

# **Religious Liberty and the Fall of Babylon**

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## ***Introduction***

Some people believe religious liberty is an inalienable right, and maintain that the state should have no control over the way people worship. On the other hand, it is tempting to believe that a strong government legislating moral standards will save society and bring back a lost golden era of peace and security when children could play safely on the streets. In some cities murders are a common occurrence often fuelled by alcohol and drugs. We also find corporate fraud and dishonesty at the highest levels of society. There is a sense that something needs to be done to bring back moral standards to society.

The word Babylon is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Babel which means confusion<sup>1</sup>; could it be that a desire to restore law and order could actually lead to anarchy? Babylon is the end time power which seeks to control worship through civil statutes (Rev. 13:17), yet is itself in rebellion against God!

As time passes, people forget the history of the struggle for religious liberty and the horrible atrocities that took place in the Dark Ages. Those involved believed they were acting to save souls and for the good of society, yet they perpetrated crimes which according to one historian “shed more innocent blood than any other institution that has ever existed”<sup>2</sup>. Many believe those days are gone and we are now living in more enlightened times, yet history tends to repeat itself; the holocaust showed how an intelligent society can perpetrate awful crimes against humanity when driven by a warped ideology.

What really is true liberty? Is it obedience to law or freedom from law? These questions go to the heart of the great controversy between good and evil, between Christ and Satan. It is important to look at the life of Jesus to understand whether Christians should support religious liberty, especially when Bible prophecy foretells future attempts to control the way people worship.

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<sup>1</sup> Harris, R. L., Harris, R. L., Archer, G. L., & Waltke, B. K. (1999, c1980). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed.) (089). Chicago: Moody Press.

<sup>2</sup> William E. H. Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, Vol. II, pp. 35, 37

The book of Revelation calls for people to come out of Babylon, because those who remain in her will share in her sins, plagues and downfall. Therefore it is important to know who or what Babylon is for our own safety.

When the twin towers collapsed in 2001, I was visiting a friend at the time. After we heard the news we were amazed as we watched the unfolding events. Many of the people on the ground were also transfixed as they stood near the buildings not realising the danger they were in; many were caught up in the destruction when the towers fell. One man told how he phoned his mother and she urged him to flee; as a result his life was saved. In a similar way God is concerned about our spiritual wellbeing; therefore He sends warnings to guide us to the right path to avoid destruction. The prophetic writings are like a “light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn,” which we would do well to heed (2 Pet. 1:19).

## ***Chapter 1 The Scriptural Basis for Religious Liberty***

The teachings of Jesus make it clear that it was not his aim to establish an earthly kingdom. When questioned by Pilate he said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). So why would we think he wanted the church to use civil power to enforce its teachings?

Jesus was persecuted while on earth and warned his disciples that they too would be persecuted (John 15:19-20). When persecuted, reviled and falsely accused he told his disciples that they were to “rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven” (Mt. 5:10-11). He taught us to pray for our enemies (Mt. 5:44); and when suffering injustice he did not seek to defend himself, but humbly submitted to death on the cross (Phil. 2:7-8). We see here no call to set up stakes and use force to make people convert. This is completely alien to the gospel of Christ. He said, “If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also” (John 14:9). The picture we get from the gospels is of a gentle Shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep (John 10:11; Luke 15:4-10), not someone who coerces people. Satan rules by fear and coercion, but Christ shows his love for us and calls us to follow him of our own free choice. God wants us to obey Him voluntarily because we believe His laws are good and in gratitude for the infinite sacrifice the Father and Son made when Christ died for our sins on the cross so that we could be saved (1 John 4:10).

Paul said, “Overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). True religion trusts in God to work out His plans and to convict people of sin and bring about rebirth, but “force is the last resort of every false religion”<sup>3</sup>. Peter told the shepherds of the flock that they were not to lord power over their flocks (1 Peter 5:1-4), rather to imitate the Chief Shepherd. Christ came as a lowly servant of humanity, to minister and to give his life as a ransom (Mt. 20:28). It is hard to reconcile that with church leaders sitting in gorgeous robes, possessing great wealth, persecuting those who do not accept their teachings. This is the very thing in essence that Peter warned church leaders not to do.

