

The Plain Truth about **FREEDOM**

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Humankind has always yearned for freedom. The quest to be free has moved entire nations and changed the course of history. People have given their lives so that others might live free. More than 200 years ago, Patrick Henry uttered the famous words, “Give me liberty or give me death!” For centuries the United States of America has been a symbol of freedom to the rest of the world. We call ourselves the land of the free—the home of the brave. In a world darkened by tyranny, a statue representing liberty stands at the eastern doorway to America holding her lamp high; illuminating the way to freedom and saying, “Give me your tired, your poor, your wretched refuse yearning to breathe free.” But do we truly breathe free, or have we been deceived into accepting a cheap, counterfeit? Is it possible that what we thought was freedom is nothing more than an illusion?

Freedom or an Illusion?

The art of illusion as practiced by professional stage magicians is nothing short of astounding. Bodies are shown to float in midair. People are seemingly sawn in half and miraculously restored whole. Magicians and assistants alike are able to disappear and reappear with startling effect. One well-known illusionist has entertained millions on national television by making a Boeing 747 airplane seemingly vanish into thin air.

As amazing as these illusions are, they pale in comparison to the ultimate illusion—the illusion of freedom. The magicians who perform stage tricks are nothing in comparison to the great magician who has pulled off the seemingly impossible. He has disguised slavery as freedom and oppression as liberty.

The Greatest Illusionist

Who is this great illusionist and how has he deceived the whole world? To find the answer we must go back to the very beginning of man's existence. Notice the second chapter of Genesis where God gave man everything he needed for a fulfilling life:

And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life *was* also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:9).

God created a beautiful garden for the first two human beings to live in. Like any good parent, He set safe boundaries for His children and basic rules to live by. Notice God's command to the first humans:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17).

After warning Adam against eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God created Eve to be a companion to Adam. Eve later met with a being the book of Genesis calls the serpent. Notice their conversation:

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1).

Who is this serpent that beguiled Eve? The Bible answers this question in Revelation where John recorded:

So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9).

Through the apostle, Christ revealed that the serpent is Satan. He is no less than the deceiver of all mankind. The devil is subtle in his approach and far more powerful than any human. As shocking as this may sound, the world has continuously been misled by this being.

Further, a deceived person does not know that they are deceived. Because they are misled, they believe they are doing right. This was the case with Eve. Believing her choice empowered her, she fell into Satan's manipulative trap!

Immediately, Satan began to plant doubt in Eve's mind. He caused her to question God's motivation in making rules about the trees in the garden. The devil framed his words to subtly imply that God was selfish and unreasonable. He made it look as though the Eternal was withholding something good from them.

Satan Uses Misdirection to Deceive

Satan's question might as well have been "Is God trying to limit your freedom of choice?" It was misdirection. It's the oldest trick in the magician's handbook. Freedom of choice was not the issue. God did not force Adam and Eve to make the right choice. He gave them—and He has given every one of us—the freedom to choose. But there are consequences to every choice.

In response to Satan's question regarding what God allowed them to eat, the woman answered with these words:

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die'" (Genesis 3:2-3).

Notice Satan's reply in the following verses. First, he misdirected the woman's attention away from the real issue, and then he lied about the consequences of making the wrong choice.

Then the serpent said to the woman, "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 3:4-5).

The devil's inaccurate response has all the elements of illusion. This is the same trick Satan continues to use in order to deceive the whole world. He mixes a bit of truth with falsehood to make the lie seem plausible.

The two trees in this garden are of great importance. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life represented a choice Adam and Eve had to make, and it is one we must make today. Believe and obey God—or not.

If our first parents would have chosen to rely on God to show them the way of life, they could have enjoyed happiness, peace, health, and prosperity. This choice was symbolized by the tree of life. On the other hand, they could choose to decide for themselves how to live. They could make their own rules and experiment with whatever lifestyles they found interesting or attractive. They could decide for themselves what was right and wrong; what was good and evil. This latter choice was symbolized by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

We know the choice that Eve made. It's the same choice we've all made. Notice the account recorded for us:

So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:6).

Adam and Eve chose to reject the instruction of their Creator in favor of taking it upon themselves to decide right from wrong. Our first parents were conned into believing that the right

to choose is the equivalent of true freedom. From that time forward, the human race has been deceived.

The difficulty with the idea that freedom of choice is all we need to be free is the fact that there are consequences to the choices we make. The choices we make can lead us to true freedom or they can lead us into slavery and oppression.

