

“Useful Idiots” And Those Who Use Them

1 Samuel 26:1-4

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 2-5-2012

Introduction

I was brought up to not call anyone an idiot. But the title of this sermon is definitely breaking that tradition. And I’m using the title because I recently read an article by one of my favorite economists, Thomas Sowell. He is a brilliant black American scholar that every one here should be at least a little acquainted with. If you haven’t read his book, *Basic Economics*, you need to read it. And I should say that he is not used to calling people names either. He presents the facts so brilliantly that he doesn’t need to engage in name-calling. But let me read to you the beginning of his article. He said,

LENIN is supposed to have referred to blind defenders and apologists for the Soviet Union in the Western democracies as “useful idiots.” Yet even Lenin might have been surprised at how far these useful idiots would carry their partisanship in later years -- including our own times.

Stalin's man-made famine in the Soviet Union during the 1930s killed more millions of people than Hitler killed in the Holocaust -- and Mao's man-made famine in China killed more millions than died in the USSR. Yet we not only hear little or nothing about either of these staggering catastrophes in the Communist world today, very little was said about them in the Western democracies while they were going on. Indeed, many useful idiots denied that there were famines in the Soviet Union or in Communist China.

The most famous of these was the New York Times' Moscow correspondent, Walter Duranty, who won a Pulitzer prize for telling people what they wanted to hear, rather than what was actually happening. Duranty assured his readers that “there is no famine or actual starvation, nor is there likely to be.” Moreover, he blamed reports to the contrary on “rumor factories” with anti-Soviet bias.

It was decades later before the first serious scholarly study of that famine was written, by Robert Conquest of the Hoover Institution, always identified in politically correct circles as “right-wing.” Yet when the Soviets’ own statistics on the deaths during the famine were finally released, under Mikhail Gorbachev, they showed that the actual deaths exceeded even the millions estimated by Dr. Conquest.¹

¹ Thomas Sowell, <http://www.jewishworldreview.com/cols/sowell090100.asp>

And Thomas Sowell went on to show in this article that America is suffering because useful idiots have become blindly loyal to a party, a person, an ideology, or a movement. Their blind loyalty keeps them from seeing the facts. And no matter how many evil things have been perpetrated by the party or person or have been done in the name of an ideology or movement, the useful idiots continue to blindly give their support. And of course, others have written on this naiveté as well. In fact, it has become such a well-known phenomenon, that scholars of the left and of the right both speak of the useful idiots of the other side. So that's where the title of this sermon comes from.

I. Useful idiots (v. 1a)

Well, the Ziphites of verse 1 were the useful idiots of King Saul. He used them as his pawns. They unwittingly supported tyranny when they thought they were defending liberty. And archeology shows that the Ziphites were passionate in their loyalty to the king, and they at least thought that they were defending liberty for their country. Verse 26 reintroduces us to these interesting people. It says, **“Now the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, ‘Is David not hiding in the hill of Hachilah, opposite Jeshimon?’”**

Back in chapter 23 we looked at who those Ziphites were. They were descendants of one of the most famous warriors of Israelite history – Caleb. They had a wonderful heritage. And they too were warriors who were proud of their history and proud of their country. They were willing to risk their lives for what they *thought* was liberty. Later when they got their heads screwed on straight, they ended up on the right side, and began to realize that they needed to support David. But at this time, their understanding of who the true enemy was, was truncated. As far as they were concerned, the only enemy they need to be fighting right now was the Philistines, and anyone who was not with Saul's program for dealing with the Philistines was part of the problem himself. When David began to criticize the unconstitutional things that Saul was doing, it appears that they must have become offended. Some people think that their offense must have come from the fact that David inherited their kinsman Nabal's property, but that doesn't explain why they were already offended with David back in chapter 23. The evidence seems to point in the direction that they thought that David was jeopardizing the safety of Israel from the attacks of the Philistine terrorists. They were probably thinking, “This is not a time for us to be divided. Yes Saul has sometimes been harsh, but we must give up some freedoms if our nation is to survive.” This is precisely the rhetoric being

used today to defend the Patriot Act and the National Defense Authorization Act, sometimes called the Indefinite Detention Act. Saul used the constant danger of war in these chapters to keep such people as these Ziphites loyal to his cause.