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<sup>3</sup> Ellen White, *Signs of the Times*, May 6, 1897, Par. 16

A person forced to convert does not truly believe because the very nature of true faith is choosing to believe, therefore any attempt to coerce people is misguided. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7), but a gift given grudgingly is of no value. Jesus said the widow's mite was worth more than all the rich people had given because it was all she had to live on (Luke 21:2-3). God looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7); its not the amount given but the spirit in which it is given that counts.

God created man in His image (Gen. 1:26); he was given a free choice, whether to love and obey God. When man chose to sin, he rejected God's leadership and placed himself under the power of Satan. Unless God had intervened by providing the atoning sacrifice of His Son, man would have had no real choice because he would have been enslaved to sin and Satan's power. Because of God's infinite love, He chose to give His Son to die for mankind (John 3:16). Through faith in this great sacrifice we can be redeemed from the condemnation of sin and have power to do right. Therefore if God gives people freedom of choice who are we to try to take it away? And if we did force someone to join the church, they would not be a genuine believer anyway.

The reward received by God's servants is not to be fully realised in this world. They are to expect suffering if they live righteously (2 Tim. 3:12), because they are in enemy territory. Since sin entered the world, there has ever been a conflict between good and evil (Gen. 3:15). Cain persecuted his brother Abel because his brother was righteous while he was not willing to follow God's instructions (Gen. 4:4-5); when he could not force his brother to worship as he wanted him to, he killed him. This is the principle behind all religious intolerance and persecution.

Satan works hard to destroy religious liberty because it prevents honest souls from following their conscience and God's commandments<sup>4</sup>. The wrath of the dragon is directed against those who keep God's commandments (Rev. 12:17). The wicked, who are controlled by Satan are filled with wrath against those whose lives and words are a continual rebuke to their wrongdoing, just as Cain was angry with his brother. The lives of the righteous disturb the conscience of the wicked. This was the reason

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<sup>4</sup> Ellen White, *The Great Controversy, Conflict of the Ages Series, Volume 5* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), pp. 204-205

the church persecuted dissenters, because the dissenters wanted to follow the Bible rather than human traditions.

Once people have rejected the truth, they often become deluded into thinking that those who advocate the truth are in error and must be stopped. By this sort of reasoning the Pharisees decided that Jesus must be put to death (John 11:50); they attributed the workings of the Holy Spirit to the devil and stubbornly refused all the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah (Mark 3:22-30). In a similar way the children of Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness. When the leaders of the rebellion were destroyed by a divine judgment, rather than repent they turned on Moses the next day and said he had killed the Lord's people (Num. 16:41). It is a fearful thing to reject light and turn against God because it leads to a state of delusion<sup>5</sup>.

The righteous are often blamed and made scapegoats in times of calamity. In the time of Ahab, Elijah was blamed for the drought even though it was Ahab's sin and idolatry that had caused the problem (1 Kings 18:17-18). Rather than admit his error the wicked king tried to blame the Lord's messenger as if it was his entire fault. Nero also tried to blame the Christians for starting the fire of Rome when suspicion rested on himself.

In history those who tried to follow the Bible and live pure lives were often denounced as heretics. Groups like the Waldenses were persecuted and hunted down simply for seeking to follow the Bible!<sup>6</sup> When Martin Luther called for reform of the church he was denounced as a heretic and many thought he was possessed by a devil<sup>7</sup>. Only on the resurrection day will the full extent of the persecutions be known as the martyrs recount how they suffered and died for their Lord.

