

Religious Liberty

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1. Religious Liberty: The Gift of God

Religion is

“the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it.”

Liberty is

“the state of being exempt from the domination of others, or from restraining circumstances. In ethics and philosophy, the power in any rational agent to make his choices and decide his conduct for himself, spontaneously and voluntarily, in accordance with reasons or motives.”

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 manner of discharging that duty.

Since God has created man, in the nature of things the first of all relationships is that to God; and the first of all duties could be nothing but duty to God.

Suppose a time when there was only one intelligent creature in the universe. He was created: and his relationship to his Creator, his duty to his Creator, is the only one that could possibly be. That is the first of all relationships that can possibly be. Therefore it is written that

Mark 12

²⁹ ...The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord:

³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

All there is of any soul is first due to God; because it all came from God. This, therefore, is the first of all commandments, not because it is the first one that was ever given by spoken word, or that was ever written out; but because it is the first that could possibly be; and this because it is the ex-

pression of the first principle of the existence of any intelligent creature. The principle was there, inherent in the existence of the first intelligent creature, in the first moment of his existence.

Now, though that is the first of all possible relationships, and the first of all duties; though that relationship and duty are inherent in the very existence of intelligent creatures; yet even in that inherent obligation, God has created every intelligent creature free—free to recognize that obligation or not, free to discharge that duty or not, just as he chooses.

Accordingly it is written:

Joshua 24

¹⁵ Choose you this day whom you will serve.

Revelation 22

¹⁷ Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Thus it is absolutely true that in religion—in the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it—God has created man entirely “exempt from the domination of others and from restricting circumstances;” has made him free “to make his choice, and decide his conduct for himself, spontaneously and voluntarily.”

Thus religious liberty is the gift of God, inherent in the gift of rational existence itself.

Any service as to God that is not freely chosen by him who renders it is not service to God. There can be no virtue in it; there can be none of God in it.

Any service rendered as to God that is not freely chosen on the part of him who renders it cannot be of God; because “God is love”: and love and compulsion, love and force, love and oppression, never can go together.

Therefore any duty, any obligation, anything, offered or rendered as to God that is not of the individual’s own freely chosen choice, can neither be of God nor to God.

Accordingly when the Lord created whatever creature—an-

gel or man—in order that that creature should be happy in the service of God, and in order that there should be virtue in rendering service or worship to God, He created him free to choose to do so.

And freedom to choose to do so carries with it, and in it, freedom to choose not to do so. Therefore, when God says to all creatures,...

Joshua 24

¹⁵ Choose you this day whom you will serve,

...it is left to each creature in the universe to decide for himself in his own freedom what he will do; whether he will serve God or not.

And when in that freedom he makes a wrong use of his choice, and chooses not to serve God, then, even then, mark it—even then, God, being God, does not persecute him, does not set him at naught, and does not hunt him.

He does seek him; yet not to pursue him, but, as it is stated in the parable of the one sheep that was lost away on the mountain alone, he goes to find him, and seeks him to bring him back.

Therefore note this truth: when God has made every creature perfectly free to choose to serve him, and in that, free to choose not to serve him—when that creature exercises his choice in the way not to serve God, even then God only loves him: for God is only love.

The only disposition that God has toward him is to love him, and by every possible means to win him yet to the choice to love him and serve him. That is God, and that is religious liberty.

2. God is the Author of Freedom

All that was said in the preceding article of God's disposition only to love, and not to condemn or oppress, one of his children who has made a wrong use of his freedom to choose, and has chosen not to honor God, is fully expressed in that proclamation and revelation which God made of himself, of what he is, when in the mount, as Moses was there with him, God promised to make all his goodness to pass before him, and to make him acquainted with himself.

Then in this revelation of himself, the Lord passed by before Moses and proclaimed:

Exodus 34

⁶ The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

This is what he *is*, not what he *does*—as if he could do something else. No, this is what he is; and in this he is God. He cannot cease to be God; and therefore cannot cease to be what is here said, for this is what he is.

