

Religious liberty, Sunday laws and the intelligent faith response

So if the Son sets you free, you will be absolutely free. (Joh 8:36 GW)

“The Reformation proclaimed Religious Liberty. The Reformers cared more for Religious Liberty than they cared for life. To them Religious Liberty was the only life. All the Religious Liberty known today either by individuals, or by States, or yet by the churches, is due to The Reformation. Yet the real Reformation Religious Liberty is little understood. . . . the Reformers clearly saw the distinction and the separation that should be made between the ecclesiastical and the civil power, and between religion and the State. They clearly made and proclaimed this distinction and separation, and steadily maintained it as one of the essential principles of The Reformation. And this is how it is that "the people of the United States," making this the fundamental principle of their government, were truest of all people to The Reformation and to Christianity, and so "changed the face of the world." A T Jones lessons from the reformation. Chapter14.

“The great movement which Wycliffe inaugurated, which was to liberate the conscience and the intellect, and set free the nations so long bound to the triumphal car of Rome, had its spring in the Bible. Here was the source of that stream of blessing, which, like the water of life, has flowed down the ages since the fourteenth century. {GC88 93.1} When one witness was forced to let fall the torch of truth, another seized it from his hand, and with undaunted courage held it aloft. The struggle had opened that was to result in the emancipation, not only of individuals and churches, but of nations. Across the gulf of a hundred years, men stretched their hands to grasp the hands of the Lollards of the time of Wycliffe. Under Luther began the Reformation in Germany; Calvin preached the gospel in France, Zwingli in Switzerland. The world was awakened from the slumber of ages, as from land to land were sounded the magic words, "Religious Liberty." {4SP 93.2}. As the tidings spread through the countries of Europe, of a land where every man might enjoy the fruit of his own labor, and obey the convictions of his conscience, thousands flocked to the shores of the New World.

The liberty God has endowed us with he will always respect it even when we make a wrong use of it. How do we know? The parable of the prodigal son demonstrates such a Father. If the father had acted in any other way it would have demonstrated that the son was not really free and that the father did not truly give liberty at all.

A T Jones the 1888 messenger defined religious liberty thus, “Religious liberty, therefore, is man’s exemption from the domination of others, or from restricting circumstances: man’s freedom to make his choices and decide his conduct for himself, spontaneously and voluntarily: in his duty to his Creator, and in the manor of discharging that duty.” **So what do we gather from this definition?**

It makes the point therefore that God is the sole judge of human faith. Also service to God must be chosen to be true and acceptable. That is it must be given spontaneously and voluntarily. Therefore the service must not be forced, any compulsory and constrained service is faithless loveless spiritless and worthless in fact only hypocrisy and wickedness. It is also indicating that religious liberty means freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience. It means the right of individual judgment in matters of faith in relation to his duty to his creator.

Inspiration concurs, “The framers of the Constitution recognized the eternal principle that man's relation to his God is above human legislation, and his right of conscience inalienable. Reasoning was not necessary to establish this truth; we are conscious of it in our own bosom. It is this consciousness, which, in defiance of human laws, has sustained so many martyrs in tortures and flames. They felt that their duty to God was superior to human enactments, and that man could exercise no authority over their consciences. It is an inborn principle which nothing can eradicate.” {GC88 295.2}

Let me repeat, liberty is a natural or inalienable right, beyond the power of state to give or remove. It means full freedom of conscience for people of all faiths or no faith. It is also the right to practice any religion or no religion without government control and coercion. Further when liberty of conscience is recognized it prevents both religious control over government and political control over religion. And so in the free exercise of religion every citizen is free to conclude, hold, practice and also change beliefs according to the dictates of conscience.

And so Christians have a peculiar liberty the nature of which is not man made and remains free in spite of any civil or human prohibition and will be innocent before God through it all.

The third angel's message of revelation 14 clearly instructs us that the inalienable right of religious liberty which has been under attack since the early 19th century will face a very fierce and final battle which has been growing in intensity over the years. This in my view is also pictured culminating in Daniel 11: 40 - 45. Included in this third angel's message are found the mechanics of the battle as stated in revelation 13 verses 11-18 and revelation 18.

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, If any man worshipped the beast and his image, and receiveth a mark on his forehead, or upon his hand, (Rev 14:9 ASV) And it was given *unto him* to give breath to it, *even* to the image to the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as should not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the bond, that there be given them a mark on their right hand, or upon their forehead; and that no man should be able to buy or to sell, save he that hath the mark, *even* the name of the beast or the number of his name. (Rev 13:15-17 ASV) And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues: (Rev 18:4 ASV)

Hence it must be important to understand the message in verity with the foundation of a faith which keeps us from presumption as we face situations tempting to such. Hence we continue to seek to explore and simplify the subject matter especially for some who still have some challenges in the area in the application with regard to the practical faith response as required by God and the relationship to civil authority when certain civil laws are introduced.