We also saw that the Ziphites were from the same tribe as David. And that makes it all the more remarkable that they sided with Saul over David. In fact, we saw that Nabal, who was another Calebite, marginalized David and tried to make him out as a nobody. David was a hero when he served Saul successfully against the Philistines, but that all changed once Saul started demonizing David.

But back to their patriotism and their loyalty, what is confusing is that David was a patriot and was loyal too. The difference between David and the Ziphites was not patriotism or loyalty, but that their loyalty was a blind loyalty. Blind loyalty and blind patriotism are the stuff that emboldens tyrants. Almost every empire and nation that has been destroyed from within has been destroyed for many of the same reasons. Two of those reasons are moral corruption and the presence of too many useful idiots who could be manipulated into blind support. So that's the first half of verse 1.

II. Misplacing the true danger (v. 1b)

But the second half of that verse shows that they had a misplaced idea of where the true danger lay. They saw David as the true danger. In light of David's heroism and loyalty to Saul, this is remarkable. In reality, *David* upheld the constitution. He was not the danger. David was even endorsed by Saul's son, Jonathan. David's character was pretty clean, thanks to Abigail.

In contrast, Saul had proved himself to be the true enemy of the constitution and worthy of being impeached for treason. Yes, he was capable of fighting Philistine terrorists. Nobody was questioning his military prowess. But let me remind you of some of the things that God had by this time given scathing denunciations of. Saul had become a centralist in his later years. He didn't start off that way, but he became that way. He had his own National Defense Authorization Act in chapter 22, where he detained eighty-five pastors without a warrant, and had them executed without a court trial. Of course, he justified it on the basis that he suspected that they had helped David (even though they denied it), and he suspected David of being an enemy of the state, though it was never proven in court. So just like our own NDAA, if you were suspected of helping a suspected terrorist in some remote fashion, you were in danger back then. And there were many other problems with Saul that parallel modern America. Let me list them: We've

seen that he engaged in eminent domain, cronyism (not quite as bad as our modern bailouts, but it was cronyism nonetheless), a ten percent tax, forced community service (that's been proposed by our current administration, but isn't currently in place), overstepping jurisdictional limits, failing to submit to God's law, putting soldiers unnecessarily in harms' way, enriching himself from political decisions, megalomania, paranoia, favoritism on taxes, state security trumping individual rights, elevating people like Doeg who hated the constitution into high positions, spying on citizens, interpreting disagreement as lack of patriotism. This has been modern America for quite some time. And when you have any candidate who speaks out against those evils, they can be marginalized by the Ziphite media just like David was.

So I think those Ziphites parallel a lot of what has been going wrong with America. The useful idiots of the right may not support Obama, and the useful idiots of the left may not support a Bush when he was in power, but both sides are blind to the true root issues that we face in America and that are destroying our country. Most candidates just want to put a bandaid on a cancer. To me it is ludicrous. But praise God, there are more and more people who are refusing to be Ziphites. They are beginning to recognize the rottenness of the system. And saying that we are rotten is not an exaggeration. God's law has been thrown out, the constitution has been trashed, our economy is heading towards disaster, and yet we are loyal to one candidate or another who is part of the problem. And why? Many times it is because that candidate has promised to throw some bones to us. "If you elect me I will get in two conservative Supreme Court Justices." Or, Christians will support a candidate whom they disagree with on numerous issues simply because this candidate promises to be tough on Iran and on terrorists. And we campaign for and try to cover for our candidate and make him look better than he is. That's the most troubling part. And when we do that, we have become useful idiots of the one-world-federalists. And I must confess that when I was younger I used to be one of those useful idiots who blindly supported a party or a candidate. No more. That is not patriotism. I want to do everything I can to reestablish God's law in this nation, and to bring back constitutionalism in this nation, and to bring back true economics, and to radically diminish the size of government. Brothers and sisters, let's not be Ziphites that a Saul can laugh at because he knows that has got us in his pocket, and because he knows that we will continue to support him and his party no matter how many promises he breaks. And of course, that is the next point.

III. We can “trust the government” to break its promises (v. 2 with Saul’s previous promises) when we treat the government as our Savior.

