



MINORITY RIGHTS

Principle 2(b): Special care should be taken to protect the rights of the minority from undue infringement by the majority.

Exodus 23:2, Proverbs 31:8-9

>> GOALS

- To recognize that every human is a child of Heavenly Parents and must be treated with respect and love.
- To understand the religious and ethical foundations for ensuring that minority rights are safeguarded and that the agency, growth, and potential of all of God's children are consequently protected.

>> SCRIPTURE STUDY

*"That every man may act in doctrine and principle . . . according to the moral agency which I have given unto him."
— D&C 101:78*

Jesus Christ's first recorded declaration that he was the Messiah of the world was made to a Samaritan woman at a well. When he [asked her](#) to serve him by drawing water for him, she was astonished: "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (v. 9). This "[double reason to be labeled unclean by the Jews](#)" was compounded by her unsavory past.

But her marginal status did not stop the Savior from choosing her, and may have even made her particularly open to recognizing him. The Holy Ghost granted her [a witness](#) of his true identity, and she stated, "I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things" (v. 25). Jesus affirmed her witness and "[unequivocally declared himself the Messiah](#)."

Here Jesus overturns the discriminatory assumptions of his time and confronts the biases that divide people. We can follow his example by confronting our biases and discarding incorrect and prejudiced assumptions. We can begin by recognizing that in a democracy, minorities are vulnerable to both misperceptions and the whims of the majority. Majority status should not give license to infringe upon the protected rights of the minority.

Political systems that allow the oppression of minority populations subvert democratic principles and allow for the tyrannical [concentration of power](#). The Framers understood this, and the U.S. Constitution codified structural bulwarks against oppression by protecting minority rights and [diffusing power](#) among the three branches and between federal and state governments. Safeguarding human and minority rights enables what [President Dallin H. Oaks](#) has called "the most desirable condition for the exercise of [moral] agency": maximum freedom "to act according to individual choices."

Still, [systemic](#) and [structural](#) impediments may obstruct the rights of the minority even when individuals in the majority [do not consciously choose](#) to deny others their rights. But the majority's [lack of awareness](#) does not mean the obstacles don't exist for minority populations. [Awareness](#) of these structures and willingness to dismantle them and replace them with more just policies will enable minorities fuller exercise of their moral agency.

Resisting oppression lifts all members of society. Because living in and perpetuating structures that oppress minorities harms souls, safeguarding the rights of minorities enables the growth and potential of all of God's children. [Elder Robert D. Hales](#) loved to quote the Quaker proverb: "Thee lift me and I'll lift thee, and we'll ascend together."

» QUOTES & CONVERSATIONS

Although democracy necessarily entails the rule of the majority, victory in democratic elections does not confer the authority to act autocratically. Thomas Jefferson, speaking about the rights of the political minority, said, “Though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, . . . the minority possess their equal rights. . . .” The principles he expressed can be extended to include minorities determined by race, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, poverty, sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity), age, or disability.

“All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will, to be rightful, must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal laws must protect, and to violate which would be oppression.”
— Thomas Jefferson

Safeguarding minority rights is not merely a civic virtue; it reflects our unequivocal doctrine that all children of God are equal and beloved in his sight. God invites all to come unto him, [“black and white, bond and free, male and female.”](#)

GOD’S CHILDREN: *Knowledge that all humans are God’s children should dislodge from us the malevolent evil of racism and disrespect for others’ rights.*

2 Nephi 26:33: “[T]he Lord . . . inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile.”

President Russell M. Nelson: “We . . . are deeply saddened at recent evidences of racism and a blatant disregard for human life. We abhor the reality that some would deny others respect and the most basic of freedoms because of the color of his or her skin. . . . The Creator of us all calls on each of us to abandon attitudes of prejudice against any group of God’s children. Any of us who has prejudice toward another race needs to repent!”

Acts 10:34: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.”

Gospel Topics on race and the priesthood: “In theology and practice, [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#) embraces the universal human family. Latter-day Saint scripture and teachings affirm that God loves all of His children and makes salvation available to all. God created the many diverse races and ethnicities and esteems them all equally.”

Elder Gerrit W. Gong: “God loves His children in our different backgrounds and circumstances, in every nation, kindred, and tongue, with room for all in His Inn.”

Sister Chieko Okazaki, Relief Society General Presidency (1990-1997): “Rejoice in the diversity of our sisterhood! It is the diversity of colors in a spectrum that makes a rainbow. It is the diversity in our circumstances that gives us compassionate hearts. It is the diversity of our spiritual gifts that benefits the Church.”

Martin Luther King III at BYU Forum: “To begin building the beloved community, we must embrace the belief that, ultimately, we are all brothers and sisters in the great human family. It means working together to create communities which have no barriers between black, white, red, brown and yellow. We are all members of the same family because we are all children of the same God.”

What do you think?

- Which quotation touches your heart or mind most deeply? Why?
- All humans are the children of God and, therefore, our siblings. Reflect on the significance and implications of this fact.
- When did you “abandon” attitudes of prejudice? Has a particular experience helped you? How will you continue this process?

