



## Appeal to the Christian Women of the South Angelina Grimké (1836)

*Angelina Grimké was born into a wealthy slaveholding family in Charleston, South Carolina, but as a young adult she moved north, to Philadelphia, where she became famous as an abolitionist. To advocate the immediate abolition of slavery, as Grimké did, was a radical position at the time; Grimké's activism, which included speeches before a state legislature and other male audiences, was more radical still because she was a woman asserting the right to act in the public sphere. Religiously, Grimké was raised in the Episcopal Church but migrated to Quakerism.*

*The tract from which the following excerpts come was published in Philadelphia, yet Grimké addresses her arguments to white women in the southern states she left behind. The first half of the tract consists of a long, detailed rebuttal (not presented here) of biblical arguments in defense of slavery. Grimké then identifies ways that her female readers, though lacking the power to vote, can nevertheless act to ameliorate and end slavery. Among other things, she urges readers to practice civil disobedience by breaking laws that forbid manumitting slaves or teaching them to read.*

But perhaps you will be ready to query, “Why appeal to *women* on this subject? *We* do not make the laws which perpetuate slavery. No legislative power is vested in us; we can do nothing to overthrow the system, even if we wished to do so.” To this I reply: I know you do not make the laws, but I also know that you are the wives and mothers, the sisters and daughters of those who do; and if you really suppose you can do nothing to overthrow slavery, you are greatly mistaken. You can do much in every way: four things I will name. [...]

1. Read, then, on the subject of slavery. Search the scriptures daily, whether the things I have told you are true. Other books and papers might be a great help to you in this investigation, but they are not necessary, and it is hardly probable that your committees of vigilance will allow you to have any other. The Bible, then, is the book I want you to read in the spirit of inquiry and the spirit of prayer. Even the enemies of abolitionists acknowledge that their doctrines are drawn from it. In the great mob in Boston last autumn, when the books and papers of the Anti-Slavery Society were thrown out of the windows of their office, one individual laid hold of the Bible and was about tossing it out to the crowd when another reminded him that it was the Bible he had in his hand. “O! ’tis all one,” he replied, and out went the sacred volume along with the rest. We thank him for the acknowledgment. Yes, “it is all one,” for our books and papers are mostly commentaries on the Bible and the Declaration. Read the Bible, then; it contains the words of Jesus, and they are spirit and life. Judge for yourselves whether he sanctioned such a system of oppression and crime.

2. Pray over this subject. When you have entered into your closets and shut to the doors, then pray to your Father, who seeth in secret, that he would open your eyes to see whether slavery is sinful; and if it is, that he would enable you to bear a faithful, open, and unshrinking testimony against it and to do whatsoever your hands find to do, leaving the consequences entirely to him who still says to us, whenever we try to reason away duty from the fear of consequences, “What is that to thee? Follow thou me.” Pray also for the poor slave, that he may be kept patient and submissive under his hard lot until God is pleased to open the door of freedom to him without violence or bloodshed. Pray, too, for the master, that his heart may be softened and he made

willing to acknowledge, as Joseph's brethren did, "Verily we are guilty concerning our brother," before he will be compelled to add, in consequence of divine judgment, "Therefore is all this evil come upon us." Pray also for all your brethren and sisters who are laboring in the righteous cause of emancipation in the northern states, England, and the world. There is great encouragement for prayer in these words of our Lord: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you." Pray, then, without ceasing, in the closet and the social circle.

3. Speak on this subject. It is through the tongue, the pen, and the press that truth is principally propagated. Speak, then, to your relatives, your friends, your acquaintances on the subject of slavery; be not afraid, if you are conscientiously convinced it is sinful, to say so openly, but calmly, and to let your sentiments be known. If you are served by the slaves of others, try to ameliorate their condition as much as possible; never aggravate their faults and thus add fuel to the fire of anger already kindled in a master and mistress's bosom; remember their extreme ignorance and consider them, as your heavenly Father does, the less culpable on this account, even when they do wrong things. Discountenance all cruelty to them, all starvation, all corporal chastisement; these may brutalize and break their spirits but will never bend them to willing, cheerful obedience. If possible, see that they are comfortably and seasonably fed, whether in the house or the field; it is unreasonable and cruel to expect slaves to wait for their breakfast until eleven o'clock, when they rise at five or six. Do all you can to induce their owners to clothe them well and to allow them many little indulgences which would contribute to their comfort. Above all, try to persuade your husband, father, brothers, and sons that *slavery is a crime against God and man* and that it is a great sin to keep human beings in such abject ignorance [as] to deny them the privilege of learning to read and write. The Catholics are universally condemned for denying the Bible to the common people; but slaveholders must not blame them, for they are doing the very same thing and for the very same reason: neither of these systems can bear the light which bursts from the pages of that holy book. And lastly, endeavor to inculcate submission on the part of the slaves; but whilst doing this, be faithful in pleading the cause of the oppressed. [...]

4. Act on this subject. Some of you own slaves yourselves. If you believe slavery is sinful, set them at liberty, "undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free." If they wish to remain with you, pay them wages; if not, let them leave you. Should they remain, teach them and have them taught the common branches of an English education; they have minds, and those minds ought to be improved. So precious a talent as intellect never was given to be wrapped in a napkin and buried in the earth. It is the duty of all, as far as they can, to improve their own mental faculties, because we are commanded to love God with all our minds as well as with all our hearts; and we commit a great sin if we forbid or prevent that cultivation of the mind in others which would enable them to perform this duty. Teach your servants, then, to read, etc., and encourage them to believe it is their duty to learn, if it were only that they might read the Bible.