We can “trust the government” to break its promises when we treat the government as our Savior. And way back in chapter 8, God had prophesied that Saul would establish a Messianic government. But who did God blame? He blamed the people. You see, governments tend to morph into the expectations and demands of the people. If the people want a Utopia, then you get a government that begins to intrude upon freedoms. If people constantly say over every irritation, “There ought to be a law against that,” the nation becomes a bureaucratically regulated country. So we deserve a Saul when we expect the state to be the Messiah. Anyway, one of the areas of suffering hinted at in chapter 8 was that the Israelites would eventually not be able to trust Saul. And certainly what Saul was doing in verse 2 lacked integrity. It says, **“Then Saul arose and went down to the Wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the Wilderness of Ziph.”**

His stated goal was to catch David – something that he had given a solemn oath that he would not do in chapter 24. Of course, this wasn’t the first time that Saul broke his word. He lacked integrity. He was a politician. And like Vladimir Lenin, he believed that promises were like piecrusts, meant to be broken. For Lenin, promises were just a way of manipulating people. Let me trace a handful of the key broken promises in 1 Samuel. In chapter 13 Saul lost God’s favor because he broke his word to Samuel, and God rejected him as having the right to be a king. That’s how seriously God took integrity. He should have been impeached at that point. In the next chapter he foolishly tried to show that he was a man of his word by being willing to kill his son. Why? Because he had made a rash oath that he would kill anyone who ate food that day. It was a ridiculous attempt to prove that he was a man of his word. But almost immediately in chapter 15 Saul broke his solemn promise by sparing King Agag and keeping some of the sheep and oxen. And of course, we have already preached on the numerous times that Saul broke his word to David and broke his solemn covenant with his son Jonathan. But the people should not have been surprised. If Saul was willing to break Israel’s *constitution* in the name of security, why would anyone trust any other promise that he made?

And we have been having the same problem in America since at least president Wilson, but in my estimation, much earlier. It was bald-faced lies

that got us into numerous wars. We have had congressmen, senators, judges, and presidents who have been willing to ignore the clear original intent of the constitution, which they have taken a solemn oath to uphold and defend – so help me God. And yet we sheeple trust them to keep their campaign promises. It's irrational. We citizens are the useful idiots who have kept putting men and women into power who have been raping and pillaging our country through the Federal Reserve System, through war and nation building, through inflation, bribes, graft, and influence. We are the Ziphites who trust our Sauls to come through for us on any number of promises. It's time that we started supporting the unelectable Davids because at least we can stand before God's judgment throne and say that we have done our duty in voting for the right man. At least we won't be nice Ziphites who are part of the problem because our lesser-of-the-two-evils candidate is part of the problem.

IV. The initiative of Saul and the initiative of freedom.

(Notice the use of the names Saul, David with the action verbs - vv. 1-5)

But this requires initiative and it requires a long-term vision. This is point number IV. You won't build a godly party overnight, unless God supernaturally intervenes. But if American Christians would embrace a long-term vision, they could succeed. And there are two literary devices that hint at this here. David Tsumura points out in his commentary on 1 Samuel that the deliberate alternation of names being reversed in the second half of verse 3 shows that David is not just responding. David is just as much an initiator of action as Saul was. The Hebrew alternation in the first half is *Saul, David, Saul, David, Saul*. In the second half it is, *David, Saul, David, Saul, David, Saul, David, Saul*. And then there is the distinction between verse 2 (where “**Saul arose and went**”) and verse 5 (where “**David arose and came**”). You would expect it to say, “David arose and went,” but it says, “David arose and came.” Very interesting! No longer is David simply fleeing. He is no longer simply reacting. David is boldly seeking to confront the tyranny. And of course, that is the wonderful story told in the rest of the chapter. But verses 3-5 prepare us to anticipate this initiative of freedom on the part of David:

1Samuel 26:3 And Saul encamped in the hill of Hachilah, which is opposite Jeshimon, by the road. But David stayed in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness.

1Samuel 26:4 David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul had indeed come.

1Samuel 26:5 So David arose and came to the place where Saul had encamped.

In the search for liberty there is always an interchange between the government and the citizens. Governments always initiate, but they also respond to the demands of its citizens. Citizens do not always initiate or respond. They can get used to being passive. So the equation is not usually changed from the government end. It is usually changed from the citizen end. And the difference is whether the citizens are activist initiators.

