



Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death!

A Biblical Case Against Coercion & Tyranny: A Theology of Human Freedom

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I am willing to go to jail for not complying with the vaccine mandates, just as I also have stood against the mask mandates. How about you? What price do you put on human liberty for the glory of God and good of your neighbour? I pray this essay may help you in forming your own biblical convictions in these trying times, days of great opportunity to stand up for our Lord and in His strength alone.

The most blessed, prosperous, and generous nation history has ever known was birthed through the bravery of Christian men like Patrick Henry. It was 23 March, 1775, when this godly patriot and statesman closed his stirring speech to the Continental Congress with these words: “Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!”ⁱ

Yet our society today asks: ‘Is freedom really worth dying for? Why all the fuss about tyranny and coercion? This too shall pass.’ Even Christians say, ‘This all sounds so American. Shouldn’t the Church just focus on the gospel, and not worry about our freedoms? Has the pulpit now become politicised?’ⁱⁱ Pastors ask, ‘Is there even such a thing as a religious exemption from vaccine mandates? What legitimate grounds could there possibly be for a Christian to be a conscientious objector?’ Sincere believers ask, ‘Pastor, is it worth losing my job, or being kicked out of my school? How will I provide for my family?’

For starters: Anyone who says that freedom is an American thing is saying a lot more about their own ignorance than they are about America. Those who know their Bible and know history understand that hatred of tyranny and love of liberty is not unique to any one place or people, but has much deeper roots than that.ⁱⁱⁱ

It was France that gave to the USA the now 92-metre tall (30-story), 220-ton Statue of Liberty in gratitude for the global reach of freedom, with the famous plaque from poet Emma Lazarus (a Jew) that reads:



*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*

Yet right here in South Africa, we have a smaller monument that makes a bigger, clearer statement about freedom than even Lady Liberty: the Huguenot monument in Franschhoek, one of my favourite spots to visit. It was built to commemorate those stalwart French Protestants who fled persecution and tyranny. This nation would not be what it is today without their contributions.

At the centre of this monument is a large marble statue of a woman atop a globe of the world. She wears no crown, for she is neither a queen or a goddess; she represents all humanity. In her right hand, she carries a broken chain, depicting freedom from bondage. In her left hand, she holds a Bible, the source of all freedom. Behind her stand three very tall, white arches symbolising the triune God of our Christian faith, crowned at the top with a cross, symbolising the greatest liberation ever at Calvary. What a privilege for us to stand with this unnamed brave woman, with our Huguenot forefathers in the faith, and in a long line of godly defenders of human dignity and liberty.

Rightly do we sing here in our South African national anthem, originally a Xhosa Christian revival hymn:

*Sound the call to come together
And united we shall stand.
Let us live and strive for freedom
In South Africa our land!*

But do we mean those words, or is it just for a good feeling before the kick-off of a soccer or rugby match? Should Christians also (or especially) sing those words; and if so, why?

Here we are in 2021 watching our freedoms vanish almost by the day. In this era of Covid lockdowns, we've all been eyewitnesses to more attacks on freedom than the world has seen since Hitler and the Nazi Holocaust 80 years ago.^{iv} I agree with Dr. Macarthur and the pastoral staff at Grace Community Church who recently stated:

We are convinced that governmental encroachment on basic human freedoms constitutes a more intimidating threat to individuals, a greater impediment to the work of the church, and a larger calamity for all of society than any pestilence or other natural disaster. These are difficult times, calling for a thoughtful, biblical, and wise response from church leaders and their congregations.^v

Part of a pastor's biblical duty is to "equip the saints" for serving Christ, which includes teaching them how to "love their neighbour", how to be "salt", "light", and "leaven" in society, "zealous for good works" (Matt. 5:13-16; 7:12; 13:33; 22:39; Tit. 2:14; 3:14). If the local church is to be "the pillar and support of the truth", centred on gospel proclamation, that includes *gospel application* to ethics and daily life (1 Tim. 3:15).

Preaching "the whole counsel of God" means not shrinking back from wherever God's Word must be applied to the issues of the day, proving the authority and sufficiency of Scripture for "training in righteousness", equipping believers to stand up for what is right in every realm of life (Acts 20:27; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Whenever the church has shone the brightest, she has always had a prophetic voice into society, calling the "kings of the earth" to take heed and hear the word of the Lord (Ps. 2; Jer. 22:29, etc.)

Yet I am baffled and dismayed at how my generation of Christians and church leaders, in the name of being 'gospel-centred', has embraced worldly, secular, leftist attitudes that are more Marxist than Christian, that are anti-freedom, anti-patriotism, anti-human-dignity, and unethical altogether. We've become like a spoiled kid, fat and lazy from enjoying our blood-bought freedoms for so long; yet unwilling to pay a price to preserve them for future generations. Yet we're more than happy to emigrate to free countries to enjoy all those freedoms achieved and defended by others?

