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WHAT IS TRUE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

I believe too many people have no idea as to what is true religious freedom. Is “religious freedom” something given to us by God or by man? We Americans have grown accustomed to thinking that our government determines our “religious freedom.” And it is evident in the light of this Covid-19 crisis that it may seem to some that such freedom is being restricted by the present political party that is in power. But “**true religious freedom**” does not begin or end with man. It begins with God, it is sustained by the Spirit of God, and it will always be maintained by the work of the Holy Spirit in our life. That is if we have submitted ourselves to God.

Now I am not advocating rebellion on the part of Christians in any situation. I have found that there are times when we as Christians need to learn more how to let God fight our battles rather than to engage in some form of resistance. It is never easy to submit to any form of authority especially if that authority is anti-God, anti-Christ, and anti-religious. Remember when Moses decided to take matters in his own hands on behalf of his Jewish brethren, and ended up killing an Egyptian...even his own people turned against him over that incident. (Exod. 2:11-14) I am sure that Moses felt that he was fighting for justice. But it is better to trust God for justice than to rely on our own strength because God can do more in five minutes than we can in a lifetime.

It is always good to know when to put up a resistance and when not to. Moses learned the art of that truth....and when they did come up to a situation in which they found themselves powerless such as at the Red Sea, God took matters in his own hands and drowned almost the entire Egyptian Army in the Red Sea and sent Pharaoh home humiliated. (Exod. 15:4; Deut. 11:4) There are times when God will tell his children that you will not need to fight in this battle (2 Chron. 20:17); that they only need to take their positions and stand firm.

Religious freedom is when we know when to fight and resist certain powers that be and when not to, and merely show our peace. Therefore, I am not advocating that we always be rebellious to our government. There are some laws which are on the books even presently that all citizens should observe and follow. Yet there are some laws which Congress is right now trying to pass, such as the one called the “Equality Act” which is really an “inequality” law - if passed it will discriminate against those of the Christian faith, parents, and even young girls in sports. I believe there is nothing wrong in contacting your political representatives of your opposition to such proposed laws.

I realize that many of those who are actively involved in the political process are against about everything that the Church of the living God stands for. Even the mass-media has become an advocate of many of their policies; especially with this so called “Equality Act.” If the Senate passes the “Equality Act,” which has already passed the House of Representatives, it will turn out to be an all-out assault on parental rights, on the family, and on millions of people of faith in our nation. As one opponent wrote of this proposed legislation said, “*It quarantines faith within your mind and says that is where it must stay.*”

Of course this is where I advocate that we as must stand firm in what I call our “**religious freedom**” because it has been given to us by God and not man. And any law of man that requires that I violate my conscience I have the freedom to do what the three Hebrew children did when compelled to bow before any image/idol - they resisted. Now their resistance of such a law brought cause to arrest them and throw them into a fiery furnace of which they realized was possible...and in which they did suffer. But miraculously, in the end they were delivered. But they were willing to die if that was necessary rather than to offend their Lord and Master....this is what we call religious freedom when we are free to disobey regardless of the consequences it may bring.

HOW TO DEVELOP RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Now, I realize not everyone who says they are a Christian is willing to pay such a price....why? The reason is because they have not matured in their faith as well as in their love for God, truth, holiness, and righteousness. Oh they may be willing to stand for some things and may even proudly boast of such courage. It is easier to make profound statements and boast of something they would do if it was necessary, but in the end fail to carry out. All of Christ disciples made the boast that they were willing to die for the Master....but when the opportunity came, they all fled. (John 13:38; Mark 14:50)

It easy to talk our faith, but it is another thing to be willing to pay the heavy price when that is the only option. We cannot do it in the flesh. Only people who have allowed the Holy Spirit to do an inward work in their life will ever be able to endure such violence to their body, mind, and soul. We all admire those people in the news such as the Catholic sisters of Saint Mary who have paid a heavy price in their resistance of abortion.

And we all admire the courage of Jack Phillips, the Baker who refused to use his craft to celebrate a gay wedding. But what about another lawsuit that he is facing in regards to the transgender issue... while he was able to fight the battle the first time and win... but now he is headed into another battle at such a high price merely to stay in business with his craft. You see, we are dealing with an enemy that does not quit...fighting. The question is, will we? We will if we allow the enemy to wear out our patience...and steadfastness. Even the Prophet Elijah found in spite of the fact that he could be so bold to take on his king and queen, he eventually ran out of strength. Only an angelic angel visit could revive what had died in him after such a long struggle. Satan is determined to wear out the patience of the saints. (Rev. 14:12).

That is why we need *“religious freedom,”* which comes from God not just the US Constitution, in this long struggle. *Francis Schaeffer*, in his book, ***How Should We Then Live***, spoke of a type of person, who is able to stand when the pressures are not too great, but when pressures mount, if then they do not have a sufficient base, they crash...then he added; ***“Culture and freedom of people are fragile because without a sufficient base, when such pressures come only time is needed --- and often not a great deal of time, before there is a crash.”***

We are watching how a “Covid-19” crisis can affect our everyday habits. We have watched shut downs in sports, schools, halls of government, churches, and even shopping malls. Our seniors have been told to stay home. Our children have been told to stay home from school. Our churches have been told to tell our people to stay home. Seniors have had to die without any family member present. Our restaurants have been closed. Avoid social hugs, hand-shakes, and sitting too close. Now we are told to wear double masks. Criminals have had a hay-day in committing crime with a legal mask which hid their identity. It is like the world has been turned up-side-down. And it seems the media enjoys prolonging this thing by telling us that there is always the possibility of another break out of some unknown disease.

Just as this “Covid-19” crisis has affected us in every aspect of life, Satan wants to do the same thing to the church. If he can stop Missionaries in the field, churches in their giving, young people in their schooling, family and friends in their socializing, he will achieve his plan to isolate us from our mission, from our fellowship, from our worship times, and from our service to one another. There comes a time when we need to break out of shelters while the bombs are falling in order for us to accomplish our mission in reaching the lost for Jesus Christ.

Don't forget there are people who still work daily: the fire department, the police department, government officials, and hospitals. Why? Because they are needed. Are not Christians needed as well? Do we not have a role to play in this hour? Have we not received a mandate? Have we not been called to the lost and dying? Is there not a role that we can play in this epidemic or one that may come our way again? When Peter answered the call to go with the people who invited him to a house of the Gentiles...was it not unlawful for him to do such a thing? (Acts 10:1-48) But he went anyway because he had the religious freedom to do that. While it was not the law of the land, or the law of the synagogue, it was the command of the Lord. God had given him the religious liberty to do so. Maybe this is the message for us today. Amen.