



BY DENNIS PAGE

One of the greatest gifts God has given to humanity is the freedom of choice. To love, or not to love. To obey, or not to obey. When humanity fell to temptation in the Garden of Eden and was taken captive by Satan, we would have remained slaves and in bondage to sin had it not been for Jesus stepping forward, declaring that He would pay the penalty for our sins. In so doing, He purchased our freedom, enabling us to choose once again. And since love cannot be forced, in the absence of freedom of choice, love ceases to be love.

“The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all intelligent beings depends upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service.”¹

Jesus is the Great Physician. He alone knows what is for our eternal good. He has the cure for the greatest virus that have plagued the human race. Although He sees that those who do not come to Him will likely produce “variants” of sin that will infect those they come in contact with, causing not only greater heartache and misery, but also the loss of eternal life. Yet He never forces the conscience to come for the cure.

Sadly, there seems to be a great deal of confusion regarding liberty of conscience among Seventh-day Adventists. This, in spite of the fact that God has demonstrated it so clearly throughout His Word. Why is this? Let us look at the inspired record as to why the confusion, and who is behind the coercion of the conscience.

In Luke 9:51-56 is the story of a Samaritan village refusing to receive Jesus. His disciples request to bring judgement upon the people but are met with a strong rebuke from Jesus declaring, “*Ye do not know what manner of spirit you are of.*” Ellen G. White comments on the incident as follows, “Coming to Christ, [the disciples] reported to Him the words of the people, telling Him that they had even refused to give Him a night's lodging. They thought that a grievous wrong had been done Him, and seeing Mount Carmel in the distance, where Elijah had slain the false prophets, they said, ‘Wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?’ They were surprised to see that Jesus was pained by their words, and still more surprised as His rebuke fell upon their ears, ‘Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.’ And He went to another village.”²

In this passage, Jesus rebukes His disciples for thinking He would violate the conscience of any person that did not accept Him and the saving grace He came to offer. No stronger moral argument could be made for the greater good, but that all should come to the Great Physician to receive healing from sin and the gift of eternal life. The disciples

felt the Samaritans should have acknowledged Christ's goodness in desiring to pass through their community and accepted the cure that He came to give. Would not immediate judgment have served as a great motivation for others to come and receive the remedy for sin? However, Christ never forces the will. He declares that those who would use force to

WHAT EXAMPLE ARE WE GIVING TO THE WORLD, WHEN, THROUGH OUR INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS, WE DECIDE THAT A PERSON'S CONSCIENTIOUS CONVICTIONS DO NOT MATTER IN TERMS OF PERSONAL HEALTH, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME UPHOLDING THE PROFOUND IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL CONVICTIONS FOR SALVATION?

¹ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 34

² *Desire of Ages*, p. 487

compel the conscience of another are being led by a different spirit.

“It is no part of Christ's mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, that seek to compel the conscience. Under a pretense of zeal for righteousness, men who are confederate with evil angels bring suffering upon their fellow men, in order to convert them to their ideas of religion; but Christ is ever showing mercy, ever seeking to win by the revealing of His love. He can admit no rival in the soul, nor accept of partial service; but He desires only voluntary service, the willing surrender of the heart under the constraint of love. *There can be no more conclusive evidence that we possess the spirit of Satan than the disposition to hurt and destroy those who do not appreciate our work, or who act contrary to our ideas*” [emphasis added].³

There are many in our faith community, who believe that the government, society, institutions or even individuals have the right to run over someone else's conscience for the greater good of all. However, who are we to determine what a person is or is not being convicted of? Are we afraid to stand up for liberty of conscience? Are we to fear as a denomination governmental reprisal if we do not fall in line with the popular narrative of the one-size-fits-all cure or preventive? I have heard doctors say vaccines are a needed layer of treatment. However, whatever a man's authoritative position maybe, this does not give him the prerogative to exercise dominion over another man's conscience. In all matters concerning conscience, “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.”

“The enemy is a master worker, and if God's people are not constantly led by the Spirit of God, they will be snared and taken. [...] For thousands of years Satan has been experimenting upon the properties of the human mind, and he has learned to know it well. By his subtle workings in these last days, he is linking the human mind with his own, imbuing it with his thoughts; and he is doing this work in so deceptive a manner that those who accept his guidance know not that they are being led by him at his will. The great deceiver hopes so to confuse the minds of men and women, that none but his voice will be heard.”⁴

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, p. 352

This all leads to a further point of consideration. What example are we giving to the world, when, through our institutions and organizations, we decide that a person's conscientious convictions do not matter in terms of personal health, while at the same time upholding the profound importance of personal convictions for salvation? We do not mandate salvation; we do not even mandate the eight laws of health that God has ordained for the good of all humanity. This, in spite of the fact that they have proven to do more for the human body on a wholistic level than any vaccine. Why not? The answer is obvious. The use of force to compel the conscience, even though it may be on the basis of seeking the best outcome for all, is acting in opposition to God.

The book of Revelation reveals another rapidly approaching event that will relate to freedom of conscience and one's individual right to choose. If we take the position today that it is okay to deny liberty of conscience for the greater good, it will be even easier to bow to social pressure when that time comes. “As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. *By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side*” [emphasis added].⁵

Adventist are not generally against vaccines. Many have had several of them in their lifetime. However, when it comes to liberty of conscience we are to stand on the side of Christ, the Captain of our salvation. Remember the great price that Jesus has paid so that we could be free moral agents. This means we must not command the conscience of another, but in love encourage others to make right choices. If we have taken a different position on liberty of conscience than God Himself, we must humble ourselves and seek the forgiveness and grace He offers to stand for truth and righteousness. Let us not fear what man can do onto us, but remember, “if God is for us who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

Dennis Page resides in Berrien Springs, MI with his wife Melody. He serves as Assistant Pastor of the Village Seventh-day Adventist Church.

⁵ *The Great Controversy*, p. 608