Dear reader, please understand: This is a call for responsible Christian citizenship, not for political revolutionaries (What political party would we even align with in these tumultuous times in South Africa?!). Defending civil freedoms or humanitarian concerns *has never been and cannot become* the mission of a biblical church, or the message of our gospel, as we remain fixed on preaching "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2; Col. 1:28-29; Rom. 1:16-17).

But upholding human dignity and freedom has always been *the fruit of the church and the result of the gospel's spread*. As the message of the cross powerfully saves souls, it transforms lives, homes and society, so that believers have proven to be the best of citizens, finest of neighbours, and most honest and hard-working employees, as we pray for our rulers "that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim. 2:1-4; "seeking the good of the city" in a pagan land, Jer. 29:4-7).

Each church and believer may have different applications in how they stand up for human freedom; but if these principles are biblical, we cannot ignore them. Here's where we're going in this essay (adapted and expanded from a sermon I preached to our church) – *Four battle cries for Christians to be champions of liberty in the face of tyranny*:

1. Freedom is from God
2. Freedom is Defined by God's Word
3. Freedom is a Treasure
4. Freedom is Fragile

Disclaimer: This essay says almost nothing directly about vaccine mandates; yet it has a ton of indirect applications (and see this endnote for more).^{vi} My short, pastoral answer for those asking about vaccine mandates is: ‘Yes, there is definitely a religious case for vaccine exemptions (see a sample church letter here^{vii}). Inform your conscience biblically about the three spheres of authority, and the limitations of government authority, and the vital Christian doctrine of the liberty of conscience.’

In our church, we’re thankfully aware of no conflicts among our people over vaccines (and we have people on both sides of the issue). Last year we already made clear to our people that we see vaccines in the same category as masks – an area of personal Christian liberty in the family sphere, outside of both church and government authority.^{viii}

The aim, however, of this essay, is not to give a short answer or a shallow response, but to lay some biblical and historic foundations. We are living through a time of massive cultural upheaval and an onslaught of godless worldviews and deadly ideologies. If we do not recognise and refute these lies, “destroying” and “taking them captive to the obedience of Christ”, they will keep shaping our instincts and our imaginations (2 Cor. 10:5). We must “understand the times”, renew our minds lest we conform, and plant our roots deep in a biblical worldview (1 Chron. 12:32; Eph. 4:14-16; Rom. 12:2). For example, the last 20 months have exposed our world’s bondage to statism (state as god) and safety-ism (safety is god). Ideas have consequences, so we must win the battle at the level of beliefs, not just behaviour (Col. 2:8).

1. Freedom is from God.

If freedom not from God, must come from dictators, state, or whomever claims to be all-powerful. Yet Scripture says otherwise. Listen to Genesis 1:26-28:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

To be human is to reflect God. That is why we speak of God’s communicable attributes, those traits of His that are share-able, translatable to us. For example, “Be holy as I am holy” (Lev. 19). God is loving, He is good, He is just, He is wise, and so must we be. And God is also free, as are we, made in His likeness.

Theologians for centuries have taught that freedom is one of God’s attributes, that God does whatever He pleases according to His holy will. God is unconstrained and unrestrained by anything outside Himself. He is the most liberated and only being in the universe who is totally free: Psalm 115:3 (unlike the dead, enslaved idols), “Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.” Psalm 135:6, “Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.” Daniel 4, “He does according to His will in the host of heaven, and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have you done?’” (cf. Job. 42:2; Isa. 43:13; 45:9; Ps. 33:11; Prov. 21:1; Rom. 9)

God's freedom is infinite and inherent, as independent Creator. Our freedom, as dependent creatures, is finite, derived, relative and limited. Since the Fall, our freedom is depraved, corrupted, and badly damaged. But it is not erased. Fallen man is still made in God's image (Gen. 9:6). And we are still called to "rule, subdue" and cultivate the earth, as His vice-regents, with a subordinate authority under Him. That means God has entrusted humans with moral agency, the power and duty to bring about results on this earth and in our vocations to which He calls us.

Let's be clear: No human government bestows on people their rights or liberties. If rulers want to be blessed, they should recognise what God has already given mankind – inalienable, inherent, fixed rights as His sacred, unique image-bearers. If civil authorities want to be cursed, they will deny man those created, inalienable rights. Psalm 8 declares the royal, God-given dignity of humanity: "What is man that You are mindful of him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honour, and made him ruler over creation...."