The Test with Freedom of Choice

Consider a teenager who can't wait to get out of their parents' house in order to be free to make their own decisions, free to be their "own person," and decide for themselves right from wrong. The highly anticipated 18th birthday finally arrives and they're seemingly "free" at last. They move out and can do all the things their parents wouldn't allow. They can smoke just like all those "cool" people they've seen on TV. But wait a minute; this choice actually took away a freedom. Now they are enslaved to nicotine.

It could get worse. Perhaps they decide to experiment with drugs and become a slave to alcohol or crack cocaine. What if they decide to drink alcohol and drive; get into an accident, and injure or kill someone? They're not so free sitting inside a jail cell or a hospital bed!

Their wrong decisions could be less dramatic. Maybe they decide against getting an education, or choose to live promiscuously and contract a sexually transmitted disease. Now they find themselves tied to a job they hate or enslaved to a life of illness. Perhaps they get pregnant and decide to marry someone they do not really love. They could get divorced and become a slave to alimony and child support payments.

There are solutions to such problems, but we can see the dangers that await a person who makes the wrong decision. And we can see the cause-and-effect relationship between the decisions they make and how their freedom is affected.

The entire human race is much like that. We have collectively made the decision that Eve and then Adam made—to reject the instruction of our Creator God.

A World Enslaved

From the time of Adam and Eve, all men and women have made some wrong decisions. As a result, we live in a world that is oppressed and enslaved. Even in this great bastion of freedom we call the United States of America, we live with our own form of oppression and slavery.

If the founding fathers could see America today, they wouldn't recognize it as the same country they helped raise up. Of course, they would be surprised by the tremendous advances in technology or the vast increases in territory and population. However, they would be shocked by our rejection of biblical principles, our liberal attitudes towards sexuality, abortion, the rampant corruption, pollution, crime, and violence. Our founders would be horrified to see this nation enslaved by our cravings and lusts. We are addicted to everything from alcohol and drugs to sex, pride, power, and money. We are obsessed with seeking the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Our own choices have caused us to be oppressed. We are oppressed in our cities by crime. We are oppressed by violent gangs of lawless youth. Innocent men, women, and children are gunned down in the streets. Those with wholesome family values are forced to accept homosexuality as an "acceptable" alternative lifestyle. We are oppressed with incurable diseases. We are oppressed by the pollution of our air, water, and land. We are oppressed by our own government that seeks to gain more power and money for itself by taking it from the people it was originally designed to protect and serve.

When the founding fathers of our great nation rebelled against the tyranny of England, the revolt began over the taxation of tea at a rate of one quarter of one percent. Imagine! Revolutionary war fought over a quarter of a percent. We pay far more tax than that just on the purchase of goods and services; let alone what we pay in income tax, property tax, estate tax, and vehicle taxes.

We are oppressed by the threat of nuclear annihilation. We are oppressed in our cities by poverty. Yes! Even in this

country of unparalleled bounty, a significant percentage of our population suffers from mental illness, hunger, and homelessness. What is the cause of all these evils?

To answer this question, we only need to look in the mirror. We are the cause! Like Adam and Eve, we have turned our back on God and chosen to go our own way. The men who fathered America believed in God. They were very familiar with the Bible and based the foundation of this nation on biblical principles. We have since chose to remove God and have forgotten that there will be severe consequences for abandoning His ethics.

Teachers are forbidden to quote presidents and historians that mention God's name. We find books about witchcraft and homosexuality on the shelves school libraries, but not the Bible. We are an oppressed society because we have decided to take God out of our lives. As a result, we are on our way to becoming some of the most oppressed and helpless people on earth!

In our country we murder helpless, unborn children by the millions. And we do it all in the name of *choice*—a woman's "right" to choose. What about the rights of the unborn child? Why are women allowed to carry out capital punishment on innocent children? After all, a man who does not want to take care of his child is called a deadbeat dad who is prosecutable by law. But a woman who does not care for her unborn child, we proudly label "pro-choice."

We all know what a bully is. A bully is someone who oppresses those that are smaller, weaker, and defenseless. A bully exercises tyranny and oppression over others simply because he can. Why then do we kill the unborn? It's for the same reason—because we can.

When people kill an innocent, unborn baby they are nothing more than a cowardly bully who is too self-centered and fearful to face the consequences of their choices. With few exceptions, it's a woman's choice to end the life of an innocent child so that her life won't be inconvenienced.

