

Whose Freedom?

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Most of us are familiar with computers these days. When you look at your monitor, what do you see in the uppermost right-hand corner of the screen? There are three little boxes up there. The one on the left, if selected, will make the screen smaller. The one on the right will close the page. What does the one in the middle do? It's the "maximize" button, isn't it. It enlarges the screen.

Reading the Bible and having the Holy Spirit teach us its truths is like selecting the "maximize" button of our minds. The message of the Scripture opens views to our thinking that are broad and expansive, taking our thoughts from this puny planet and focusing them on issues much wider, much loftier. We need that! We must have that! The Bible says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Proverbs 29:18. There are greater realities than merely the things we see around us. The Lord wants to open our eyes, "maximize our screen" to the "big picture" view.

There was a prophet named Balaam who desperately wanted the money that would come from cursing God's people Israel. He got mad because his donkey kept stopping on the trip, even once crushing his foot when the donkey veered sharply from the path into a wall. Then Balaam's eyes were opened and he saw a bigger picture. He saw an angel of God ready to destroy him. Elisha's servant trembled in fear as he saw the Syrian troops surrounding the town of Dothan, but when the prophet prayed for him and the Lord opened his eyes, he came to see angel warriors of God protecting them.

There was a man zealous for the cause he served, and so he went from Jerusalem to Damascus with the intent of rooting out and persecuting the people of "the way," the followers of One called Jesus. Then on the road, the "maximize" button was pushed on his mind, the screen was enlarged and he saw a bigger picture. He saw Jesus and knew that He was the Lord. This view changed his life forever.

Abraham followed the call of God from his comfortable home in Ur to a pilgrim life in Palestine because he saw a bigger picture. Moses was willing to forego the throne of Egypt and the treasures of the Pharaohs because his vision was enlarged; he "looked to the reward," that is, the heavenly kingdom. The list of the heroes of Hebrews 11 includes those whose minds were expanded by God's "big picture" view; those whose mental screens were maximized by faith.

Fifty years ago society experimented with "mind expanding" drugs, which turned out to be exercises in reducing mental capability. No one in their right mind would recommend taking LSD before sitting for an important exam. We don't need drugs to expand our minds; we need the vital truths of the Bible to enlarge our vision. We need the eye salve of the Holy Spirit to see the "big

picture,” especially in today’s turbulent world. We need to have the knowledge that God is willing to give us, if we will open our minds and hearts to His Spirit and search His Word diligently. Our topic today bears on that concept.

Today has been designated as “Religious Liberty Sabbath.” We are prompted to promote the theme of religious liberty and encourage our members to take advantage of the information made available in our periodical, “Liberty Magazine,” which contains articles relevant to our times on this subject. We are encouraged also to give an offering to the cause of “Liberty,” so that this good magazine can be placed in the hands of the thought-leaders and decision-makers of our country. In the “big picture” view, the concept of liberty or freedom is extremely important today. It is being offered by two leaders. There’s a “freedom” that is being offered by Lucifer, the arch-rebel of God, and there’s a “freedom” that is being offered by Christ. Two “freedoms”; in the end, each one of us will make a choice as to whose freedom, whose theory of liberty, we have selected.

Lucifer’s freedom is planted on the platform of “freedom to disobey” or “freedom from law.” The first “liberty campaign” was launched long ago. In heaven, he promoted the idea among the angels that they were holy beings and didn’t need a restrictive law. They should be “free” to choose whatever course their own minds laid out, without being hampered by the fences of law. His campaign stood for the proposition that those angels who remained loyal to God were in fact slaves; bound by their allegiance, held back by their loyalty.

This was the same campaign pitch he made to Eve in the Garden of Eden concerning the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If you analyze his arguments carefully, you can detect the line of reasoning he put forth. He told Eve, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Genesis 3:5. Do you hear what he told her? He was saying, “Eve, God is holding you back. He doesn’t want you to advance to your full capability. Great promotion can be yours if you enjoy the “freedom” of which I speak. If you continue obeying God, you will be restricted and not realize your full potential. You will not be fully “free.” You won’t completely know liberty. If this fruit can impart the gift of speech to a snake, just think what heights you’ll reach when you partake of it! You’ll become like God! Don’t let Him impede your progress. He’s jealous of your growth and doesn’t want you to become like Him. He wants to keep you under His control and make you a slave.”

So Satan promoted his “liberty campaign” to our first parents. Was he speaking the truth? Had he himself experienced “liberty” as a result of his conduct and choices? The record is clear that he had not. He was now confined to earth, except for being allowed access to heaven on certain limited occasions as the book of Job mentions. Even this ended after Jesus died on the cross. No, Satan no longer had the full measure of travel privileges he previously enjoyed. Was this freedom? He no longer had the freedom of peaceful serenity toward the future. To him now, the future was dark and foreboding. Thoughts of doom and depression settled on his mind as God’s Spirit Who brings joy and peace was no longer a resident in his thoughts. The comment, “‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked,’” was first true of the mind of Satan. Isaiah 57:21. Was this freedom?