Not even the most beautiful plants or most adorable pets, not the most brilliant horse, dolphin or monkey – none of them can escape their plant/animal nature and instincts, to which they are held captive. They have no soul or conscience, which only mankind has been given as image-bearers of the Almighty. To bear God's likeness means volition and will, a freedom to choose.

Vishal Mangalwadi is perhaps India's foremost Christian intellectual. He wrote, *The Book That Made Your World*, in which he describes how Israel's Exodus set them apart from all other nations, ancient peoples, and pagan worldviews:

[The Exodus] revealed that God was free. He was not limited by either the political or military might of Egypt, however oppressive or brutal. Nor was God limited by historical factors, oppressive armies, or insurmountable natural obstacles, such as the Red Sea. God was not part of the cosmic machine. He was free, and He wanted His children to be free like Him. Oppression and slavery were evils to be routed. They were evil because they were contrary to all that God had intended for the human beings made in His own image. ... Biblical cultures highly value freedom as the essence of God and of His image – humanity. (p. 337)

Or as Wayne Grudem states:

When human beings are deprived of their ability to make free choices by evil govts or by other circumstances, a significant part of their God-likeness is suppressed. It is not surprising that they will pay almost any price to regain their freedom. American revolutionary Patrick Henry's cry, 'Give me liberty or give me death!' finds an echo deep within every soul created in the image of God. (pp. 217-18, Systematic Theology)

Even secular voices see this sometimes. Jeffrey Tucker has been a reliable voice for decades in history and economics, and in the last two years an outspoken critic of Covid lockdowns and tyranny. Recently he wrote:

...Human beings will not be forced [forever] to live in cages and think only what our masters tell us to think. We are wired to be free, creative, and truth telling, and cannot abide by systems that attempt to stamp out all those instincts and instead treat us all like lab rats.... No, never.

The crazy rules and practices governments and corporations adopted and imposed over the last 20 months will in time look ridiculous and embarrassing to nearly everyone. That we went along with such preposterous practices is a sad commentary on the human condition and its primitive ways.^{ix}

Yet such observers are still limited by their secular, naturalistic worldview. What they fail to see is the spiritual root problem beneath all these bad fruits. “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”, declares Psalm 14. Folly is always self-destructive, as Proverbs often describes (e.g., Prov. 13:20; 15:32; 18:7,9). *Once you deny who God is, you deny who man is as His image-bearer.*

Why then fight for human freedom if there’s nothing unique about being human? If there’s nothing sacred about human life, why should we not all be miserable slaves? *Everything starts with our view of God.* Psalm 36, “In Your light we see light”. “God is light, in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5). But outside of God, are all forms of darkness – spiritually, morally and in every way.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was perhaps the greatest defender of freedom in the 20th century, exposing the West to the evils of Soviet Communism (where he spent 8 years in their Gulag prison camps). Solzhenitsyn said:

More than half a century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.

Since then I have spent well-nigh fifty years working on the history of our Revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous Revolution that swallowed up some sixty million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.

What is more, the events of the Russian Revolution can only be understood now, at the end of the century, against the background of what has since occurred in the rest of the world. What emerges here is a process of universal significance. And if I were called upon to identify briefly the principal trait of the entire twentieth century, here too, I would be unable to find anything more precise and pithy than to repeat once again: Men have forgotten God. (<https://www.pravoslavie.ru/47643.html>)

Nations that remember God are free; nations that forget God are shackled and bound. “Only those who face up toward God can face down tyrants”.^x Look at what is happening today in some of the world’s most secular nations (where many South Africans have emigrated): Australia and New Zealand, with their seemingly endless lockdowns and Covid regulations, and statism.

Purely because of supposed violations of ‘public health’ martial law, mothers are being pulled away from their own children, protestors shot at, employers threatened, and civilians tackled in the streets. Unvaccinated parliamentarians lose their voting rights. ‘No jab, no job; no shot, no shopping’ is now the slogan of the day. For not complying, individuals are fined \$21,000 for each incident; businesses/churches are fined \$110,000!

What do you call people who need state permission to eat, travel, shop, worship, get haircut, go to gym, and live life? You call them slaves.

There's more tyranny in Australia: Once you are vaxxed, must always check in with your QR code. All businesses are being recruited to join the state's total digital surveillance apparatus. Soon, all must use the EQR code for every purchase, for all trading, in order for the government to track all spending automatically, as further steps toward an Australian Digital ID system. This will provide an easy path toward Chinese-style social credits, tracking your carbon footprint to test your loyalty to the climate change cult.