What is it, then, that he is? Merciful—full of mercy. Mercy is the disposition, the very heart's life, to treat people better than they deserve. That is himself, and he never treats anybody, he never will treat anybody, he never can treat anybody, in any other way than better than he deserves; because merciful is what he is.

Therefore, when one, in his freedom of choice which is essential to virtue, which is essential to happiness, and to the true worship of God—when in the exercise of that freedom, any person exercises it the wrong way and makes the wrong choice, makes the wrong use of it, God is ever merciful to him, treating him better than he deserves, in order that he may be brought to reverse his choice and put it on the right side.

Next he is gracious. Gracious is favorable, extending, holding forth favor. And this God does to all creatures, whatever their condition or position may be. God being God, being gracious, he is gracious to every creature, whatsoever the creature may be and whatsoever his condition may be.

Consequently when any one exercises his choice in the wrong way, makes a wrong use of it, instead of God abandoning him, threatening him, throwing him over, persecuting him, blotting him out of existence, he is ever gracious, holding forth to him favor, not in any sanction or approval of his wrong course, but in order that if by any possibility he may reverse his choice and use it on the right side.

God is not only merciful and gracious, but long-suffering. The definition of God's long-suffering is "salvation":

2 Peter 3

¹⁵ The long-suffering of our Lord is salvation.

Then when one makes the wrong use of his freedom, turns his choice to the wrong side, and goes the wrong way, all the disposition that God has toward him, all that God has for that person, all that he holds out to him is mercy and grace and salvation, seeking to save him from that wrong course, to win him from the wrong use of his choice, to awaken him to himself and to God, that he may choose to make the right use of his freedom of choice and choose to recognize and serve his Creator.

By the way, I just now used the expression, "Awake the person to himself"—awake him to himself and God. This recalls the word that Jesus spoke in the parable of the prodigal son. That parable tells this whole story. There was that son, who chose to leave his father's house and go off for himself; but he made the wrong choice when he started. He was free to choose to do just as he did, but he made the wrong choice, and things did not go well with him.

When he made the choice to live outside his father's house,

and away from his father, he went down and down and down, until he reached such a point of deprivation that he fain would have picked up the husks and wrung some more substance from them after they had been abandoned by the swine. When he reached that point,—remember the record is in the words of Jesus—“he came to himself.” And the next thing in the record is, when he came to himself, he thought of his father. And the next thing is that he said, “I will arise and go to my father.”

Note the moment he came to himself, the first thought was of his father. And what, all this time, was the father’s attitude toward him? While that son was away, wasting his father’s substance and degrading himself in riotous living, thus lost to himself and to his father by his wrong choice, his father was still thinking of him, was still waiting for him, was still longing that he would come to himself, and come home.

And when at last this son did come to himself, and think of his father’s house, and said to himself, “I will arise and go to my father,” even when “he was yet a great way off, his father saw him,” and when he saw him he “ran” to meet him with joyous welcome, caresses, and kisses.

What is that parable for? What does it tell? It tells the heavenly Father’s attitude toward those who make a wrong use of the freedom which he has given to every soul.

It tells the divine story of religious liberty.

Otherwise, there would be no such thing as freedom. If it were not so, if God treated any creature otherwise than just that way, the word freedom would not express it, for it would not be freedom; for then the service might be of constraint, not willing, and so have the taint of bondage not the fragrance of freedom.

Bear in mind that the freedom of which God is the Author and Giver is freedom indeed. Absolutely, infinitely, and eternally it is so.

3. Religious Liberty for Unbelievers

Thus far we have considered the subject of Religious Liberty, upon the original foundation, in view of the original principles, and as involved in the original conditions. Let us now consider it in actual experiences.

Man did use his freedom of choice the wrong way. He did choose to sin, and when he had done this, what is the first manifestation of God's disposition toward him and of God's treatment of him, after he had gone the wrong way in the garden?