The early church faced persecution by the secular authorities. When Peter and some of the other apostles were brought before the council, they said that, "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). This is the great principle that faithful Christians have followed down the ages. Although Christians are to support the civil

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<sup>5</sup> Marc Rasell, *The Final Deception and Its Antidote*, (CreateSpace, 2011), Chapter 4 – Delusion, pp. 45-47

<sup>6</sup> Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, Vol. 5, Chapter 4 – The Waldenses, pp. 76-78

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 8 – Luther Before the Diet, pp. 154

state (Rom. 13:1-6) and are encouraged to pray for their rulers (1 Tim. 2:1-4), there are times when they have to refuse to obey the government when this conflicts with their faith. The government has its role to protect society and uphold the civil law, but they should not seek to control the conscience and the way people worship. They can hold people accountable for theft, fraud and murder, but should not dictate how they worship. These different roles are recognised in Jesus' statement, "render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Mt. 22:21).

Early Christians refused to burn incense to the Emperor's statue<sup>8</sup> because it would have been an act of worship, breaking the commandment not to worship other gods and a denial of Jesus their Lord. Many were sent to their deaths, sometimes painful deaths because they refused to compromise their faith. After times of persecution many emerged with missing limbs or eyes. God's people will ever be pilgrims and wanderers on the earth, looking for a better country and city, not made by human hands (Heb. 11:16).

It is important to recount the history of the struggle for religious freedom, because in that context it can be seen why religious liberty is so important, and what mistakes were made in the past. It also reveals how Satan works behind the scenes, using civil power to persecute those who are faithful to the Bible.

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Woodburn Hyde, *Paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire*, pp. 184, 185. Copyright 1946 by University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia. Used by permission in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students' Source Book*; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962), Vol. 9, p. 734

## **Chapter 2 The History of Religious Liberty**

After the long period of pagan persecution, a new danger arose for the Christians. By human wisdom it seemed that by making some compromises the pagans would join the church, and the church would be spared further persecution. But the result was not the conversion of the pagans but the fall of the church<sup>9</sup>. Pagan images were replaced by statues of the saints. Sun worshippers could now worship in church on the day of the sun and many converts secretly continued to worship idols. The Biblical Sabbath was gradually dropped over many centuries in favour of the more popular day of the sun. The rites of the church came to resemble magical incantations, rather than reflecting the simple faith of the apostles. Services were eventually spoken in a language not understood by the people, and came to resemble the senseless mummerly of heathen worship.

The liberty that we enjoy today is the result of hundreds of years of struggle and bloodshed against a mammoth religious system that turned to secular power for support and ruthlessly persecuted those who dissented. Such actions did not represent the true nature of Christ's gospel, who taught people to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (Mt. 5:44). Even slight variations of belief were crushed and subdued and those who held them had to hide in forests, mountains and caves in order to survive. We can think of groups like the Waldenses, Albigenses, Huguenots and the Reformers. Many were massacred and an almost infinite number were burned at the stake according or otherwise put to death according to Cardinal Bellarmine<sup>10</sup>.

It is important not to forget the history of these times because those who forget or ignore the past are doomed to make the same mistakes again. In a moment of crisis, brought on by some natural disaster, war, plague, famine, or terrorist atrocity, people are ready to look for a political saviour to solve their problems. It was in this setting that the church first gained political power. Pagan Rome collapsed following hordes

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<sup>9</sup> Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 42-43

<sup>10</sup> John Dowling, *The History of Romanism*, p. 547 [from Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation* (Review and Herald Publishing Association), pp. 133-134] see also Robert Bellarmine, *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei* ("Disputations Concerning Controversies of the Christian Faith"), Tom. II, *Controversia II*, Lib. III, *De Laicis*, Cap. XXII (Colonia Agrippina [Cologne]: Hierati Fratres, 1628), vol. 1, p. 388. Latin [from the Seventh-day Adventist Source Book, section 828, p. 464]

of invading Barbarians, famine and plague<sup>11</sup>. As classical civilisation collapsed, a new power arose to fill the vacuum, the Bishop of Rome:

“Out of the ruins of political Rome arose the great moral Empire in the ‘giant form’ of the Roman Church.”<sup>12</sup> (*Alexander C. Flick, The Rise of the Mediaeval Church*)

In times of persecution the church had remained relatively pure. The result of compromise and turning to the state for support led to many joining the church because it was popular or to gain political power. This led to the fall of the church from its apostolic purity. Rather than save the church from further persecution it actually resulted in more. When after a time the church became powerful, she persecuted and destroyed dissenters far more than pagan Rome had ever done. Eventually the inquisition was set up with its torture chambers which searched out and destroyed so called “heretics” in a systematic way. People could be accused anonymously and held for years, not being told what they were accused of and tortured so they would confess.