[...] Perceive you not that dark cloud of vengeance which hangs over our boasting republic? Saw you not the lightnings of heaven's wrath in the flame which leaped from the Indian's torch to the roof of yonder dwelling and lighted with its horrid glare the darkness of midnight? Heard you not the thunders of divine anger as the distant roar of the cannon came rolling onward from the Texian country, where Protestant American rebels are fighting with Mexican republicans—for what? For the re-establishment of slavery—yes! of American slavery—in the bosom of a Catholic republic where that system of robbery, violence, and wrong had been legally abolished for twelve

years. Yes! Citizens of the United States, after plundering Mexico of her land, are now engaged in deadly conflict for the privilege of fastening chains and collars and manacles—upon whom? Upon the subjects of some foreign prince? No! Upon native-born American republican citizens, although the fathers of those very men declared to the whole world, while struggling to free themselves from the three-penny taxes of an English king, that they believed it to be a self-evident truth that *all men* were created equal and had an *unalienable right to liberty*. [...]

Can you not, my friends, understand the signs of the times? Do you not see the sword of retributive justice hanging over the South, or are you still slumbering at your posts? Are there no Shiphrahs, no Puahs among you who will dare, in Christian firmness and Christian meekness, to refuse to obey the wicked laws which require woman to enslave, to degrade, and to brutalize woman? Are there no Miriams who would rejoice to lead out the captive daughters of the southern states to liberty and light? Are there no Huldahs there who will dare to speak the truth concerning the sins of the people and those judgments which, it requires no prophet's eye to see, must follow if repentance is not speedily sought? Is there no Esther among you who will plead for the poor devoted slave? [...] If there were but *one* Esther at the South, she *might* save her country from ruin; but let the Christian women there arise, as the Christian women of Great Britain did, in the majesty of moral power, and that salvation is certain. Let them embody themselves in societies and send petitions up to their different legislatures, entreating their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons to abolish the institution of slavery; no longer to subject woman to the scourge and the chain, to mental darkness and moral degradation; no longer to tear husbands from their wives, and children from their parents; no longer to make men, women, and children work without wages; no longer to make their lives bitter in hard bondage; no longer to reduce American citizens to the abject condition of slaves, of "chattels personal"; no longer to barter the image of God in human shambles for corruptible things such as silver and gold.

The women of the South can overthrow this horrible system of oppression and cruelty, licentiousness and wrong. Such appeals to your legislatures would be irresistible, for there is something in the heart of man which will bend under moral suasion. There is a swift witness for truth in his bosom, which will respond to truth when it is uttered with calmness and dignity. If you could obtain but six signatures to such a petition in only one state, I would say: Send up that petition, and be not in the least discouraged by the scoffs and jeers of the heartless or the resolution of the house to lay it on the table. It will be a great thing if the subject can be introduced into your legislatures in any way, even by women, and they will be the most likely to introduce it there in the best possible manner: as a matter of morals and religion, not of expediency or politics. You may petition, too, the different ecclesiastical bodies of the slave states. Slavery must be attacked with the whole power of truth and the sword of the Spirit. You must take it up on Christian ground and fight against it with Christian weapons, whilst your feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. And you are now loudly called upon, by the cries of the widow and the orphan, to arise and gird yourselves for this great moral conflict, "with the whole armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." [...]

Sisters in Christ, I have done. As a Southerner, I have felt it was my duty to address you. I have endeavored to set before you the exceeding sinfulness of slavery and to point you to the example of those noble women who have been raised up in the church to effect great revolutions and to suffer for the truth's sake. I have appealed to your sympathies as women, to your sense of duty as

Christian women. I have attempted to vindicate the abolitionists, to prove the entire safety of immediate emancipation, and to plead the cause of the poor and oppressed. I have done—I have sowed the seeds of truth, but I well know that [...] “God only can give the increase.” To him, then, who is able to prosper the work of his servant’s hand, I commend this appeal in fervent prayer, that as he “hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty,” so he may cause his blessing to descend and carry conviction to the hearts of many Lydias through these speaking pages. Farewell. Count me not your “enemy because I have told you the truth,” but believe me, in unfeigned affection,

Your sympathizing friend,  
ANGELINA E. GRIMKÉ

**Source:** A. E. Grimké, “Appeal to the Christian Women of the South,” *The Anti-Slavery Examiner*, September 1836, 3rd ed. reprint, 16-18, 24-26, 35-36, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t5db85197>. Public domain.

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Several religious or political terms capitalized in the source have been converted to lowercase here, including *scripture*, *divine*, *holy book*, *heaven(ly)*, *abolitionists*, *emancipation*, *committees of vigilance*, *republic(ans)*, and *rebels*. The terms *the South* and *Southerner* are capitalized here, as in the source publication; but *the northern states* and *the southern states*, capitalized in the source, have been converted here to lowercase. *Father*, in reference to God, is consistently capitalized here though inconsistently so in the source publication. *Spirit* has been capitalized in the expression *sword of the Spirit* to match the usage of the passage from the Bible (King James Version) to which Grimké was alluding. Divine pronouns have been converted to lowercase.

These edited excerpts from Grimké’s tract are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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