After the man had made his choice to do the wrong thing, to serve the wrong one, and to go the wrong way, and God came into the garden, it is true that the man was afraid and hid himself. But did he need to be afraid? That is the question that is here asked.

Was there on the Lord's side any ground for the man to be afraid of God? Did God go into the garden to condemn or punish the man?

No; his fear was but the result of what he had done. He had made a wrong choice, he had started the wrong way, he was under the wrong master, and his own life being separated from God and committed to the wrong, in the darkness and gloom of the evil in which he had been taken, he misjudged God, and so was afraid of him.

But when the man was come face to face with God, and the Lord had brought the fault to its original source in the evil one, what then did he say? He spoke the word that then meant and everlastingly means only salvation to every soul of man;

Genesis 3

¹⁵ I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it [the seed of the woman] shall bruise your head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

The first thing that God brought to the man after he had made his wrong choice was the word of salvation. That word of salvation was the promise of the One to come who should break off this evil that had been fastened upon man, set the man free again, and bring him to God, where his choice would be on the right side, and he dwell truly with God and in God.

And when Jesus (of whom this was the promise), came into the world in the flesh, in the exact expression of all that we have so far found, this is his word:

John 12

⁴⁷ If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not.

What word is it that Christ brought that he desires every man should hear? Only the word of God—the word of salvation. He is only the Saviour, he is not the destroyer; and therefore his name when he came into the world was Jesus, Saviour, because...

Matthew 1

²¹ ...he shall save his people from their sins.

The other name given him was “Emmanuel,” which is by interpretation, “God with us.” When he came, he came as God with us; that is, bringing God to man, to make man acquainted with God as the Saviour, which alone he is, and cannot be anything else.

Thus he came bringing only the word of salvation. And when he came presenting that word in whatever way, in whatever light, he could present it to mankind, yet he proclaims the whole principle of original and eternal religious liberty:

John 12

⁴⁷ If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not.

And although that is exactly as it is here quoted, yet there are professed Christian people who cannot believe that it is

there until they have opened their own Bibles and read, and have found that it says just that. And even then, they can hardly believe that it is right. They say,

“That is not the way I thought it read,—I thought it read, ‘If any man hear my word and believe, I judge him not;’ and, if he does not believe, then I supposed that he would be judged and punished for it.”

But that is not the way of Christ and of God. That is the way of the world. Indeed, that has been for ages the way of the church. And even yet, far, far too much, that is the way in the churches; even to the very latest church.

When the church presents the gospel, the word of God which is committed to the church of God to preach, and the people choose not to obey it, but to reject it, then they are immediately judged as unworthy of further attention or recognition, presently judged to be incorrigible, and then to be compelled to obey, or to be punished for not obeying, the dictates of the church framed into the law of the state.

And just there is where the turn is made from religious liberty to religious despotism, from Christianity to anti-Christianity. But that is not the Christian way; that is not Christ’s way; that is not God’s way; that is not religious liberty.

Religious liberty, Christian religious liberty, in the word of Christ is,

John 12

⁴⁷ If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not.

Then when Christ sends forth me or you as his ambassador to present his word to the people, and we present it to them, and they choose not to believe it, that is their freedom; and that they choose to exercise their freedom in that way is none of our business at all. They do not derive their existence from us, they are not responsible to us, but to God only.

We are not to judge them! Nor to set them at naught; nor

in any way to slight them; but only to love them freely as before, and seek by every possible Christian means to win them to see that what we preach is the word of God, and the word of Christ; and to win them to believe in him.

Further: God has put his word here to be believed. He longs and waits with all long-suffering for the people to believe it. And when he gives that word to you and to me to present to the people that they may believe it, and at the first essay they choose not to believe it, and then we treat them so as to offend them, we, by that act, are preventing the very thing we are sent to do.