After a mere two-day's notice, the Victoria state Premier has now been given permanent emergency powers. Children caught without a mask are fined \$181.74 per offense; unmasked teens or adults are fined \$726.97! Every business must have 'covid marshalls' to report any breach of the restrictions to a special hotline (Nazi-style snitchers).

Yet most Australians seem to comply, like sheep led to slaughter. Solzhenitsyn's words ring out once more: "men have forgotten God". Fascism and dictatorships always seem far-fetched at first, until you're in the middle of it, and then it's too late. It's called incrementalism, the 'frog in the kettle' syndrome, slowly and imperceptibly raising the temperature.

As de Tocqueville warned Americans nearly 200 years ago, "Despotism may be able to do without faith, but freedom cannot. ...When a people's religion is destroyed...then not only will they let their freedom be taken from them, but often they actually *hand it over themselves*."^{xi} By design, we are made to be worshippers; if we don't worship God, the state will replace Him as the next most powerful alternative.

2. Freedom is Defined by God's Word.

Look back at Genesis, as Moses now zooms in on God's creation and command of man on Day 6:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." ...And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (vv. 15-17, 25)

Adam and Eve were perfectly and joyfully free – emancipated to live all of life in obedience to their King, following His good and wise commands. Even before the Fall, human freedom was found in God's Word alone. Inside God's revealed, stated boundaries, mankind was free, blessed and prosperous. Outside of God's Law was only cursing, bondage and death. That was the great lie of Satan: "you shall be like God", finding freedom outside of obedience to His Word (Gen. 3:1-7).

No wonder the entire Psalter begins as it does, 'How blessed is the man who does not walk...stand...sit with sinners. But his delight is in the law of the LORD..., whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked...the way of the wicked will perish' (Psalm 1). Twice in the Book of James, God's Word is called, "the law of liberty", because this Book liberates like no other book. It is God's truth that spiritually transforms and unshackles you from sin's bondage. Who then in society should be bigger champions of human liberty, if not us, the people of the Book, whose entire faith is built upon this "royal" and "perfect law of liberty"?

Watch for this theme throughout Scripture, throughout history, and throughout your life: Obedience liberates; disobedience enslaves. Walking God's way brings freedom; walking any other way brings bondage. "I shall run the way of Your commandments, For You will enlarge my heart" (Ps. 119:32).

Why did God tell Moses to lead His people out of bondage in Egypt? "Tell Pharaoh, 'Let My people go, so *that* they may serve Me" (Exod. 8:1; 9:1). On what basis did God give Israel His Ten Commandments? "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall (x10)..." (Exod. 20). In other words, the Lord was saying, 'I am your King because I am your Redeemer. I freed you so that you will obey Me. You are redeemed for holiness, liberated for the sake of godliness.'

Otherwise, the Israelites would've just gone right back to their old ways as slaves for 400 years in Egypt; they'd just replace Egyptian tyrants with Hebrew ones. '*You can take the slave out of Egypt easier than you can take Egypt out of the slave.*'

Want proof of how central God's Law was to defining human freedom? Those two tablets with His Ten Commandments (the summary of His entire Law) were written by "His own finger" (Exod. 31:18; Deut. 9:10). They were placed in the Ark of the Covenant and kept inside the tabernacle, inside the very Holy of Holies, under the mercy seat – all this at the centre of their nation wherever they went. God gave His people this constant, visual reminder that durable, lasting freedom is possibly only under the rule of God and the rule of His Law.

In the first place, why did Pharaoh even care if the Jews just went away for a few days for a brief worship getaway in the desert? Because Pharaoh knew what freedom meant; this pagan king knew more than some pastors today: "*Pharaoh instinctively knew that if Israel was set free to worship God, they would never be slaves again. True worship of the living God sets the captives free.*"^{xii} Everything starts with worship. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" and "of understanding" (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). Preserving freedom starts with religious liberty – the freedom to gather and worship the Source and Author of all freedom, the one true and living God.

In the New Testament, God's Word continues to define freedom further: "having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ...For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death", so that we might obey God's Law and walk in His Spirit, not in the flesh (Rom. 6:17; 8:2-4). Fact is that everyone is a slave; the only question is *whose slave are you?* Do you belong to sin's cruel mastery, or are you subject to Christ's gracious lordship, under His easy yoke (Matt. 11:28-30)?

America's founding fathers, in separating from the tyranny of King George III in England, made clear that this hard-won freedom was not a freedom for selfishness; it was an "ordered liberty", a lawful freedom under the authority of the Creator, King & Judge, the One to Whom we will answer for how we've stewarded these freedoms entrusted to us.

Paul further declares freedom's purpose in Galatians 5, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery... For you were called to freedom brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (vv. 1,13). Or as Peter succinctly states, "Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but us it as bondslaves of God" (1 Pet. 2:17).