PROTECT RIGHTS: *The protection of minority rights ensures that agency and human rights are safeguarded, and also protects the majority from the moral corruption that results when they become oppressors.*

D&C 98:5: “That law of the land which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind, and is justifiable before me.”

Prophet Joseph Smith: “Under [the U.S. Constitution’s] provision, a man or a people who are able to protect themselves can get along well enough; but those who have the misfortune to be weak or unpopular are left to the merciless rage of popular fury.”

Church Newsroom: “These [1st Amendment] rights do not exist to protect only those with whom we agree. They exist to protect the person whose opinions get in the way, whose thoughts and beliefs seem threatening and sound unpopular. Rights are not something to be enjoyed only by the majority sitting comfortably in power. They are also for the unseen minority, the forgotten and the voiceless.”

Prophet Joseph Smith: “I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist or a good man of any other denomination; for the same principle which would trample upon the rights of the Latter day Saints would trample upon the rights of the other denomination . . . who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves. It is a love of liberty which inspires my Soul, civil and religious liberty to the whole of the human race.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks: “We believe laws ought to be framed to achieve a balance in protecting the freedoms of all people while respecting those with differing values. We reject persecution and retaliation of any kind, including persecution based on race, ethnicity, religious belief, economic circumstances, or differences in gender or sexual orientation.” (See also President Oaks’ [speech](#) on balancing religious rights and nondiscrimination law.)

Article of Faith 11: “We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.”

Sister Neill F. Marriott, Young Women General Presidency (2013-2018): “The debate we speak of today is about how to affirm rights for some without taking away from the rights of others. On one side of the debate we have advocates of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) rights. This movement arose after centuries of ridicule, persecution, and even violence against homosexuals. Ultimately, most of society recognized that such treatment was simply wrong and that such basic human rights as securing a job or a place to live should not depend on a person’s sexual orientation.”

Valarie Kaur: “America needs to reconcile with itself and do the work of apology . . . , [to] embrac[e] a new narrative of an America longing to be born, a nation whose promise lies in the future, a nation we can only realize by doing the labor: reckoning with the past, reconciling with ourselves, restructuring our institutions, and letting those who have been most harmed be the ones to lead us through the transition.”

What do you think?

- Which quotation touches your heart or mind most deeply? Why?
- What stake does the majority have in respecting the rights of the political, racial, religious, or other minorities?
- Should minority rights only be respected when the minority actively seeks to assimilate into the majority?

“We must find ways to show respect for others whose beliefs, values, and behaviors differ from our own while never being forced to deny or abandon our own beliefs, values, and behaviors. . . .

“Every citizen’s rights are best guarded when each person and group guards for others those rights they wish guarded for themselves.”

— Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

» IDEAS FOR TEACHING CHILDREN

- A garden is a lovely place to be, often with many kinds of flowers growing. What are some things that are **similar** about various flowers? What are some things that are **different**? Different types of flowers need different kinds of care. Some need more sun or water than others. When flowers get what they need, they grow and thrive. How can you help different types of people to grow and thrive? How do you feel when you help others?
- The Declaration of Independence states that all people are created equal. Yet people are different! Is it fair to treat people badly because they have a different color of skin? Practice a different religion? Have a disability that makes them hear or see or walk differently? Have you ever been treated unfairly because you were somehow different from other people? How did you feel? How do you think others feel if they are treated unfairly because they are different?
- Listen to and study the words to the Primary song [“I’ll Walk with You.”](#) Discuss how this song invites you to love and respect those who may be different than we are.
- Read the story [“Seeing Musa”](#) and discuss. How did Angie misjudge Musa? Have you ever been judged unfairly? What can we do to prevent mistakes like this?
- Try a few of the many activities from the Learning For Justice classroom resources. For example, [this story discusses assimilation and identity](#).
- Experts in mental health and psychology were interviewed about how to talk to children about violence against racial minorities. See their suggestions and reading ideas [here](#).

» THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be a “minority”? Can you imagine ways that you are or might be in a minority or marginalized position? Do you treat others now as you would want to be treated should your status shift?
- Black Americans faced an intransigent and hostile majority yet persevered in their efforts to claim their inalienable civil rights using nonviolence and civil disobedience. What examples can you identify where minority rights were achieved through nonviolent strategies?
- Why are the opinions of minority communities important to the health of a democracy? What avenues do they have for expressing opinions?
- When the majority decides to oppress, intimidate, drive out, or exterminate a minority group within their nation, often that minority has no option but to appeal for help from outside their own country. When has the international community been successful in protecting a minority group? When have they failed?

» TAKE ACTION

- Learn from minority groups. For example:
 - > Read, watch, and listen to materials by minority people that express minority opinions.
 - > Seek out opportunities to talk to people from different backgrounds.
 - > Learn about histories of other minority groups.
 - > Be humble if instructed by minorities on ways you may have unintentionally caused harm.
- Plan a time to gather others and discuss these ideas. You could hold a “family home evening,” host a discussion group, or participate in the MWEG Facebook Discussion Group to explore these ideas with neighbors or friends.
- Be informed about laws that could affect or infringe upon minority groups.
- Volunteer, raise awareness, or donate money to organizations that work to protect minority groups.
- This [article](#) offers 100 resources to act against racism, help Black organizations, and learn to be anti-racist.