We are sent to persuade the people to believe the word of God. When a man chooses not to believe it, and I take a course toward him that will offend him, thereby I fix it so that he will not be inclined to believe it. Indeed, he will be less inclined to believe it, and less liable to obey and go in the right way than if he had never heard me at all. And I by such a course have defeated the very purpose for which I was sent forth into the world.

Therefore the only true way to treat people when we present the word of God to them and they reject it, is just as lovingly, just as tenderly, just as winningly as the great mercy and loving-kindness and long-suffering of the Lord can enable us to do: that thus we may still induce them to incline to believe, and in believing choose to go in the right way.

We are commanded to...

2 Timothy 4

² ...exhort with all longsuffering.

And let it be said again, for it cannot be too much emphasized: when Christians take any other course toward those who do not believe, they prevent the very things that they profess to be trying to accomplish.

4. Religious Liberty in the Gospel

It is not ourselves only, it is not the Lord's side alone, that is to be considered. It is also the man himself. Read the next verse:

John 12

⁴⁷ For I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

⁴⁸ He that rejects me and receives not my word...

(which in the previous verse he has recognized his freedom to do)

...has one that judges him...

Who is this "one" that judges him who believes not? It is not Christ, nor is it God. For Christ, in whom God is manifest and who is "God with us," plainly says that he judges him not.

Who then is that "one"?

...the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

Note it: the words that he spoke are the words of eternal life:

John 12

⁴⁹ For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.

⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.

John 6

⁶⁸ ...you have the words of eternal life.

Whether by him as it is in the Bible, or by his true ambassador today, when that word is presented, eternal life is presented; because the word is the word of eternal life, bringing the life of God to every soul who receives it.

That being the word of eternal life, whosoever rejects it, rejects eternal life. And when he chooses to reject eternal life, in

doing that he chooses eternal death. Then who judges him to death? Who puts him in the way of death? Only himself, by his own free choice.

There can be no other way of it. For when God holds forth to me the word and the way of life, and beseeches me by every possible consideration to receive eternal life; and against it all, I choose to exercise my freedom in rejecting that life, in so doing I do choose death. When life is gone, death is the only thing that remains. When eternal life is rejected, eternal death is chosen. And he who makes that choice, does himself put himself in the way of death. He himself judges himself worthy only of death.

And so says the Scripture:

John 12

⁴⁸ He that rejects me, and receives not my words, has one that judges him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

In the thirteenth chapter of *Acts*, when Paul and Silas had preached at Antioch, and the Gentiles besought that the same words might be preached to them the next Sabbath day, and almost the whole city came together the next Sabbath “to hear the word of God;” and the Jews, filled with envy, “contradicted and blasphemed,” then Paul and Silas waxed bold and said:

Acts 13

⁴⁶ ...It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

Who judged those people unworthy of everlasting life? Only themselves. How? By persistently rejecting the word of God, which is the word of everlasting life, contradicting and blaspheming.

In yet another scripture this same story is told:

Romans 1

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

¹⁷ For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

The Revised Version gives a stronger translation:

¹⁸ ...who hold down the truth in unrighteousness.

The truth comes to them, but they refuse to accept it, they hold it down; again it comes to them, but they beat it back in unrighteousness. And the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold down, who beat back, the truth in unrighteousness.

You note that even then the wrath of God is not primarily against the men. The word does not say that his wrath is against ungodly and unrighteous men, but against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man.

The eternal love of God is manifested to every unrighteous man. And every unrighteous man who will accept the word and gift of the love of God will be saved from all unrighteousness and all ungodliness. The wrath of God is against, and will smite, the ungodliness and unrighteousness of the man; but the man himself will be eternally saved.

The wrath of God is not against the man; but against the ungodliness and unrighteousness that is in the man. And when the man rejects the word of God's salvation, which would save him from all ungodliness and unrighteousness, and so identifies himself with the ungodliness and unrighteousness, so that when the wrath of God smites that, it cannot miss the man because he has persistently identified himself with it, then only himself is responsible for that, and by his own confirmed choice.