“Freedom” is a battle cry for the Christian. Yet we must all beware, especially in these days of rising tyranny: If “freedom!” becomes our only watchword (our one-string guitar, the only drum we beat), detached from faith, love and obedience, or cut off from Christ and His cross, then we will be the next casualty in a long line of antinomian, lawless believers. Paul repeatedly warns us against selfishly abusing our liberties at the expense of others (1 Cor. 8-10; Rom. 14).

Jesus Himself put it most boldly, in light of the worst bondage of all, the captivity behind all other captivities: “Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ...If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (Jn. 8:34,36). As Charles Wesley testified of his own conversion:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

It is imperative that we define freedom correctly. Our society uses the same word but smuggles in a new definition. God says “freedom” is about obeying Him; our world says, “freedom” is about satisfying self, as long as you don’t ‘harm anyone else’. These are polar opposite definitions. Scripture does not teach a freedom that exalts *personal autonomy* as the highest good; it says *personal virtue* and duty are the highest good. *Liberty is not to do as I please, but to do as God pleases.*

We live in culture drowning in false freedom, thanks especially to Hollywood. For example, consider the demonic, false doctrines of Disney: “No right, no wrong, no rules for me I'm free. Let it go, let it go!” (from the movie, *Frozen*). The culture says freedom means: ‘freedom of choice’ to murder unborn babies; ‘freedom of expression’ to pursue every form of pornographic perversion and sexual immorality; ‘freedom to marry’ the same gender; ‘freedom of identity’ to indoctrinate children with LGBTQ lies, to restrict free speech, to cancel all dissent. Yet all these abuses of freedom should not silence Christians; it should make us all the more vocal in defending true human freedom.

John Adams (2nd president of USA), once warned: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”^{xiii} Or as another historian warned in 1805:

If this (bondage) should ever become the deplorable situation of the United States, let some unborn historian in a far distant day, detail the lapse, and hold up the contrast between a simple, virtuous, and free people, and a degenerate, servile race of beings, corrupted by wealth, effeminated by luxury, impoverished by licentiousness, and become the automatons of intoxicated ambition.^{xiv}

3. Freedom is a Treasure.

Miguel de Cervantes (author of *Don Quixote*) famously said:

Liberty is one of the choicest gifts that Heaven hath bestowed upon man, and exceeds in volume all the treasures which the earth contains within its bosom....

Liberty, as well as honor, man ought to preserve at the hazard of his life, for without it, life is insupportable.^{xv}

Benjamin Franklin rightly warned, “Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety.”^{xvi} From painful experience and careful study, he knew what few today seem to recognise – freedom’s inestimable value.

Why did God appear at the burning bush and send Moses to rescue the Israelites? Yes, it was supremely for His glory and His great redemption plan; but He also makes clear it was His compassion for His captive people in their misery: “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings” (Exod. 3:7). There was nothing desirable about human bondage.

In the Bible, slavery to tyrants is always a curse, never a blessing. Oppression signifies God’s judgment, never His favour. The whole Book of Judges tells the story of repeated cycles of God’s discipline upon His wayward people, handing them over to tyrants. Idolatry always brings bondage. Yet God hears the cries of the oppressed and delivers.

What is one of the most beloved Old Testament images for prizing human freedom? It is the glad prospect of “every man under his own vine and under his own fig tree” (1 Kgs 4:25; 2 Kgs 18:31; Isa. 36:16; Micah 4:4). The vine and the fig tree are means of sustenance, objects of ownership and work, signifying peace, prosperity – the blessings of liberty.

Personhood for us, as God’s image-bearers, means choosing between right and wrong. “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life!” (Deut. 30:19). “Choose you this day whom you will serve!” (Josh 24:15). Often our Lord Jesus invited people, ‘Come to Me, Take and eat, Follow Me, Listen to Me!’ (Matt. 11:28; Rev. 22:17, etc.). Our biblical convictions about the bondage of the will should underline human responsibility and dignity, not negate it.^{xvii}

Why did the prophets declare that Messiah would come? Isaiah makes clear (the first text Jesus’ read aloud in the synagogue at outset of His public ministry): “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me to...proclaim liberty/release to the captives...to set free those who are oppressed” (Isa. 61:1; Lk. 4:18). True, that promise is *not* about political, earthly freedom (we reject all forms of Liberation Theology). It is entirely about spiritual liberty of the heart from sin and guilt. Yet the entire premise assumes that liberty is good, slavery is bad.