Yet, in his unexplainable and unreasonable frame of mind; in his hatred against God and desire to induce our first parents into becoming a part of his team, he peddled “freedom” as a reason for Eve to disobey God’s commandment. In this he used one of his time-tested weapons; falsehood. He

lied. He didn't tell the truth. He himself knew that the happy and free existence he had enjoyed before was now gone, but in his spiteful hatred of God, it was his purpose to rob Him of His children by bringing them on board his rebellion. Oh, the malignity of sin!

It didn't take long before Adam and Eve discovered that his campaign speech was riddled with lies. Oh, there was a small smattering of truth in it. Yes, their eyes were "opened," as he promised, but not in a beneficial way. Their eyes were opened to see their nakedness. Their eyes were opened to know shame, guilt and fear. Was this good? Was this freedom? Was the course of disobedience one which brought happiness? Did following Lucifer's proposition result in liberty?

I'm afraid not. In a very striking and literal way, their freedom was curtailed by sin. They were restricted from entering their lovely garden home. An angel with a drawn sword now stood at the gate, where before there had been none. The door to Eden now was closed; the access to the Tree of Life now denied. The opportunity to daily converse with God and His angels was no longer available. This was not liberty as Satan had promised.

The Bible tells the sad story of fallen man's pursuit of "freedom" by following the path of Satan. Cain was "free" to offer his fruit instead of obeying God and bringing a blood sacrifice. His "freedom" was costly; it cost him his brother and cost Cain his peace of mind and dwelling; he was forced to flee and live a life as a vagabond.

Nebuchadnezzar walked in the path of Satan's freedom, nurturing pride and self-exaltation, proclaiming (notice the personal pronouns), "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven; 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen.'" Daniel 4:30-32. As did his spiritual forefather Lucifer, self had become predominate and he was unable to recognize his accomplishments as having been given him by God. See the once honored king, now eating grass because of his pride. Is this freedom?

A man of Gergasa, east of the Sea of Galilee, had given his mind to the devil to the point that he became demon possessed. "Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. And when He (Jesus) had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones." Mark 5:1-5.

Is this a picture of freedom? Oh, you could argue that this man was "free" in the sense that no chains or shackles could bind him. But was he "free"? No! His was the worst slavery imaginable! He was "free" to self-destruct, cutting his flesh with sharp stones till the blood flowed. He was "free" to relinquish the companionship of his family and friends. He was "free" to live a lonely and forlorn existence among the graves. This was not freedom!

Today Satan is enjoying unusual success in promoting his campaign of liberty. Society is desirous of throwing off all restraints. "I will do my own thing" is the language we hear today. "Don't judge me. I am capable of determining my own truth" is the voice of the multitude in today's generation. Rejection of all authority is the sentiment that pervades the thinking of mankind in the 21st century. Atheists proclaim that there is no God and hence no accountability; no divine law which must be obeyed. In sympathy with this, many pulpits declare that the Ten Commandments are null, void and have no bearing on the Christian's life. Such is not the case! These are the echoes of Eden's serpent!

The Bible makes the contrast clear. "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness." Romans 6:16. There are two choices, and two choices only. We will either be disciples of Satan or followers of Christ. There are no other alternatives. We will either buy into the concept of freedom as promoted by the devil, which is "freedom from law," or accept the freedom offered by Christ.

Jesus presents His offer of freedom. It is freedom within obedience. It is freedom within loyalty to God's gracious law. Everywhere in the universe, from the universe of the telescope to the universe of the microscope, we observe order and arrangement. God has instituted the governing principle of law which enables the systems of the universe to exist efficiently and safely. What would the universe be without the law of gravity? Without the laws of motion? What would the human race be without the laws of genetics? Without the laws that govern everything in our lives including the beat of our hearts and the flow of our blood? Even the medical terms which describe malfunctions incorporate this principle. What is arrhythmia or cardiac dysrhythmia? It is when there is abnormal electrical activity in the heart; it is when the heart is not beating according to the laws of physiology.

God's platform features the principle of freedom through obedience, not from obedience. It is diametrically opposed to Satan's proposition, freedom from law. It has the benefit of being in place long before sin was introduced. No heavenly intelligence can argue against the fact that peace and harmony ruled throughout the universe while guided by God's system of law. There was a serene liberty enjoyed by all inhabitants of the universe while they were in submission to God's requirements. It was not slavery, but liberty!