The estimated more than 54 million unborn children murdered in this country since 1973 staggers the imagination. This is more than five times the number of people murdered in the holocaust, and we are doing it to our own children. Never in the history of mankind has there been a civilization that has oppressed its own children on such a massive scale. What is wrong with us? God Almighty is furious with the oppressive murder of our young. And we have the nerve to call it freedom.

Freedom of Choice is Not True Freedom

It's time we wake up and repent before it's too late. Many have been subtly enticed by Satan into believing that freedom of choice is the equivalent of true freedom. We've been seduced into making wrong choices; ones that have led us into the slavery and oppression of abhorrent sin. Because we have freedom of choice, we often don't realize we have been enslaved. We don't seem to understand that the choices we make have consequences; ones that can take us in the opposite direction of freedom.

If we lived in a universe where there were no consequences for our actions, no cause and effect, we could make any choices we desire and never pay a price. But the universe we live in is not like that. As every student of science knows, for every action in this physical universe there is an opposite and equal reaction.

As much as some would like to believe otherwise, this law of cause and effect greatly influences our moral lives. Just like material laws govern the outcome of physical events, spiritual laws determine both our mental and emotional condition in this life; as well as our judgment in the afterlife.

Some would have us believe the existential philosophy that there is no rhyme or reason to the universe or our human existence. They think that we are nothing more than a chance accident in a random universe. These same people are often quick to proclaim that laws are an instrument of oppression, and that only in the absence of law does one find freedom.

Nothing could be further from the truth. How foolish this concept seems when we examine it. Can you imagine a scientist believing that the laws of physics are oppressive and restrictive? Can you imagine an aerospace engineer choosing to exercise his freedom of choice by ignoring the laws of aerodynamics when designing an airplane? Would you want to fly in an airplane designed by such a person? The very freedom of the airplane to soar through the sky is obtained by the careful observance of the laws of aerodynamics. Only when the aircraft is in harmony with the laws that govern flight is it free to fly.

In like manner, only when we are in harmony with God's laws do the spiritual laws that govern our lives set us free. James referred to God's decrees as the "perfect law of liberty" (Jam. 1:25). The Ten Commandments, and all of the statutes and judgments that follow them, are actually the way to true freedom.

However, this is the exact opposite of what most people believe. The master illusionist, Satan, has tricked millions into viewing God's law as oppressive and restrictive. Even mainstream Christianity has adopted a negative view of God's law by teaching that it has been done away. Yes, many who call themselves Christians have been deceived. But what did Christ actually teach about the law?

Jesus Preached Repentance

Throughout the gospels, we find that Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God always included one very important directive—repent! Notice Mark's words:

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15).

Matthew also recorded this message indicating that “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Mat. 4:17).

If Jesus taught that we are to repent, just what is it that we are to repent of? Well, sin, of course. For example, John the Baptist preached “the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4). When Christ was questioned about the fact that He was seen eating with sinners and publicans, He said that He came to call “sinners to repentance” (Mat. 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32). After Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Apostle Peter preached repentance from sin:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

We are to repent of sin, but what is sin? The Apostle John explained that sin is any transgression of God’s laws:

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness (1John 3:4).

Clearly, Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God requires repentance from sin, and sin is the transgression of the law. Throughout the gospels we find that the Savior taught the importance of obedience to God’s law. For more on this subject, request our book titled *The Ten Commandments—are they required today?* In Matthew we find the story of a wealthy young man who came to Christ asking what was required to receive eternal life:

Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. But if you

want to enter into life, **keep the commandments**”
(Matthew 19:16-17).

I Have Not Come to Destroy the Law

Despite His continual affirmation of the law, the people noted that Christ did things differently than the religious establishment of His day. He rejected the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees. He associated with sinners and publicans. Thus, He realized that some might misjudge Him, causing them to misunderstand His message. To ensure that His position was perfectly clear, the Savior stated:

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17-19).

Christ insured that people understood the standard of righteousness God required for entry into the Kingdom was greater than that of the religious leaders of his day. He said:

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).

The scribes and Pharisees made a pretense of keeping the letter of the law, but failed entirely to keep its spiritual intent. Christ gave several examples of this. The letter of the law says we shall not murder, but the intent is that we are not to hate our neighbor, nor be resentful of him (vs. 21-22). The letter of the law says not to commit adultery, but the intent of the law is that

we are not to lustfully think about anyone outside of our marital relationship (vs. 27-28).