When a desperate, impoverished Jew would sell themselves into slavery, what provision did our merciful God make? On both the 7th year and the 50th, they were liberated (Deut. 15:15; Lev. 25:42). For this reason, God called for the Jubilee declaration: “proclaim liberty throughout all the land!” (Lev. 25:10). Those are the biblical words engraved on America’s famous Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.

God outlawed all forms of slavery: “He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death” (Exod. 21:16). That meant stealing another person’s autonomy/freedom through forcible enslavement was prohibited. The New Testament teaches the same, that it is against God’s law to be a “slave-trader, man-stealer, kidnapper” (1 Tim. 1:10). Likewise Paul wrote to converted slaves, “If you are able to become free, do that. You were bought with a price [Christ’s own blood]; do not become slaves of men” (1 Cor. 7:21ff). God’s Word never romanticises or minimises

human slavery. *How then, in the name of being ‘gospel-centred’, did it become a virtue to speak out against human freedom and in defense of tyranny?*

We hear Christian leaders saying, ‘Lockdowns, church bans, mask and vaccine mandates, these are all great opportunities to love our neighbour by *giving up our freedoms*, sacrificing our liberties for the greater good.’ But no matter how nice and spiritual that sounds at first, it is a half-truth and a twisting of Scripture. Paul speaks about giving up personal opinions and religious preferences for the sake of the weaker brother, lest he violate his own conscience and injure his faith (1 Cor. 8-10; Rom. 14).

But that is not the same as giving up hard-won civic freedoms and the public good of my neighbour and of all society in order to become a doormat to dictators. There is nothing Christian about throwing away the cherished liberties we enjoy in the West that were birthed out of a biblical worldview. Unlike in Bible times, we’re reaping the rich fruits of centuries of Christian influence, for which we should be profoundly thankful, not cavalier and dismissive. For the love of God and country, my grandfather and my father bravely fought and risked their lives for freedom and against tyranny. I’m grateful for holidays that remind us of this, like Memorial Day and Veteran’s Day, “lest we forget”.

In our church, we still have numerous men who bravely served in our South African military service during the Border War of the 1970s and 80s against communism, securing freedoms we still enjoy today because of their sacrifice. Even if the enemy was mislabelled ‘die swaart gevaar’ (‘the black danger’) by a racist, apartheid government, ‘die rooi gevaar’ (‘the red danger’ of communism) was a true enemy, and is today a greater threat to our world perhaps than ever before. I thank God for these valiant men who defended our treasured liberties.

It is also an unbiblical redefining of love to suggest that we give up human rights in the name of Christian love. As one pastor well stated:

If we turn our heads or act with indifference when our neighbours are covered with the weight of tyranny or injustice, we are in fact hating our neighbours. If I am not jealous for their liberty, their freedom and protection, I hate my neighbour. Love for neighbour demands that we resist tyranny as an act of obedience to God. (Jeff Durbin)

The 8th Commandment is yet another biblical proof of God’s commitment to human freedom: “You shall not steal” (Exod. 20:15; Deut. 5:19). Unlike Karl Marx (and socialists and communists), God believes in private property rights – in your freedom to earn, acquire and own. God and His prophets rebuke state thieves who trample on human freedom – such as King David taking another man’s wife, or King Ahab stealing Naboth’s vineyard (2 Sam. 11-12; 1 Kgs 21).

Grudem concludes:

*Throughout the Bible, from the beginning of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation, God honors and protects human freedom and human choice. Liberty is an essential component of our humanity. Any government that significantly denies people’s liberty exerts a terribly dehumanizing influence on its people. (p. 92, *Politics According to the Bible*)*

Hear the cry of the unvaccinated captives: “Hi, I’m a Canadian citizen. I haven’t broken any laws, but I can’t work, can’t go to a restaurant/movie theatre, can’t ski, can’t take my kid to swimming or soccer; cannot leave my country, or fly within it, nor board a train or a ship. SOS!”^{xviii}

Dear friends, there is a badly forgotten, much-needed truth in our day: *Inner freedom leads to outer freedom*. Spiritual liberation cannot stay there; it spills over into all of life. This is the story of the past 2,000 years, wherever the Bible has gone. This treasure of liberty has been Christianity’s gift to the world!