It is easy to make scapegoats out of religious minorities, and seek to blame them for the problems of society. That is how Hitler came to power following an economic crisis, promising to solve the problems of the country and then blaming minority groups. Although he was popular at the time, we now look in horror at the atrocities he committed. Those who spoke out like Pastor Bonhoeffer were in danger of being sent to a concentration camp.

In Bible history, Israel was warned against making covenants with the people of the land because they were idolaters (Deut. 7:2). The prophet Jeremiah warned about relying on the “arm of flesh” instead of the Lord (Jer. 17:5). Whenever Israel turned to the heathen for help rather than God it ended up in disaster. Solomon thought there would be no problem in marrying heathen wives, but eventually they

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<sup>11</sup> C. Mervyn Maxwell, *The Mark of the Beast*, Symposium on Revelation – Book II, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, Vol. 7 (Washington, DC.: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), pp. 126-127

<sup>12</sup> Alexander C. Flick, *The Rise of the Mediaeval Church* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1959), p. 150

turned him to idolatry (1 Kings 11:4). The decision of the early church to compromise with the pagans and seek support from civil power was a monumental mistake.

The church became Babylon by seeking the aid of secular powers and making compromises with pagan idolaters; as a result she lost her purity. The terrible oppression and persecution of dissenters which lasted over a thousand years is in many cases too horrible to recount. This is why Jesus said, "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved" (Mt. 24:22).

It has sometimes been denied that the church really carried out such atrocities, but historical statements affirm that they did take place<sup>13</sup>. Luther said that the church never burned heretics (meaning the true church). Cardinal Bellarmine in debate referred to Luther's statement, he thought he was referring to the Catholic Church and said, "This argument proves not the sentiment, but the ignorance or impudence of Luther; for as almost **an infinite number** were either burned or otherwise put to death, Luther either did not know it, and was therefore ignorant; or if he knew it, he is convicted of impudence and falsehood-for that heretics were often burned by the church, may be proved by adducing a few from many examples."<sup>14</sup>

Pope Martin V in a letter to the King of Poland said, "burn, massacre, make deserts everywhere, for nothing could be more agreeable to God, or more useful to the cause of kings, than the extermination of the Hussites"<sup>15</sup>

Alfred Baudrillart, rector of the Catholic Institute of Paris said, "When confronted by heresy, she does not content herself with persuasion; arguments of an intellectual and moral order appear to her insufficient, and she has recourse to force,

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<sup>13</sup> See Uriah Smith, Daniel and the Revelation, pp. 133-135 and C. Mervyn Maxwell, God Cares, Vol. 1, The Message of Daniel For You and Your Family (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1981), pp. 132-133

<sup>14</sup> John Dowling, The History of Romanism, p. 547 [from Uriah Smith, Daniel and the Revelation. pp. 133-134] see also Robert Bellarmine, Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei ("Disputations Concerning Controversies of the Christian Faith"), Tom. II, Controversia II, Lib. III, De Laicis, Cap. XXII (Colonia Agrippina [Cologne]: Hierati Fratres, 1628), vol. 1, p. 388. Latin. [from the Seventh-day Adventist Source Book, section 828, p. 464]

<sup>15</sup> L M de Cormenin, The Public and Private History of the Popes of Rome, Vol. II, pp. 116, 117 [from Uriah Smith, Daniel and the Revelation, pp. 134-135]

to corporal punishment, to torture...Especially did she act thus in the sixteenth century with regard to Protestants."<sup>16</sup>

The New Catholic Encyclopedia acknowledges that the inquisition, especially in Spain towards the close of the Middle Ages was "one of the darker chapters in the history of the church"<sup>17</sup>. It acknowledges the killing of about five to six thousand Protestants.