Sunday laws – how shall we respond?

We are sure from our present understanding of the 3rd angel's message that Sunday laws will be passed and later enforced on the world but in the most direct way against those who keep the commandments of God and will require a wise faith response bringing complete victory over the image and mark of the beast. At that time wisdom will be needed to act in a way which does not impede the work of God or bring untimely and unnecessary trials.

Hence it is written in the scriptures, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." Psalm 19:13.

This passage clearly indicates that when the Christian faced with trying and testing choices in regard to their duty to God and requirements by the civil authority which may appear in conflict with their duty to God, faithless responses can and will result in presumption. Hence we must pray to be kept from presumptuous sins.

Inspiration wrote many years ago, "There are many who fail to distinguish between the rashness of presumption and the intelligent confidence of faith. Satan thought that by his temptations he could delude the world's Redeemer to make one bold move in manifesting His divine power, to create a sensation, and to surprise all by the wonderful display of the power of His Father in preserving Him from injury. {Con 85.1} God has given man **precious promises upon conditions of faith and obedience; but they are not to sustain him in any rash act.** If men needlessly

place themselves in peril, and go where God does not require them to go, and self-confidently expose themselves to danger, disregarding the dictates of reason, God will not work a miracle to relieve them. He will not send His angels to preserve any from being burned if they choose to place themselves in the fire. {Con 85.3}

When Jesus was on earth he instructed his disciples thus, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. Matthew 10:16. Inspiration gives a word, "If it can be avoided, do not put yourselves into the power of men who are worked by the spirit of Antichrist.. {3SM 400.2}

Further "If you see that by doing certain things which you have a perfect right to do, you hinder the advancement of God's work, refrain from doing those things. Do nothing that will close the minds of others against the truth. There is a world to save, and we shall gain nothing by cutting loose from those we are trying to help. All things may be lawful, but all things are not expedient. {9T 215.1}. 1 Cor: 6:12 and 1 Cor 10 :23.

"If we counsel them not to respect the idol Sabbath exalted to take the place of the Sabbath of the Lord our God, then instruct them in this matter in a quiet way and encourage no defying of the law powers in words or actions unless called to do this for the honor of God to vindicate His downtrodden law. Let there be no unnecessary act of arousing the combative spirit or passions of opponents. 3 SM 395

Let me put a few simple questions before your mind. If by the law of the land you are commanded to refrain from secular Sunday labour what should be your response? Is that a restriction of religious liberty? Does it require a compromise of your faith? Does it conflict with the law of God? Should that civil law be ignored? If there is a penalty attached for non compliance of the law, would it be a wise act to ignore the law and suffer the penalty at the time whether fine or imprisonment?

Let us look at some situations in the new testament involving Jesus and the disciples which required faith and trust in divine guidance to act correctly. Important principles are brought out for our instruction.

But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. (Mat 10:23 ASV). Inspiration comments, "It is not the will of God that your lives shall be carelessly sacrificed." {RH, April 20, 1911 par. 20} Is there instruction in this command for us now and in the future?

But the Pharisees went out, and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him. And Jesus perceiving *it* withdrew from thence: and many followed him; and he healed them all, (Mat 12:14-15 ASV). And after these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Judaea, because the Jews sought to kill him. (Joh 7:1 ASV). Was this a response of fear or faith?

"And not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad. So from that day forth they took counsel that they might put him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews, but departed thence into the country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there he tarried with the disciples. (Joh 11:52-54 ASV). Are there principles in this passage for our instruction?

And when many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel together to kill him: but their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates also day and night that they might kill him: but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket. (Act 9:23-25 ASV). Was this lack of faith or a response of faith?

And when there was made an onset both of the Gentiles and of the Jews with their rulers, to treat them shamefully and to stone them, they became aware of it, and fled unto the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the region round about: and there they preached the gospel. (Act 14:5-7 ASV). Did they act right? I think so.

The people must be given the truth, straightforward, positive truth. But this truth is to be presented in the spirit of Christ. We are to be as sheep in the midst of wolves. Those who will not, for Christ's sake, observe the cautions He has given, who will not exercise patience and self-control, will lose precious opportunities of working for the Master. The Lord has not given His people the work of making a tirade against those who are transgressing His law. In no case are we to make a raid on the other churches. {CCh 318.4}

“To defy the Sunday laws will but strengthen in their persecution the religious zealots who are seeking to enforce them. Give them no occasion to call you lawbreakers. . . . One does not receive the mark of the beast because he shows that he realizes the wisdom of keeping the peace by refraining from work that gives offense. . .