And let me just illustrate this. You can definitely see it under the Judges, but even into the first few years of Saul's reign the people were used to being very involved. They were active in protesting the tyranny of the judges Joel and Abijah in chapter 8. And they successfully got them impeached. They were very involved in resisting Saul's tyranny in chapter 14. Saul was going to kill Jonathan, and verse 45 says,

But the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great deliverance in Israel? Certainly not! As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people rescued Jonathan, and he did not die.

That was a very bold move on the part of the people. This is the kind of citizen initiative that preserves liberty. It's called interposition. But over time Saul learned how to use redistribution of wealth, accumulation of power, bantering the threat of the Philistines, and other issues to make the people passive and fearful of doing or saying anything. And when the people become passive and fearful, there is no stopping tyranny. Of course, activism by itself is not enough. The Ziphites were activists, but they were simply cheap labor for Saul.

V. Liberty comes from constant vigilance and awareness of what is happening (v. 4).

The last thing that I see in these verses is that liberty comes from constant vigilance and awareness of what is happening. Verse 4 says,

"David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul had indeed come."

The rest of the chapter shows the brilliant actions that he took, but this verse shows that David was trying to make his decisions based on constant vigilance and awareness of what was happening. Saul had his spies and David had his own spies who gathered information.

In our own day, if it hadn't been for the information that we constantly received from organizations like HSLDA, we would not have nearly the liberties that we currently have for homeschooling in Nebraska. The stealth attacks on homeschooling have been so constant and so devious, that if it hadn't been for spies reporting what Saul was up to, we would have been in deep water. The HSLDA has been absolutely critical in helping homeschoolers respond intelligently. And for the most part, homeschoolers have responded with great initiative, just like David and his men did. Now I don't necessarily agree with all that HSLDA says, anymore than David had to agree with the intelligence that any one spy might have brought. I don't agree with all the news organizations that I get my news from, but it is critical that Christians get informed.

Now, we don't call them spy organizations. We call them watchdog organizations. And there are many watchdog organizations that the Sauls of this world would love to close down. Thankfully the Google blackout prevented the most recent attempt. But when you have the attitude of Saul pervasively present in DC, it is just a matter of time before good watchdog organizations are closed down or sued out of existence. But as long as the Internet is open and free, they won't be able to stop David's watchdogs from watching.

In a Cato Institute article, titled, *Voting is Overrated*, James Bovard said,

Voting is no substitute for the eternal vigilance that every friend of freedom must demonstrate towards government. If your freedom is to survive, Americans must become far better informed of the dangers from Washington – regardless of who wins the Presidency.

This is not lack of patriotism. It is consistent with the whole history of American patriotism. Bovard was simply echoing the words of President Andrew Jackson in his farewell address. Jackson said,

But you must remember, my fellow-citizens, that eternal vigilance by the people is the price of liberty, and that you must pay the price if you wish to secure the blessing. It behooves you, therefore, to be watchful in your States as well as in the Federal Government.

But in saying all of this, I do want to caution us not to become perfectionistic. Always keep in mind that it was Saul who shoved David out, not David who refused to work with an imperfect government. David was not a perfectionist. He served in the military under Saul. He was willing to keep moving things in a godly direction by means of the free market of ideas. And it was precisely because his ideas were becoming so popular that

he was being shut down. When a government becomes tyrannical, it can no longer afford to allow the free market of ideas to flourish. That's why Saul wanted to shut down what the women were saying about David in their free press in chapter 18. The truth was just too inconvenient. So what do the liberals do? They can't convince people in the free market of ideas, so they use force. This is why countries like Sweden are shutting down all education except for state education. They want a monopoly of information dissemination. This is why countries like China censor the web. This is why we must do everything we can to let even unbelievers know that the kind of liberties DC is taking away will hurt everyone. It will hurt the Ziphites just as much as it will hurt us. And in the upcoming chapters, David does a brilliant job of winning the Ziphites, the larger group of Calebites, and other Judahite clans over. He was not the kind of incrementalist that would ever compromise. I despise that kind of incrementalism because it lacks integrity. But he was incrementally advancing the cause of God and constitutionalism within Israel. He had a long-term vision, and he was patiently pursuing it without taking justice into his own hands. So you could summarize point V as "be informed, don't be a perfectionist, and have a long term vision."