Then when the finality comes, you know it is written to those on the left hand he says,

Matthew 25

⁴¹ Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire...

...prepared for you? Oh no, not prepared for a single man that was ever in this world...

⁴¹ ...prepared for the devil and his angels.

Whosoever gets there, goes because he chooses to go there rather than to be with God in heaven. For when they do go there, they go to a place prepared for somebody else, not for them; and it is of their own free choice that they are there. They made the choice, and stuck to it, and that is the only place where they can land. And when they find themselves there, they should be just as glad of it as when they made their choice.

Thus from the beginning to the end, from the creation of the first creature until the destruction of the last creature that shall ever exist, man is upon the foundation of absolute freedom; free to use his freedom in such way as he chooses.

And through it all God presents himself in every possible way that even he can, to persuade the man to see and walk in the right way; to use his choice as he should.

When against it all, the man uses his choice in the wrong way, he gets at last simply what he has chosen, and he himself is the only one responsible for it. And that is freedom, that is religious liberty.

Thus we have found that when Jesus came as the representative of God—presenting God again to the world—he presented religious liberty on the same foundation as in the beginning.

5. Religious Liberty in the Church

We have found that on the original foundation, in original conditions, in actual experiences, and in the teaching and works of Jesus, religious liberty has held on, the same true and perfect liberty.

How, now, with the apostles and the early Christians when they went forth to preach the gospel after Christ had gone back to heaven?

The briefest and yet the fullest view of this phase of the subject is in the fourteenth chapter of *Romans*, beginning with the first verse and reading to the twelfth:

Romans 14

¹ Receive him that is weak in the faith.

Don't forget that. When he is weak in the faith, he is liable not to live just as righteously and just as perfectly as you and I do. But that is because he is weak in the faith. We are to recognize this and have sympathy, and be merciful toward the weak member.

Romans 14

¹ Receive him that is weak in the faith, but not to doubtful disputations.

The margin reads, "Not to judge his doubtful thoughts." Not to question him as to just how he believes this or that or the other thing.

Mark it: though he "is weak in the faith," it is the faith that he is weak in. And he who has faith, however weak it may be, that faith connects him with divinity; that faith opens the door to him of eternal life; that faith comes from God and connects him with God; and that faith, though he be weak in it, is entitled to the divine respect of all in heaven and on earth.

So let me say it again, though he be "weak in the faith," it is the faith in which he is weak; and we are to respect the faith,

because that faith is of God. Faith is of Christ; of it Christ is the author and finisher; and all men must so regard it or else be guilty of supplanting and opposing Christ.

Accordingly, no man, no set of men that ever was or shall ever be on earth, can ever have any authority or any right to judge anybody's faith or lack of faith in any degree whatever. Faith is a personal thing, wholly between him who has it and the Author of it.

Romans 14

²² Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God.

What is the word of God concerning Christ when he should come?

Isaiah 42

³ A bruised reed shall he not break...

A bruised reed! You have seen it. Something has struck it on the side. The bruise shows. It is almost ready to topple over. The slightest touch on the opposite side would cause it to bend a little too far and break. This is the one that is weak in the faith.

And instead of putting so much as a breath against that bruised reed that would cause it to bend too far and break, every soul must handle it tenderly, and seek to strengthen the life that is in it, that the bruise may be overcome, the faith sustained and increased, and life received and enjoyed.

Isaiah 42

³ ...and the smoking flax shall he not quench.

It is true that flax is exceedingly inflammable; and yet on the other hand, when flax is down only to the smoking point it does not take much to put it out. While flax is perhaps the most easily ignited when the blaze is there, yet it is also the most easily extinguished when the blaze is slower, and it is only smoking.

And he who finds in the world one whose faith is so low, so almost extinguished, that it is compared only to the smok-

ing flax, he must be most careful toward such, that he shall exert upon that weak faith no dampening influence that would cause it to be less alive.

Even a breath must be only of the breath of life, and it must be breathed so tenderly as to strengthen the faith that is weak and make him who has it a victor. That is the word to you and me.