These figures are very modest, overlooking the crusades against the Albigenses and Waldenses, and omitting such things as the Thirty Year War, in which military and civilian casualties, Protestant and Catholic exceeded eight million. Non-Catholic research puts the figures for persecution much higher than in the thousands<sup>18</sup>.

Whatever the statistics, numbers cannot convey the personal suffering endured at this time. Such as John Brown who had his feet barbecued before being tied to the stake, or Helen Stark who was stuffed with her baby into a sack and drowned, or eight year old Billy Fetty who was cudgelled to death for sympathising with his father who had been suspended by an arm and a leg for two weeks<sup>19</sup>.

The New Catholic Encyclopedia says in its article on Torture:

"Under the influence of Germanic customs and concepts, torture was little used from the 9th to the 12th centuries, but with the revival of Roman law the practice was reestablished in the 12th century. . . . In 1252 [Pope] Innocent IV sanctioned the infliction of torture by the civil authorities upon heretics, and torture came to have a recognised place in the procedure of the inquisitorial courts."<sup>20</sup>

During the Reformation, a single monk, Martin Luther, defied the authority of the papacy over the Bible and called for reform of the corruptions inflicting the church. The Reformers rejected the notion that the papacy has the right to change

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<sup>16</sup> Alfred Baudrillart, *The Catholic Church, the Renaissance, and Protestantism*, pp. 182, 183 [from Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation*, p. 134]

<sup>17</sup> *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Inquisition", "Auto-da-Fe", "St. Bartholomew's Day, Massacre of" [from C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, Vol. 1, p. 132]

<sup>18</sup> C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, Vol. 1, p. 132

<sup>19</sup> John Foxe, *Book of Martyrs* (New York: Charles K. Moore, 1847), chaps. on persecutions in Scotland under Henry VIII and in England under Mary [from C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares* Vol. 1, pp. 132-133]

<sup>20</sup> *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, art. "Torture" [from C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, Vol. 1, p. 133]

God's laws and mediate the forgiveness of sin because these prerogatives belong only to God. Thus they identified the papacy with the man of sin or antichrist who puts himself in the temple of God (the church) as if he were God (2 Thess. 2:4)<sup>21</sup>.

Through the work of the Reformers the church was liberated from tyranny. Many of the opponents of the Reformers also wanted to see reforms of the abuses of the clergy who lived in luxury while demanding huge sums of money in return for the absolution of sins. The teaching of the Reformers that the forgiveness of sin belongs only to Christ broke the power of the papal system of penances and indulgences. People were set free to look to Christ alone for salvation, which is given as a free gift (Eph. 2:8-9). Luther was set free from years of mental agony after being taught to look to Christ for salvation by the pious Staupitz<sup>22</sup>. Although the Reformation led to more freedoms and a return to many Biblical doctrines, its work was not complete. There were still some errors that needed correcting and only a few saw that freedom of conscience must be upheld for all, whatever their religious convictions.

In England the Puritans wanted to worship God according to their conscience and not be forced to attend the parish church. The Baptists believed that only a believer should be baptised<sup>23</sup>. Although most Puritans and Baptists believed that they should observe Sunday, a few of them kept the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week because they could see no Biblical basis for Sunday keeping. One of those who called for observance of the Biblical Sabbath was Theophilus Brabourne, an Anglican clergyman. In 1628 he wrote the first English book calling for the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath<sup>24</sup>. He argued that we should keep the Ten Commandments and that Christ had not changed the Sabbath to Sunday<sup>25</sup>. Eventually he was arrested, imprisoned, fined a thousand pounds, stripped of his ministerial license and excommunicated.