British historian, Paul Johnson, wrote:

[Spiritual freedom in Christ] is the father of all other freedoms. For conscience is the enemy of tyranny and the compulsory society [that coerces].... The notions of political and economic freedom both spring from the Christian conscience as a historic force. (p. 516, A History of Christianity)

19th-century poet, James Russel Lowell, stated:

I challenge any skeptic to find a 10-square mile spot on this planet where they can live their lives in peace and safety and decency, where womanhood is honoured, where infancy and old age are revered, where they can educated their children, where the Gospel of Jesus Christ has not gone first to prepare the way. If they find such a place, then I would encourage them to emigrate [there] and proclaim their unbelief. (p. 330 in D. Noebel, Understanding the Times)

Mangalwadi writes of William Carey’s missionary legacy, “India’s freedom was a fruit of the gospel. ...Without the Bible’s political ideas, Muslim emperors, Hindu militia, or European merchants would still be ruling India” (p. 351). He contrasts this to the unbiblical, bloody freedoms trumpeted by the French Revolution:

Without the Bible, democracy became what Plato had condemned as the worst of all political systems. ...America, not France, became the beacon of liberty, precisely because it allowed the Bible to shape its cultural ethos. ...Only cultures founded on the Bible have viewed freedom as a virtue worth dying for. ...[As another historian observes] It is impossible to enslave mentally or socially a Bible-reading people. (p. 337)

Here in South Africa, when was slavery finally abolished? In 1833, because of that heroic defender of freedom in England, Christian politician William Wilberforce. – And 150 years later, what brought the end of the evils of Apartheid here in this land? Once again, significant Christian influence and prayer played a vital role.^{xix} During the American Civil War, it was an abolitionist hymnwriter, in defending the civil rights of black slaves and upholding human liberty and equality, who wrote “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”:

*As Christ died to make men holy,
Let us die to make men free.*

This divine gift of human freedom cannot be kept to ourselves. At the University of Stellenbosch in the 1990s, Wynoma Michaels was a PhD student and the first black woman to be student president. She said, ‘although the Bible was abused, nothing else gave her people a greater sense of their own worth and meaning than the Good Book. It

was the one book the slave-owner and slave shared in common; they both knew they stood under its authority as equals. ...A great number of my people took the trouble to become literate for one supreme reason – to read the Bible.’ And so Mangalwadi concludes: *Today the Bible is the chief factor in the opening of the African mind, just as it was the key to opening the Western mind* (p. 354). Who can put a price on this treasure of freedom which God’s Word brought to the modern world?

4. Freedom is Fragile.

One defender of freedom wrote:

It is the common fate of the indolent to see their rights become a prey to the active. The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance; which condition if he break, servitude is at once the consequence of his crime and the punishment of his guilt.^{xx}

Ronald Reagan stated:

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like...where men were free.^{xxi}

These leaders are stating what the Bible said long ago, from our Lord Himself: “To whom much is given, much will be required” (Luke 12:48). As with all of God’s gifts, if we don’t steward them wisely, He will take them away. We live in a Romans 1 world of ingratitude and idolatry, “suppressing the truth in unrighteousness”, being handed over by God Himself to all kinds of bondage (Rom. 1:18-32).

It is because of freedom’s fragility that God’s Word designates the separate spheres of authority, lest any sphere encroach upon the jurisdiction of another. History is replete with examples of the harm that comes from family dynasty’s ruling church or state, or church empires ruling family and state, or today’s iron-fisted state trampling over the rights of families and churches.

Solzhenitsyn often warned the apathetic, complacent free world in the West (looking on at the evils of communism): “There always is this fallacious belief: ‘It would not be the same here; here such things are impossible.’ Alas, all the evil of the twentieth century is possible everywhere on earth.” It is not a virtue to be naïve; the Bible calls us to live soberly and temperately, unsurprised by any extent of human evil and depravity in this fallen world.

As society today moves increasingly leftward, inequality is now seen as the greatest threat, not tyranny. Good and evil are replaced by the new ‘moral’ categories of rich and poor (privileged and under-privileged) as the greater injustice. Thus, the highest goal for society is no longer, “liberty and justice for all”, and creation of wealth from which all benefit. Instead, the chief aim is material equality and redistribution of wealth. This is the product of Marxist thinking, which has led to tyranny and poverty every single time.^{xxii}

One historian gives this sobering description of how our liberties are under assault today:

...The great horrors of the 20th century, like Stalin’s Holodomor, the Holocaust, and the Khmer Rouge’s Cambodian genocide, were all rationalized by their perpetrators

as necessary to achieve some alleged greater good. When the inalienable individual rights of the minority conflicted with an alleged greater good for the majority, inalienable rights were swept aside. The end justified the means.

...Once society allowed the philosophy of utilitarianism to erode the ironclad protection of individual rights and freedoms, it was just a matter of time until some critical emergency would justify sweeping away individual human rights to achieve some alleged greater good. ... Life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, property rights, freedom of speech, limits on the power of government, universal human rights, etc., are principles designed to protect the individual from the herd.