The scribes and Pharisees knew only the letter and did not comprehend the intent of the law. As a result, Satan was able to mislead them. These men chose to design their own version of righteousness which became known as Judaism. In it, they devised more than six hundred rules regarding how to keep the law; making it extremely burdensome. As Christ said:

For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers (Matthew 23:4).

When we consider the long list of traditions designed by these religious leaders, it's no wonder that people thought God's law was oppressive and restrictive.

In addition to being ignorant of the intent of the law, the scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites. They only adhered to the letter of the law in order to appear righteous. Christ said:

But all their works they do to be seen by men...
(Matthew 23:5).

Because of their outward show and a lack of inward conversion, Christ likened these people to burial tombs painted with whitewash. These sepulchers appeared clean and beautiful on the outside, but were filthy and full of dead men's bones within (Mat. 23:27).

The common myth is that the scribes and Pharisees were too strict in their observance of God's law. This is a complete fallacy! Christ never chastised anyone for being too strict in observing God's law. The truth is that they did not keep many aspects of God's law! They kept the traditions they had instituted instead! Notice the Savior's stinging indictment of the religious establishment of his day:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone (Matthew 23:23).

Mark also recorded the words of Christ making this truth plain and simple:

“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.” He said to them, “*All too* well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition” (Mark 7:6-9).

Notice that Jesus did not say they should refrain from keeping the law, but that their man-made traditions caused them to fail to properly keep it. They missed the big picture—the very purpose of God’s law. The truly sad aspect of their example is that, not only were they unable to find the way to the Kingdom of God, they were preventing others from seeing the path as well:

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in (Matthew 23:13).

Satan has used misdirection to lead people to an incorrect conclusion. Hundreds of millions have formed the opinion that God’s law is harsh, restrictive, and oppressive based on the example of the scribes and Pharisees. The truth is, being a Pharisee does not mean their obedience to God’s law

was overly strict. According to God, the Pharisees were actually lawless hypocrites!

The Law Written In Our Hearts

The example of the scribes and Pharisees proved that righteousness cannot be legislated. True righteousness has to do with the spirit and intent of the law, and it cannot be forced upon people. In the words of Christ:

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-4).

True righteousness comes from God, and it is His desire to write that law upon our hearts. Moses recorded the Almighty to say:

Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever! (Deuteronomy 5:29).

The need for a New Covenant did not come about because of a flaw in the Old Covenant. It came about because of a flaw in the hearts of the people. However, Moses wrote about a time when God would change the hearts of all people; a time when they would have an entirely different view of the Creator and His way:

And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live (Deuteronomy 30:6).

The New Testament reiterates this relationship between loving God and obedience to His law:

Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the lord” (Hebrews 8:8-9).

A covenant is simply an agreement. It is a contract between two parties. As long as both uphold the terms of the agreement, it remains in force. But when one of the parties breaches the terms, the contract is nullified. When Israel did not live up to the terms of the Old Covenant, God rejected them. The fault the Eternal found was not with the covenant—it was with the people.

That was not the end of God’s plan. Israel of old served as a pattern for something destined to occur in the future. In time, God would offer a New Covenant to all people. The author of Hebrews explained:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the House of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Hebrews 8:10).

Just as with the Old Covenant, the New Covenant continued to be about God’s law. But instead of being written on tablets of stone, God chose to write His law in our heart and mind. To those who repent and are baptized by ministers of His true Church, He will give them a new spirit and a new heart:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them* (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

The New Covenant addresses God's holy law on a deeper level than the letter of the law. Not only does it address the spirit and intent of the law, it explains the spirit and intent of the motives that influence every one of us.

God Defines Love

Many have misunderstood the nature of the New Covenant. Because it addresses the intent of the heart, some have thought it to mean that God can be worshiped in any manner we choose as long as we have love in our heart. This type of thinking was never a part of the Church created by Christ and led by the apostles. These early Jewish converts came from a background that made it unthinkable to minimize the law in any way. Such a departure in values and thought from Christ's teaching only began to arise toward the end of the first century. During that time, the apostles were combating Gnostic philosophy which taught that obedience to the law was not required. Paul, John, Peter, and Jude all wrote of this, reminding Christians that God's grace is not a license to disregard his law:

For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who **turn the grace of our God into lewdness** and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 4).

Sadly, this kind of thinking persists to this day in so-called mainstream Christianity. There are those who teach that Jesus kept the law so that we don't have to, and all that matters is that we have love in our heart. While it is true that we are to have the

love of God in our heart, it is the Almighty who defines what love is. As He explained through the Apostle John:

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome (1John 5:3).