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<sup>21</sup> The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, (Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington, D.C. 1966), "Antichrist"

<sup>22</sup> Ellen White, The Great Controversy, Chapter 7 – Luther's Separation from Rome, pp. 123-124

<sup>23</sup> Stan L. Hastey, Baptists and Religious Liberty, The Baptist Heritage Series  
<http://www.churchplantingvillage.net/workarea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=8589990530>  
(Baptists\_and\_Religious\_Liberty.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Bryan Ball, The Seventh-Day Men (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 62 [from Hal Holbrook, Seventh Day DVD, (LLT Productions, 2004), Part 4]

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 71, 76 [from Hal Holbrook, Seventh Day DVD, Part 4]

Because the views of the non-conformists differed from the established church they were persecuted, and eventually many migrated to the United States to find a land where they could worship freely<sup>26</sup>. Yet even here they did not see at first the importance of religious liberty and enforced their own doctrines on others. Roger Williams called for a separation of church and state and was forced to leave Massachusetts because of his radical views. Although the Puritans had been persecuted by the state, they did not see that everyone should be free to worship according to their conscience. Eventually a Bill of Rights was established giving freedom from state controlled religion. It forbade appointment to an office being based on religious affiliation. Although the American national motto is, “in God we trust”, no particular religion is specified. Those who formulated the Bill of Rights were Christians but they did not insist that those elected to political office had to be of the same faith. The history of persecution which had been experienced in the Old World was still fresh in their minds; the constitution reflected the enlightened view that the state must not control religion.

Although the Bible says that, “the throne is established by righteousness” (Prov. 16:12), one cannot legislate righteousness. Unless people voluntarily choose to follow God and His laws, attempts at reform will fail. Coercion is misguided because it encourages those not truly converted to join the church which actually weakens the church. And there is always the danger that misguided and zealous believers will try to force their own erroneous ideas upon others.

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<sup>26</sup> Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, Chapter 16 – The Pilgrim Fathers, pp. 290-292

### **Chapter 3 True Liberty**

Christian liberty is founded on the principle that we are created in the image of God and were given a free will (Gen. 1:26). When man fell he became a slave of sin and lost much of his liberty. However, man had been deceived into sin; unlike Satan he had not fully cast off his allegiance to God, so there was still hope for him. There would still be a struggle between good and evil and those who would exercise faith in Christ would be given power to overcome the evil one (Gen. 3:15)<sup>27</sup>. Jesus came to proclaim freedom to those oppressed by Satan (Luke 4:18-19) as prefigured in the year of Jubilee, when all the slaves were set free (Lev. 25:10). True liberty is found in Christ, because only he can set a person free from the shackles of sin (John 8:34-36).

Although a person has freedom to make choices, that freedom is curtailed when he is enslaved by sin (Rom. 6:16). An alcoholic who is unable to stop drinking is not truly free. A gambler addicted to gambling is enslaved. It is only through Christ that a person can truly escape the slavery of sin and be set free from these destructive habits. Hence Christ gives us back our freedom; he liberates us from sinful and self-destructive tendencies.

The mistake many make is in believing that Christian liberty sets a person free to break the law of God. If everyone in society felt free to break the Ten Commandments and went about murdering, stealing, and committing adultery, then society would be ruined and there would be no true liberty.

A person who commits crime and breaks the law ends up losing his freedom. The courts have to send lawbreakers to prison to stop them from harming others as a punishment for their crimes. So law breaking, rather than providing freedom actually leads to a loss of freedom. The statement, “obedience to law is liberty” is frequently found on courtroom walls and sometimes is inscribed over the entrance of the courthouse.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Chapter 30 – Enmity Between Man and Satan

In the great controversy between good and evil, Lucifer claimed that the angels did not need the laws of God because their hearts were naturally good<sup>28</sup>. He wanted to overthrow the law of God and stirred up rebellion in heaven, the result was anarchy and slavery to sin.

The confusion over the law comes from a misunderstanding about the meaning of Paul's writings. Paul spoke against legalism which was a real problem for some of the early believers. Legalism means trying to keep the moral law, and perhaps parts of the ceremonial law and minute man-made rules in order to earn salvation. Keeping the law does not earn us merit with God; even Abraham who kept God's commandments had to be justified by faith (Gal. 3:6; Gen. 15:6).