Conclusion – vigilance is not enough; we must also avoid utopianism or a messianic state

In conclusion let me point out that there are three main kinds of problem people that have messed up America. Obviously there are the Sauls who self-consciously hate the constitution and are deliberately turning this nation into a Fascist state. Then there are the citizens who could care less what Washington DC does. Their passivity is mainly responsible for the unconstitutionalism that seems to be ubiquitous in DC. But thirdly, there are the Ziphite liberal organizations that want the government to do something about everything that ticks them off. I started by quoting Thomas Sowell. I will end by quoting a wonderful newspaper piece where he talks about this second problem. It is titled, "Utopia Versus Freedom." He said,

"Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom." We have heard that many times. What is also the price of freedom is the toleration of imperfections. If everything that is wrong with the world becomes a reason to turn more power over to some political savior, then freedom is going to erode away, while we are mindlessly repeating the catchwords of the hour, whether "change," "universal health care" or "social justice."

If we can be so easily stampeded by rhetoric that neither the public nor the Congress can be bothered to read, much less analyze, bills making massive changes in medical care, then do not be surprised when life and death decisions

about you or your family are taken out of your hands-- and out of the hands of your doctor-- and transferred to bureaucrats in Washington.

Let's go back to square one. The universe was not made to our specifications... [In other words, you can't always get your way. Later in the essay he says,]

Ultimately, our choice is to give up Utopian quests or give up our freedom. This has been recognized for centuries by some, but many others have not yet faced that reality, even today. If you think government should "do something" about anything that ticks you off, or anything you want and don't have, then you have made your choice between Utopia and freedom.

Back in the 18th century, Edmund Burke said, "It is no inconsiderable part of wisdom, to know much of an evil ought to be tolerated" and "I must bear with infirmities until they fester into crimes."

But today's crusading zealots are not about to tolerate evils or infirmities. If insurance companies are not behaving the way some people think they should, then their answer is to set up a government bureaucracy to either control insurance companies or replace them.

If doctors, hospitals or pharmaceutical companies charge more than some people feel like paying, then the answer is price control. The actual track record of politicians, government bureaucracies, or price control is of no interest to those who think this way.

[After giving more wonderful commentary, he said:] If you cannot tolerate imperfections, be prepared to kiss your freedom goodbye.

So let me end by saying that we live in perilous times very similar to the times of David. There are enemies of America, and no one is denying it. But the enemies are not simply foreign Philistines who hate our country. There are enemies of the constitution within, just like Saul. And those enemies exist in both parties. And it is important that we neither be passive citizens nor activist Ziphites who constantly say, "There ought to be a law against that." Let's stop asking the government to "fix" everything. Instead, let's ask for limited, constitutional government as conceived by our founding fathers. Ultimately we will live in a world that is Christian. I am convinced that God will make the free market of ideas to work. Truth will triumph by God's grace and not by force. But until that happens, let's use constant vigilance and take initiative in preventing even more of the liberties that our nation has had from being eroded. And to God be the glory. Amen.

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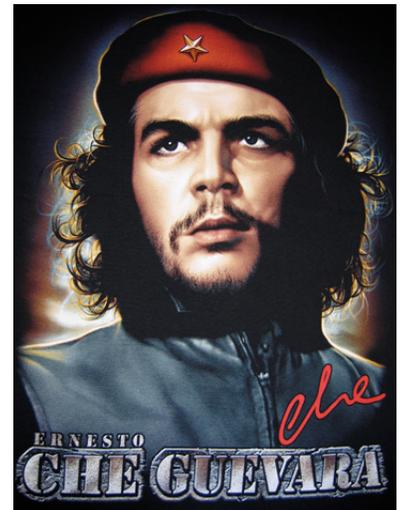
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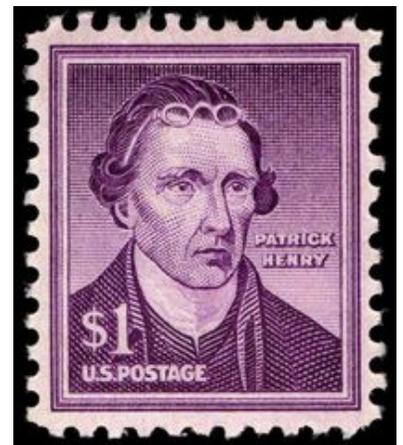
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