Christ came to this earth to bring true liberty. Of Jesus the Bible says, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." Isaiah 61:1.

The Bible says that the wise Creator gave His laws "for our good." "What does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good." Deuteronomy 10:12, 13. In fact, the Ten Commandments are specifically called the "law of liberty." James 2:12.

According to Lucifer's proposition, those two words, "law" and "liberty" do not go together. According to his system, those two words can't abide in the same sentence; they are contradictory. In his way of thinking, the Ten Commandments should be called the "law of slavery." Lucifer's proposition, that liberty comes from disobedience to God's laws, strikes at the very core of the question concerning the trustworthiness of the divine Sovereign. Does He truly love and care for the happiness and safety of His creatures? Are His laws such that promote well-being? Again, no heavenly intelligence can argue against the fact that prior to the inception of rebellion, there was nothing but joy and unlimited serenity.

Satan has stood valiantly by his campaign throughout the ages. But what do we see? When the church of the middle ages strayed from God's principles and His Word; when Satan was allowed access and through the Papacy attempted to effect one of his most masterful deceptions, the change of the Ten Commandments, what do we see? Freedom? No, we see coercion and force, two of the devil's most effective tools.

Freedom to worship according to the dictates of one's conscience was restricted during the middle ages, on pain of the loss of property, limb or life. Yet, those true to God "did not love their lives to the death." Revelation 12:11. Millions of martyrs testified by their dying breath of their allegiance to God and His platform of truth. While being chained to the stake, these heroes nevertheless reveled in their freedom to praise God until their voices were choked by the flame.

Satan knows that his time is short and has stepped up his campaign to promote his philosophy, that of freedom from God's law. One of the two institutions established by God in Eden, formed for the good of mankind, is under his direct attack. The divinely ordained institution of marriage, Satan hates. He knows that a Christian home, in which a man and his wife demonstrate *agape* love and raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, provides a powerful influence in society. His hatred is directed against the godly institution of marriage.

This is seen in the recent issue of gay marriage, as played out in many states (and now the District of Columbia), particularly California. Despite the will of the majority of the electorate (not to speak of the biblical origin of marriage), promoters of this deviant life style push their agenda. Now they are challenging the recently passed state constitutional amendment, defining marriage as being between one man and one woman.

They have hired a "super lawyer team," according to Alan Reinach, an Adventist attorney who writes for NARLA, the North American Religious Liberty Association. They have retained Theodore Olsen, a former solicitor general of the United States, a conservative Republican. Joining him, in a strange twist, is David Boies, who was his *opponent* in the famous "Bush v. Gore" case that decided the 2000 presidential election! They will attempt to prove that it is "so grossly unfair and unreasonable for marriage to be restricted to a man and a woman, despite the long history of marriage, that the Federal courts must reverse a valid electoral decision of the California voters to amend their own state constitution."

This is a blatant attempt to abolish the divinely ordained institution of marriage. It is Satan's campaign of "freedom *from*" God's system at work today. We will see this issue grow larger as time progresses and will witness the hatred against God and His ways as demonstrated by the

advocates of that philosophy. Expect ridicule, loss of liberty and violence in the wake of this movement.

Satan's hatred is also specifically addressed against the other institution which came from Eden, the Sabbath. Marriage and the Sabbath were the two institutions formed before sin which accompanied Adam and Eve into the post-Eden world. Satan's hatred of both has been seen throughout the ages, but will come to a climax in the days just prior to the end of his reign.

Satan hates the Sabbath because it points to God as the Creator; because it beautifully illustrates the truth of salvation, that we rest from our work of trying to earn God's favor and trust in His great work of redemption. Satan hates the Sabbath because it reminds us of God's ability to take a world "without form and void" and make it "very good," the very thing He proposes to do in the lives of all who submit to His gracious will.

The prophecies of Revelation tell us clearly that prior to the return of our Lord, the issue of worship will be central. To the forefront of all minds will be brought the great question, Will I submit to the system of God and obey all His laws, including the Sabbath commandment, and trust in His freedom, a freedom *within* obedience? Or will I subscribe to the system of Satan, that I am "free" to dispense with God's law and find liberty in "doing my own thing"?

These things are going to come to their fulfillment soon! Before long, those who have chosen the side of Christ will feel freedom from the grave; freedom from mortality and these decaying bodies; freedom from being released from the pull of a sinful nature. We will feel the exhilarating freedom of being lifted to meet our Jesus in the clouds of heaven, to be escorted to the land of eternal freedom! That's freedom worth having, isn't it? Let us focus our minds on the "big picture" and find our place on the Lord's side, the side of obedience to His just requirements, the side of true liberty. "If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." John 8:36.