“When the practices of the people do not come in conflict with the law of God, you may conform to them. **If the workers fail to do this, they will not only hinder their own work, but they will place stumbling blocks in the way of those for whom they labor, and hinder them from accepting the truth.** On Sunday there is the very best opportunity for those who are missionaries to hold Sunday schools, and come to the people in the simplest manner possible, telling them of the love of Jesus for sinners, and educating them in the Scriptures. . . . {Mar 177.2}

Sunday laws and the domain of God

And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because that in it he rested from all his work which God had created and made. (Gen 2:2-3 ASV) Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest; that thine ox and thine ass may have rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the sojourner, may be refreshed. (Exo 23:12 ASV)

Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? to his own lord he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be made to stand; for the Lord hath power to make him stand. (Rom 14:4 ASV) One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind. (Rom 14:5 ASV) So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. (Rom 14:12 ASV)

“That repeats the original truth that is expressed in *Genesis* and all the way through the Book. The observance of a day, the observance of a Sabbath or a rest day, pertains to God: and to the relationship between God and the individual faith and conscience. Rom: 14: 4. God has appointed a day that is true. He calls upon all people to observe that day, that is true. But in the original freedom in which he has created man, any man is free to choose not to do it just as he is free to choose not to believe His word. And when any man chooses not to regard the day that God appointed, his responsibility for it is to God alone, and not to any man, to any set of men, to any legislature, or to any court on earth. Thus the truth cannot be forced upon men. For it to be to men the truth that it really is, it must be received upon their personal choice freely made: and when men simply cannot be compelled to obey the truth, much less should they be compelled to believe that which is a lie. A T Jones in his book religious liberty.

Therefore, by the word of God, all this campaign that covers the whole land, yes, covers all Christendom, that is seeking for law, more and more law, to compel the observance of a day, whether it be Sunday or any other day—even if it were the day that God has appointed—is a direct invasion of the province of God and of the realm of faith and conscience; and must be repudiated by every Christian; by every one who would respect the sovereignty of God and

the freedom of faith and conscience—in a word, by every soul who would regard religious liberty.” A T Jones.
Religious liberty P: 3.

“The duty to worship God is based upon the fact that he is the Creator, and that to him all other beings owe their existence. And wherever, in the Bible, his claim to reverence and worship, above the gods of the heathen, is presented, there is cited the evidence of his creative power.” “All the gods of the nations are idols; but the Lord made the heavens.” [Psalm 96:5.] “To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things.” “Thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; . . . I am Jehovah; and there is none else.” [Isaiah 40:25, 26; 45:18.] Says the psalmist, “Know ye that Jehovah, he is God; it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves.” “O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.” [Psalm 100:3; 95:6.] And the holy beings who worship God in Heaven state, as the reason why their homage is due to him, **“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for thou hast created all things.”** [Revelation 4:11.] {GC88 436.2}

When and in what situation should I ignore the enforcement of Sunday laws.

The great issue so near at hand [enforcement of Sunday laws] will weed out those whom God has not appointed and He will have a pure, true, sanctified ministry prepared for the latter rain.--3SM 385 (1886).

At present Sunday-keeping is not the test. The time will come when men will not only forbid Sunday work, but they will try to force men to labor on the Sabbath, and to subscribe to Sunday observance or forfeit their freedom and their lives. But the time for this has not yet come, for the truth must be presented more fully before the people as a witness....Mar Chapter 169.

The truth should be presented in short articles, in clear, distinct lines, giving special points in regard to the Lord's Sabbath, and showing that those who frame laws to compel the observance of the first day of the week are disloyal to the Lord of heaven, who placed His sanctity upon the seventh day. Are we doing all we can to exalt the law of Jehovah?--Lt 58, 1906.

A time is coming when the law of God is, in a special sense, to be made void in our land [the United States]. The rulers of our nation will, by legislative enactments, enforce the Sunday law, and thus God's people will be brought into great peril. When our nation, in its legislative councils, shall **enact laws to bind the consciences of men in regard to their religious privileges**, enforcing Sunday observance, and bringing oppressive power to bear against those who keep the seventh-day Sabbath, the law of God will, to all intents and purposes, be made void in our land. Mar Chapter 171.

We are not required to defy authorities. Our words, whether spoken or written, should be carefully considered, lest we place ourselves on record as uttering that which would make us appear antagonistic to law and order. We are not to say or do anything that would necessarily close up our way. We are to go forward in Christ's name, advocating the truths committed to us. ***If we are forbidden by men to do this work, then we may say, as did the apostles, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."*** [Acts 4:19, 20.]--"The Acts of the Apostles," pages 68, 69. May we seek earnestly for that heavenly wisdom which God has promise and waits to give as needed and in good measure.

Yours in Christian liberty

P L Blackman. -----18/12/2021.