The First Commandment

We can profess to have love for God in our hearts, but unless we keep His Ten Commandments, we do not love God! As the Son of God clearly stated, “If you love Me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). John also wrote:

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. **He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar,** and the truth is not in him (1John 2:3-4).

If we say that we know and love God, but do not keep His commandments, we are a liar and fooling ourselves! These are strong words indeed, but many will be shocked upon Jesus’ return to find that He required more of them than mere lip service. Speaking of the day of His return, Christ Himself said:

Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; **depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!**’ (Matthew 7:22-23).

Christ said that if we work iniquity, or lawlessness, He doesn’t even know us. He wants more than just idle talk and empty promises. He wants obedience to His law. As He said on another occasion:

But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say? (Luke 6:46).

Jesus wants much more than simply professing His name and saying that He is our Lord; He wants us to obey His law. It was He who gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. Yes, the very One who became Christ, and walked the earth as a human being, is the same One who spoke to Moses and delivered His law to ancient Israel (John 1:1-3, 18; 5:37, 47).

Christ has not changed His mind about His law. He does not change on such matters (Heb. 13:8). Do not allow anyone to mislead you regarding God’s law. It is neither harsh nor oppressive. It has not become unimportant or irrelevant. Nothing could be more important or relevant for us today than God’s law. It is the way to eternal life and true freedom!

Obedience to God’s Law Is Real Freedom

Most of mankind has been misled by God’s enemy—the powerful illusionist—Satan. They have been deceived into believing that God’s law is oppressive when in fact it is the very source of freedom we desire. Notice Christ’s words:

Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

An easy yoke and light burden do not sound oppressive, and it isn’t. Living the way of God is the best possible way to live. Each of us will go one of two ways in life. It is a choice we must make. It is no less than the two trees presented to Adam and Eve. Which is the easiest? Which is freedom, and which is slavery? The Apostle Paul wrote:

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 *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? (Romans 6:16).

While sin may appear to be fun, pleasurable, or to our benefit, it always has a terrible kickback. It enslaves us by its seduction. Sin will ultimately lead to one, and only one, end—death! The choice is ours. We can serve God and find a yoke that is easy, or we can become enslaved by sin.

Some 3500 years ago God looked down and saw the children of Israel enslaved in Egypt. He heard their cries, He saw their oppression, and He took pity on them. After they were freed, He gave them instructions showing His people how to stay free. His instructions were His law.

Blessing or Cursing – Our Choice

On Mount Sinai, God Almighty gave the Israelites what James was inspired to call His perfect law of liberty—the Ten Commandments. These are the framework of His law. They were then presented a choice. It is the same choice Adam and Eve were faced with, and the same choice we have today. As with humankind's first parents, God did not force them to make the right choice, but He did make it very clear what the consequences of their decision would be.

Moses was told to proclaim these consequences as the Israelites were making ready to cross the Jordan River and go over into the Promised Land. After reminding them of the laws God had given them, Moses said:

Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God: Blessed *shall* you *be* in the city, and blessed *shall* you *be* in the country. Blessed *shall be* the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and

the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed *shall you be* when you come in, and blessed *shall you be* when you go out. The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. The LORD will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you. The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe *them*. So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, *to* the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them (Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

For a time, the Israelites obeyed God and enjoyed tremendous blessings. In like manner, this great nation of America has enjoyed many of these same blessings from God. He has blessed us with the choicest part of the earth and resources that much of the world only dreams of. We had been set on high above all the nations of the earth. We have been the head and not the tail as the most powerful and influential nation on earth. God

had blessed us with tremendous wealth and prosperity. Our enemies have been smitten before us and we became the greatest nation the world has ever seen.

All of this is changing. Our place as the head is beginning to slip. We were once a lender nation, but have become the largest debtor nation in the history of the earth. We have lost respect in much of the world because of our corrupt and lawless ways. The attack on the World Trade Center launched us into a quagmire from which we may never be able to extricate ourselves. We no longer prevail in every armed conflict. Much of the world no longer sees us as a nation under God—a God fearing people. Our own president stated that “Whatever we once were, we are no longer a Christian nation” (Obama, 2008). More and more we are viewed as immoral, unethical, dishonest, and purveyors of everything that is contrary to decency and goodness. Our disobedience to our Creator is catching up with us and it is going to get much worse. Notice the consequences for disobedience to God and His law:

But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: Cursed *shall you be* in the city, and cursed *shall you be* in the country. Cursed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed *shall be* the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Cursed *shall you be* when you come in, and cursed *shall you be* when you go out. The LORD will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me. The LORD will make the plague cling to you until He has consumed you from the land which you are going to possess. The LORD will strike you with consumption,

with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever, with the sword, with scorching, and with mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish. And your heavens which *are* over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you *shall be* iron. The LORD will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed. The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth (Deuteronomy 28:15-25).

