done. Years after the days of this rebellion, a descendant of David would be rebuked by another prophet who would warn, "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars" [2 CHRONICLES 16:9].

I don't mean to justify Ahithophel nor to blacken David's name. God alone is the judge of the heart. I only mean to caution that we must not be overly quick to judge another when we hear of an account that entails hurt and injury. God alone knows the heart; only He can know the raging passions that drive people to act sinfully. Our role is neither to approve of Absalom's rebellion nor to condemn David for failure to bring justice to his family. We receive the wisdom of the Word in order to ensure that our own lives are lived out with wisdom.

APPLICATIONS — Throughout this account and in study of the events the preceded the rebellion, the fallen condition of mankind is displayed prominently. No one comes out without flaws. God does not hide the sinful condition of His people. We come to him as sinners, utterly depraved in every facet of our being. We have nothing with which to induce the Master to love us. If we are redeemed, we must know it is of grace and not of our own merits. The finest woman, presenting herself before the Lord is still compelled to confess that she is a sinner and in need of His mercy. The finest man, whatever our estimate of that man, is at best a sinner requiring divine mercy.

Rebels will continue to arise until Christ at last puts down all rebellion. Jesus warned disciples, “You will hear of wars and rumours of wars” [MATTHEW 24:6]. Jesus’ warning is an iteration and an amplification of Isaiah’s statement concerning the condition marking mankind:

“The wicked are like the tossing sea;
for it cannot be quiet,
and its waters toss up mire and dirt.”

[ISAIAH 57:20].

The spirit of rebellion appears to be the spirit of this age. The restless heart of mankind is witnessed repeatedly as people groups and movements vie to shout down the old guard while exalting their own opinions. This will continue, and intensify, until Jesus returns.

There is a time to stand and fight; however, that time is the exception and not the rule. Christians find scant comfort in advocating rebellion against the rulers whom God provides. Neither Paul nor Peter counselled rebellion when believers were oppressed. Paul instructs believers, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore, one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed” [ROMANS 13:1-7].

This as comprehensive a statement as we could hope to receive. To be certain, government has the responsibility to commend good behaviour and to condemn wicked behaviour. However, until government begins to exalt evil and censure righteousness, it is difficult to find biblical justification for rebellion. Perhaps we witness such unjust government at times in this day, but the Christian must realise that rebellion carries with it the very real possibility that government will ruthlessly crush the rebellion. Worse still, from the Christian perspective, is the requirement for obedience “for the sake of conscience.”

Peter presents the identical requirement for Christians to cultivate a submissive attitude rather than a rebellious attitude. He writes, “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honour everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor” [1 PETER 2:13-17].

As the rebel spirit grows in contemporary society, we witness growing infiltration of an attitude of rebellion into the churches of our Lord. Too often people whom we count as brothers are determined to force their will on the Body, refusing to accept the leadership provided by the Spirit of Christ. Paul warned of those among the saints who were rebellious when he wrote, “Just as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so these also resist the truth, men who are corrupt in mind, worthless in regard to the Faith” [2 TIMOTHY 3:8, HOLMAN CHRISTIAN STANDARD BIBLE].

Without divine leadership, rebellion must ultimately fail. One who wears the livery of an elder must not tolerate rebellion, even in his own household. This is the teaching of the Word. “An elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife, with faithful children who cannot be charged with dissipation or rebellion” [TITUS 1:6]. Such attitudes must be condoned neither in the conduct of believers in society nor in the assembly of the Lord. The man of God must be a man of peace, seeking peace for the people of God. Before God, the elder is responsible to “pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace” [2 TIMOTHY 2:22]. He must instruct the people to seek peace in all things. This is why we pray “for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” [1 TIMOTHY 2:2].

The rebellion that ultimately divided the Davidic Kingdom was initiated by the LORD God Himself. “Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, a servant of Solomon, whose mother’s name was Zeruah, a widow, also lifted up his hand against the king. And this was the reason why he lifted up his hand against the king. Solomon built the Millo, and closed up the breach of the city of David his father. The man Jeroboam was very able, and when Solomon saw that the young man was industrious he gave him charge over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph. And at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah had dressed himself in a new garment, and the two of them were alone in the open country. Then Ahijah laid hold of the new garment that was on him, and tore it into twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, ‘Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes (but he shall have one tribe, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel), because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did. Nevertheless, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of David my servant whom I chose, who kept my commandments and my statutes. But I will take the kingdom out of his son’s hand and will give it to you, ten tribes. Yet to his son I will give one tribe, that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name. And I will take you, and you shall reign over all that your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. And if you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you”’” [1 KINGS 11:26-38]. What I would have you see is that such divine intervention is the exception and not the rule.

Another truth is that ***Slights, unaddressed, may fester until there is an eruption.*** The story may well have been different had Absalom taken the initiative to speak with his father. Yes, it was David’s responsibility to be a father to his daughter and to Absalom; nevertheless, had Absalom been the adult at this time, who can say what might have happened? As it is, the wound to Absalom’s soul festered until it exploded into open rebellion that would lead to death for himself and for many others.

Had Ahithophel or Eliam confronted David rather than allowing his actions to fester in their hearts, perhaps they could have changed the course of Israel’s history. For either of these men, I must believe that fear ensured that these situations would not be addressed. In our culture, and likely in that ancient culture, a direct approach would have seemed so abrupt as to be impolite. However, confrontation could have resulted in contrition.

The rebel heart may be mollified through humble confession of sin. From the text before us, it is apparent that had David confessed his sin earlier, and had he confessed to those whom he offended, the account may have been quite different. We have no idea how many trials we initiate through our own sinful pride. We will do well to hear the admonition James provides, “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another” [JAMES 5:16]. Likewise, Peter admonishes believers, “Humble yourselves ... under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your cares (and slights and wounds and pain) on Him, because He cares for you” [1 PETER 5:6].

Truth and love cover a multitude of sins. This is a final truth that must be considered if only through omission in the divine account. David’s reaction to the death of his son, his decision to flee rather than jeopardise the people through war, are both indicative of love, both for Absalom and for his people. James instructs the people of God, “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” [JAMES 5:19, 20]. A judicious application of the truth is capable of turning a brother from the path leading to death. Similarly, Peter admonishes believers, “Keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” [1 PETER 4:8].

We can invest our time with those who carp and cavil resulting in growing bitterness of soul, but we do so to our own detriment. We may imagine that we are among friends when we gather for a gripe fest; but really, we are allowing ourselves to be sucked into rebellion that brings us directly into conflict with the will of God. How much better to be the one who shows effusive love or who graciously speaks the truth in love. Had someone confronted Absalom or Ahithophel before they began to contemplate rebellion, who knows what this could have meant to the kingdom? If we show love to those who are soaking in the gall of their supposed bitterness, who knows what dangers may be avoided. Let us learn from the history of God’s people. Amen.