Romans 14

¹ Receive him that is weak in the faith.

Suppose the individual has not the exact degree of faith that I have. That is none of my business; because I am not the author of faith. He does not owe his faith to me, he does not owe his service to me. Nor does he owe it to you, nor to any other man or set of men on earth.

Has he faith in Jesus Christ? That is the thing. And when he has, however weak it be, he owes it all to God. It all comes from God, and his relationship in it is solely to God; and you and I have nothing whatever to do with it, but only to respect it, to encourage it, and to strengthen it.

Romans 14

² One believes that he may eat all things; another who is weak eats herbs.

³ Let not him that eats despise him that eats not; and let not him which eats not judge him that eats; for God has received him.

God received him upon his faith. Even though it be a faith that is only as the strength of a bruised reed or only as the smoking flax; remember that "God has received him" upon that faith. And he will breathe life into that faith and make it grow, and make the man strong unto eternal life.

Romans 14

⁴ Who are you that judges another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.

And I am not his master, nor are you his master,

Matthew 23

⁸ One is your Master, even Christ; and all you are brethren.

Let it be so.

Romans 14

⁴ Who are you that judges another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.

All that an individual with faith in Christ, owes, because of that faith, he owes to Christ. He is subject to Christ alone; he owes to him his service, his life, his all. Our place—yours and mine—is to be helpers of his joy, and not judges of his faith. Such a one is God's child, and by the Lord he will be kept, upon his faith; for we read, strictly in this connection:

⁴ ...he shall be held up, for God is able to make him stand.

And this is still the same true religious liberty that we have been studying from the beginning; but here it is the religious liberty of the other man.

It is easy enough for each man to claim religious liberty for himself. All are ever ready to do this. But very few are they who claim religious liberty for the other man.

The fourteenth chapter of *Romans* teaches us to recognize and to be forever true to the religious liberty of the other man. And it is eternally true that whosoever does not recognize and be true to the religious liberty of the other man does not recognize, and is not true to, religious liberty for himself, as religious liberty is in truth. True religious liberty he does not know.

6. Religious Liberty in the Nation

After making plain in the fourteenth chapter of *Romans* the religious liberty of the other man, and the importance that every soul shall recognize this, next there is taken up the thought and the importance of “the powers that be” recognizing and respecting religious liberty.

Therefore it is written:

Romans 14

⁵ One man esteems one day above another: another esteems every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

That touches a question that is rife everywhere today; the question of compelling people to observe a certain day and in a certain way. But in the matter of observance of a day, the regarding of one day above another, God says to all people,

Romans 14

⁵ ...Let every men be fully persuaded in his own mind.

⁶ He that regards the day, regards it unto the Lord; and he that regards not the day, to the Lord he does not regard it.

So you see any day regarded not to the Lord is not truly regarded at all: for there is nothing in it truly to regard. Therefore, since the observance of a day is a matter that pertains to God, and lies between God and the individual's faith and conscience, any observance of a Sabbath or rest-day enforced by law, by statute, by police, judge, court, or prosecution, is an invasion of the province of God and the realm of faith and conscience in the first instance; and in the second instance, is not the observance of the day and never can be.

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. 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.

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.

Service to God must be chosen to be true and acceptable. When it is not freely chosen and is compelled, such compulsory and constrained service is only sin. As the leading church historian has expressed it,

“The truth itself forced on man otherwise than by its own inward power, becomes falsehood.” (Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion*, vol. 3, p. 186)

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 obey lies.

Another phase of this invasion of the province of God and of the realm of faith and conscience is the widespread and growing demand for the established teaching of religion in the public schools. Only the last spring this phase of the question was by an organized movement pressed at Washington City: and for a purpose this was done at the capital of the na-

tion.

Yet what was done at Washington is but a part of a movement that is being conducted throughout the whole land. There is a national association that has gained a large place, that is organized expressly to get the government, whether state or national, committed to the established teaching of religion in the public schools. These things serve to make it plain that this subject of religious liberty is a living issue, and a very present truth.

