

Lesson Seventeen

Revolutionaries

LESSON IDEA

To show the difference between the revolutionaries who fought for and won American independence, and those in our time who have worked to destroy freedom while pretending to be like our Founding Fathers. The contrast between George Washington and Cuba's communist dictator Fidel Castro will serve as our main example.

PREPARATION

Review the discussion parts of the lesson and adapt them to fit your family's level of understanding. For younger children, clip pictures of presentday revolutionaries from newspapers and magazines and compare them with those of Washington and signers of the Declaration.

SINCE THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, those who led it have been honored as heroes worldwide. Why do you think so many persons, in so many countries other than our own, share our admiration for George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, John Hancock, and the other Founders? [Encourage each child to answer.]

Fidel Castro, for example, was widely portrayed on American television and elsewhere as the "George Washington of Cuba" during the Cuban revolution in the late 1950s. Was that comparison valid? Why? [Encourage everyone to answer.]

Let us first take a brief look at George Washington as the perhaps the prime example of an American revolutionary leader in 1776. He had lived a comfortable life on his Virginia plantation. His customs, manners, dress, and speech were those of an English gentleman. He had no animosity toward the English and valued the principles of honesty, honor, and fairness that were aspects of the civilization of his day.

In sharp contrast, the Marxist rebel Fidel Castro demonstrated total contempt for such principles as honor, integrity, truthfulness, and justice, and a willingness to use any means to achieve his ends by overthrowing the established order.

But why, if Washington was not opposed to English values, did he lead an army against Britain in a war for independence? Why did he

believe that it was important to break political ties with a nation sought to have its citizens be ethical, truthful, and just? Exactly what aspects of British policy did he and his fellow revolutionaries oppose to the point of being willing to wage war to bring about change? [Encourage discussion, including the point that the American leaders were at odds with Britain's king-centered government, not the basic values of English society. Though justice was the professed goal of English civil law, it was not practiced by the King or Parliament.]

WHY DID WASHINGTON oppose England's king-centered government, but not its code of values? The determining factor was a deep religious conviction. He was recognizing that rights are God-given, he rejected the notion that they were King-given. He valued the honor, honesty, and justice of English society because such positive attributes were based on Scripture and were uplifting for all societies and nations.

Castro, as a Communist, denied the existence of God and waged war against not only the Cuban

FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS

If the discussions in this lesson are beyond the understanding of younger children, you may wish to skip them and focus instead on the story of the mythical kingdom of Thud. Questions that could be raised after reading the story could include:

If you had lived in the country of Thud, would you have joined the rebels of the nation of Opportunity who were fighting for freedom? Why?

Were the Tyrants who overthrew the king honest? Did they fight fairly? Who helped them? Could they have taken over the country without the help of some of the King's own ministers?

What lies do you suppose the Tyrants told the people to entice them to fight each other?

If you had lived in the kingdom, would you have been more frightened if the Tyrants had killed only their enemies, rather than every fourth persons they met at random? Why did they do the latter?

government, but all sound religious values as well. Lying, stealing, and assassination were to him mere tools to further the goals of his revolution. Castro believed and taught his followers – that “the end justifies the means.” What does that phrase mean? [Help family members to understand that the “end justifies the means” concept demolishes standards of right and wrong. Acts are judged in terms of whether they work, not whether they are right or wrong.] For Castro, all sorts of evil acts were held to be proper if they benefited enhanced his revolution. Do you think Washington and the other American revolutionaries also believed that “the end justifies the means?”

Castro was a master of deceit. When seeking money and weapons from the United States, he assured the U.S. officials (and the American people) that he was not, and never had been, a Communist. Once in power, he told the Cuban people and the world that he was, and always had been, a Communist.

Did Washington or other American leaders try to conceal their motives from European nations during their Revolution? What steps did they take to make their intentions clearly known? [Point out that their motives were openly and bluntly stated in the Declaration of Independence.] What would have happened if Castro had been as honest in stating his motives? Would he have received American support? Why not? What did he have to hide? [Make clear that the methods and brutality of the communists were well known due to their takeover of other countries. Castro would not have succeeded if he had honestly stated his case.]

Following Castro’s successful revolution, the firing squads were formed, and thousands of Cubans were murdered as “enemies of the revolution,” not because they had opposed it, but because they were property owners or might do so in the future. Graves of wealthy Cubans were opened so items of value could be confiscated to finance the Castro regime. Churches were closed; ministers, priests, and missionaries tortured and were murdered; Bibles were confiscated and destroyed; families were separated; food was rationed. Why were these terrible steps taken? [After some answers have been given, ask if these acts of terror would encourage or discourage opposition to the new government. Would Castro’s power be increased or

decreased? Help family members to understand that when life and liberty are attacked by government, and average citizens are terrorized, the government has become a dictatorship, regardless of what it may otherwise choose to call itself.]

WHAT HAPPENED in America after the War for Independence was won? There were “enemies of the revolution,” to be sure. Almost one-third of the colonists had remained loyal to England, and some had given information to the British that cost American patriots their lives. Were they lined up before firing squads? Some patriots thought it would be justified, but Washington and other leaders rejected such revenge. There were no executions, and property was not confiscated. To be sure, some of the pro-British colonists (called Tories) were badly treated by neighbors or former friends. Some lost property through the ravages of war and wanton acts of a few hotheaded militia, but none faced a firing squad or hangman’s noose sanctioned by the new government. In fact, the Continental Congress even refused to cancel debts owed to British merchants, and such revolutionary leaders as Thomas Nelson, Jr., Thomas Jefferson, and Lewis Morris men who had emptied their own pockets to pay the expenses of American troops and ambassadors sold more of their property and other possessions to pay the personal debts they owed to the British.

The new government formed after the war by the victorious American revolutionaries entailed less power than any other in history. Gone was the throne that had been reserved for kings and dictators. Its place was taken by a legislature, court system, and executive branch three separate centers of power, each designed to check and balance the power and influence of the others.

The God-given rights of the people to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were protected by a written contract called the Constitution. Powerseekers were hamstrung by the restrictions written into that historic document.

It could easily have been otherwise. Washington, had he been inclined to do so, could have taken advantage of his power as the commander of a victorious army to establish a strong, central government. Indeed, so great was his popularity that many of his fellow citizens urged him

