

The Iron Fist in the Velvet Glove

In the month of October, expect political vitriol like you've never seen before – all centered on the elections and the nomination of a new Supreme Court justice. No matter what side you're on – or even if, like me, you're not ecstatic about *any* side – the spectacle should teach us a larger lesson about government and political power: *We have way too much of both.*

If America's Founders could observe what is about to happen, they would be appalled. They would admonish us in terms like this: "We warned you! We told you to keep government small, but under both parties you created a monstrosity so big and powerful that you now find yourselves at each other's throats. We told you that big government is incompatible with good government, but you didn't listen. We told you never to sacrifice your character for power or handouts, but you forgot that too."

In my book, [*Was Jesus a Socialist?*](#), I wrote about this toxic, soul-crushing thing called power. The pursuit of it is evidence not of a love of others, but rather, love of oneself. Power is about the lust for control, the desire to push others around, take their stuff, punish somebody just because of who they are or what they have, and puff yourself up by dragging somebody else down. It's evil, and it will be on parade in the impending character assassination of another Supreme Court nominee.

Nothing brings forth bad people and licenses them to do evil more thoroughly than *concentrated power*. It never advertises itself honestly. Nobody says, "Vote for me because I want to live your life for you." From the outside, it sounds reasonable. The state will care for you! The state will relieve you of worries and responsibilities! We will give you

free stuff! We will help the poor and punish the rich!

Inside the velvet glove of power's seductive promises is the iron fist of arrogance and compulsion. The promises to care for you are the bait.

As a Christian, I look to the teachings of Jesus for guidance. He never made false or unaffordable promises. He didn't curry favor with certain constituencies at the expense of others. He didn't play cynical class-warfare games. He focused on eternal truths, not temporary, earthly advantages. He never said anything like, "Put government in charge. Demand that the politicians rob Peter to pay Paul."

Government, the instrument of concentrated power, is composed of mortals, prone to all the temptations all mortals face. It has nothing to give anybody except what it first takes from somebody. If it's big enough to give you everything you want it's also big enough to take away everything you've got.

Power rots the soul. Rare is the individual who becomes a better person for having possessed it.

When Jesus walked the Earth, Rome was an imperial tyranny. A century before, it was a republic. The collapse of character had provided evil men the opportunities for power they craved. Demagogues promising "bread and circuses" corrupted almost everybody. In the end, none of that "free stuff" was worth what Romans forfeited in the pursuit of it – namely, their lives and liberties.

Reflect on this as you watch the ugliness of politics in the coming month.

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