Someone caught in the trap of legalism remains enslaved because the law cannot set him free, it only points out his errors (Rom. 3:20; 7:7). Legalism tends to lead people to keep the law in a superficial way, and ends up with them actually breaking the law. We can see this in the life of Cain and the Pharisees who superficially kept the law but ended up breaking it by committing murder.

Only Christ can set a person free, and in that sense we are free from the law, from its condemnation and from trying to earn salvation through good works. But we are not free to break God's eternal moral law, the Ten Commandments which He wrote with His finger and spoke from Mount Sinai. Such an interpretation is taking Paul's writings out of context; he was not advocating breaking the moral law. To make this clear he states that faith does not nullify the law (Rom. 3:31), rather the law makes one conscious of sin (Rom. 3:20) and it is holy, just and good (Rom. 7:12).

We need to be careful in rejecting one error (legalism), not to fall into the trap of an equally deadly error (antinomianism - lawlessness). If you were caught breaking the speed limit and the judge decided to let you off, it would not be right to walk out of the court and say, I've been set free, so I can drive as fast as I want to!

The idea that Jesus abolished the law is clearly repudiated in his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:17) where he says, "I am NOT come to destroy

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 495

BUT to fulfil [the law]”. The Greek word “pleroo” (fulfil) can mean either to abolish or to fill something up, such as filling a cup with water. This same word is applied to the disciples being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52). Therefore Jesus is saying I came NOT to abolish the law BUT to fill it with meaning. In his sermon he says that murder is wrong, but goes further by saying even anger can break the Commandment (Mt. 5:21-22). Thus he showed the spiritual nature of the law; this is also recognised by the Apostle Paul (Rom. 7:7).

Jesus taught the permanence of the law when he said, “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail” (Lk. 16:17). And regarding those who teach others to break the least of these commandments, he said they would be called “the least in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5:19). It is clear that it was not Jesus’ purpose to abolish the moral law.

James speaks of the moral law and the Ten Commandments as the law of liberty and the Royal law (James 2:8-12). It is only a misuse of the law that enslaves a person. One illustration of this is trying to use a mirror to clean your face. A mirror is not designed to do that, and neither is taking away the mirror a valid solution, it just hides the problem. The answer is to find a cloth to wipe your face. The solution to the sin problem is in Jesus whose blood cleanses us from all sin. So the mirror and the cloth work together for a common purpose, they both have a role to play.

The Sabbath is a time for freedom when we can escape from worldly duties to spend time in communion with God. It is interesting that God specified that Sabbath privileges should be extended to servants of a household and even to domestic animals so that they may also rest (Deut. 5:14; Ex. 23:12). The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt where they were commanded to work on the Sabbath. They thought it impossible to keep the Sabbath while in slavery<sup>29</sup>. Now that they had been liberated it was important for them to recognise the needs of others and not to oppress their servants and animals. The Sabbath is a time of equality because all share the same holy time.

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<sup>29</sup> Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Conflict of the Ages Series, Volume 1 (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1890), p. 258

The true purpose of the Sabbath is freedom from sin. It is a time to commune with God and is a sign that God sanctifies us (Ex. 31:13), therefore it is a pledge that those who truly keep it will be made holy<sup>30</sup>. The Sabbath aids our walk with God and helps maintain our freedom in Christ. If we did not observe the Sabbath, we would be in danger of neglecting our relationship with God because our focus would be on our own works<sup>31</sup>. So the Sabbath is in a special sense a time of liberty when we commune with God and remember that He created us and redeemed us through Christ's atoning sacrifice.

Omitted from the preview:

**Chapter 4 Further Prophetic Developments**  
**Chapter 5 Why it is Not Safe to Remain in Babylon**

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<sup>30</sup> Marc Rasell, *The Mark of the Beast and the Seal of God* (CreateSpace, 2012), Chapter 5 – The Seal of God, pp. 28-29

<sup>31</sup> Marc Rasell, *Nehemiah the Sabbath Reformer*, (AuthorHouse, 2010), Chapter 9 – The Origin of the Sabbath, pp. 60-61