But remember the definition of religion:

“The duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it.”

And from the Scripture and divine principles which we have studied, it is evident that when any nation, any state, any people or government, puts itself between man and God and undertakes to decide in the matter of religion and faith, and presumes to put upon man against his choice what some men say that the recognized religion shall be, then such is not religion at all: it is iniquity. Even though they may intend that it shall be the right religion, the Christian religion, yet when it is forced upon men, it is destroyed as the Christian religion.

By such procedures men are separated from God: and a set of men have put themselves between man and God, have shut out God, and require that men shall render obedience to what they say is the faith. It is no longer having faith to yourself before God: but having faith to a set of men before the government. Has not that been tried enough in the world for people in this age to have found it out?

It is one of the most surprising things that people in this day and in this nation should act in all things just as if this were the earliest of all nations, instead of the latest. If the United States were the first nation on earth, and the people without any advantage of experience were feeling their way along, there might be some possibility of an excuse for the

course that the people are taking today.

But when the United States is the latest of all the nations, and has the benefit of all the experience of all the nations and countries from Nimrod down until this hour, then for the people of the United States to act as they are acting in this matter of national and enforced religion, just as if history had never occurred, and they with blinded eyes go crookedly on in opposition to all the lessons of human experience—that is a most puzzling thing.

Has not this identical thing been tried over and over in every nation from the time that Nimrod set up his kingdom, until now? Has not every nation, and every government from Nimrod until now tried to compel people to be religious? But were they ever made religious by compulsion? In every instance it has only increased iniquity, and has been sheer vanity from beginning to end.

And when Christianity came into the world, itself conceived in religious liberty, and preached religious liberty to the world, the perversion of it brought the Dark Ages and the great power of the papacy, and compulsory religion again.

And when in the Dark Ages the papacy dominated all Europe and dictated the faith and compelled all to be religious—what did it bring? It brought the worst system of iniquity, and the most widespread evil that was ever upon this earth.

Now this nation of the United States was founded upon principles drawn from the lessons of all the history of those preceding ages; and above all upon this principle of religious liberty, that religion or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence, and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience.

“And to judge for ourselves, and to engage in the exercises of religion agreeably to the dictates of our own conscience, is an inalienable right, which upon the principles upon which

the gospel was first propagated and the Reformation from popery carried on, can never be transferred to another.”
(Baird’s *Religion in America*, bk. 3, ch. 3, par. 22)

That is what our fathers said who made this American nation. And because of this they put in the fundamental and supreme law, the provision that...

“no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification for office or public trust under the government;”

...that...

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;”

...and that...

“the government of the United States is not in any sense founded upon the Christian religion.”

And that is religious liberty. Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and their noble associates who laid the foundations of this mighty nation, laid that foundation firmly upon the eternal rock of true religious liberty: and this in view of the lessons derived from the *prima facie* evidence of all history.

And now, after this noble nation has continued thus for more than a hundred years, and has been a blessing to the world, in the enlightenment of the nations and all mankind upon the principles of liberty, of justice and right,—I say that when in the face of all this, men at the head of the church and high in the nation will shut their eyes and turn their backs upon all the lessons of history, and deliberately take a course to turn this nation back into the old path of religious despotism, this is beyond all powers of comprehension.

Friends and people all, let us open our eyes and look at things as they are, in the light of the truth as God has given it. Let us recognize God in his true place, and the freedom which he has given to every soul. And let us ever remember in behalf of all people that charter of religious liberty from God:

Romans 14

⁴ Who are you that judges another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.

¹² Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Let us all seek ever the true way of the love of God shed abroad in the heart for all people in the world; seeking by all means of loving-kindness and long-suffering to truly represent Him who introduced Christianity into the world with the divine watchword,

“On earth, peace; good will toward men,”

and thus be true representatives of true religious liberty.