The oppression God warned Israel of in this prophecy actually took place. At first the Israelites obeyed God and were tremendously blessed. Eventually, they strayed so far from God that He allowed them to be conquered and taken captive.

The nation of Israel became divided in 975 B.C. and split into two nations: the house of Israel consisting of ten tribes, and the house of Judah made up of Judah, Benjamin and many Levites. In time, the tribes of the house of Israel chose to worship Baal. They were defeated and taken into captivity by the Assyrians from B.C. 721-718. One hundred years later, the house of Judah sinned even worse. As a result, they were oppressed by the Chaldeans and brought under a yoke of slavery.

While the northern tribes were lost to secular history, they are not lost to God (Gen. 49; Jam. 1:1). America was founded, and is largely populated, by the descendants of the ancient house of Israel. Because of our lawless and wicked behavior, this nation is going to be taken captive by a foreign power once again. God is going to allow the people of the modern nations of Israel to be conquered and sold into slavery. Tragically this coming time will be worse than anything ancient Israel experienced for their disobedience.

God promised Abraham's descendants great blessings as a result of the patriarch's obedience. As a result, America, Britain, Australia, France, and several others have become great nations

today. Still, these nations have not continued in obedience to God, and they will experience a time of terrible trouble. The prophet Jeremiah records this warning for modern day Jacob who is the father of these great nations of Israel:

For thus says the LORD: We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? So why do I see every man *with* his hands on his loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it; and it *is* the time of Jacob's trouble... (Jeremiah 30:5-7).

The time of Jacob's trouble is the period of the great tribulation which is to come upon the whole world. It is described by the prophet as being so great that "none is like it." Christ spoke of this event in human history as the worst the world will ever experience, stating:

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be (Matthew 24:21).

After this horrible tribulation that will come upon the modern-day descendants of Israel, Christ will return to this earth and save His people. Notice the words of Jeremiah:

Alas! For that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it; and it *is* the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, says the LORD of hosts, *that* I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; Foreigners shall no more enslave them. But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them (Jeremiah 30:7-9).

These verses speak about a time yet to come. At the time it was written, King David had long been dead and buried. This prophecy addresses the future when God's government will be established on earth. At that time, Satan will be banished, his yoke broken, and mankind will truly be set free. This is the good news that Christ came to the earth to proclaim. It is the same message that was spoken by the prophets of old. Notice Isaiah's words in this regard:

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; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God (Isaiah 61:1-2).

The "acceptable year of the Lord" is the last year of man's reign. It looks to the time when the Messiah will come again and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. It is Christ bringing His government with infinite power and wisdom to undo the terrible problems humanity has created. The Messiah and His saints will then rule on the earth. He will create a utopian society for all mankind (Rev. 5:10; Isa. 35:1). All will come to know His law and obey it (Hab. 2:14). All will reap the enormous benefits of God's way of life. Thank God for the wonderful future He has in store for humankind.

Choose To Obey God

What does your future hold? The time of Jacob's trouble is coming and it will be worse than anything this planet has ever seen. It is going to affect the entire earth and will devastate this nation. But you don't need to fear the future. The Bible speaks of God's miraculous protection for all those who obey Him. You and your family do not have to suffer the tribulation. You have a

choice. Moses summed up that choice when he spoke to Israel with these words:

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you,
that I have set before you life and death, blessing and
cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your
descendants may live (Deuteronomy 30:19).

This is true freedom! It is to use our autonomy to choose God's way! To choose the way of sin only leads to suffering and death. Instead, God encourages us to choose life! If we strive to live within the parameters found in His Word, we will fulfill our transcendent human potential. As Christ said:

If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.
And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make
you free (John 8:31-32).

Do not be fooled by Satan's illusion. Freedom of choice is not freedom at all. We do not have an inherent moral compass directing us to consistently make the right choices. In mercy, God has revealed the way we should choose. Choose to keep God's holy law of liberty—the Ten Commandments. Choose the truth. Choose the way of true freedom!

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