...Pop culture increasingly mirrors and reinforces this shift. Even the current batch of superhero movies reflect this. Most no longer follow the theme of "one against many" but have shifted instead to a team approach to solving problems. The lone warrior has been replaced by the team player. And it is not the individual that requires protection, but rather the entire herd or team because safety lies at the center of the collective, which must pull together for the greater good. We're all supposed to be in this together, so responsibility to protect the individual has been replaced by responsibility to protect the herd.

...Even censorship, propaganda, and radical social engineering all begin to take on a moral veneer when they are justified as being for the good of the herd. The woke culture wars of today and the lockdown/COVID-Zero crowd have the same philosophical impulses as the ambitious social-engineers of the past, like Robespierre, Marx, Engels, Stalin, Hitler, Mao, and Castro, who also had no qualms about sacrificing truth, liberty, and even lives for the alleged good of the herd.^{xxiii}

Conclusion

The more we are convinced of a biblical view of individual, inalienable human rights granted by God, and the more we appreciate our rich and costly heritage of freedom, the more we will hate tyranny and oppose it wherever we can. Even if your resistance looks different than mine. But if we don't treasure God's gift of freedom, there will be little or no resistance at all; it won't be worth the sacrifice.

As Christians, we know that Jesus said the world will get worse in these last days before His return (Matt. 24). Countless believers across history and around the world today have been imprisoned and martyred for the sake of Christ, with no earthly hope of preserving their freedoms. Yet they gladly suffered for their Lord, and so must we. During the great 7-year tribulation, by God's own design, Antichrist will brutally trample on every last vestige of human rights and freedoms (Rev. 12-13). Yet Christ will then come and crush all His foes and usher in His kingdom of perfect righteousness, peace and freedom. None of these future prospects make us escapists in the present age, or cancel our duty to love our neighbour and defend human rights wherever we can. We labour this day in light of that day, to be found faithful when the King returns.

To answer the vital question of, 'What is the biblical role of government in protecting our freedoms (instead of trampling over them)?', see my other essay and related resources.^{xxiv} In the last 20 months, no biblical text has been more misquoted and abused than Romans 13. Instead of being the standard Christian text for lawful submission to authority, it has

become the favourite proof-text for capitulating to all forms of tyranny and evil. I've also done a sermon on when and how Christians ought to resist evil.^{xxv}

We need to remember a favourite slogan and biblical conviction of our Protestant forefathers, "Resistant to tyrants is obedience to God", as illustrated by the Hebrew midwives, Elijah, John the Baptist and our Lord Himself and the apostles (Exod. 1:17; 1 Kgs 18:17; Mk 6:18-29; Matt. 22:21; 26:64). But obedience to tyrants is disobedience to God (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29).^{xxvi}

Don't underestimate the power of one brave voice willing to swim upstream, willing to live by conviction instead of coercion, one 'Athanasius Contra Mundum' with a Christlike face like flint (Isa. 50:7), willing to stand alone, one Luther against the entire Diet of Worms. All that it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. Choose now to refuse to live any longer by lies, but to live by truth and stand for freedom. Abraham Kuyper, Christian theologian and Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1901-05), said: "In any successful attack on freedom, the state can only be an accomplice. The chief culprit is the citizen who forgets his duty."^{xxvii}

How would slavery or apartheid have ever ended if all the Christians, in the name of being 'gospel-centred', just stayed in hiding or submitted to unlawful and evil regulations? Can you not see how the last 20 months of mask mandates and now vax mandates fuel hatred, segregation and discrimination? How could a Christian have anything to do with such evils?^{xxviii} Beware of the complicity of silence and indifference:

... You don't have to be any of those abominable scoundrels to be an enabler of tyranny. You simply need to hold your tongue. You simply need to look the other way. You simply need to turn a deaf ear. You simply need to stifle your gut feeling that something is profoundly, irrevocably wrong about every venomous lie, absurd policy, and malignant mandate that has bombarded the public since spring 2020.

You simply need to live in fear. You simply need to cling to your ignorance. You simply need to follow the leader. You simply need to surrender to cowardice. Every act of collusion, every stain on your conscience, every bureaucratic compromise of your values etches an ineradicable scar into your soul.^{xxix}

As Martin Niemöller, one of the few brave pastors who confronted Nazi Germany (and was imprisoned), warned:

*First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.^{xxx}*

Without the influence of the Bible and Christianity, there would've been no William Wallace and no free Scotland. As the movie Braveheart portrays in that final battle:

I am William Wallace, and I see a whole army of my countrymen here in defiance of tyranny! You have come to fight as free men, and free men you are. What would you do with that freedom? Will you fight?

A voice cries out: *'Fight? Against that? No, we will run, and we will live.'*

Wallace replies: *Aye, fight and you may die. Run and you'll live, at least a while. And dying in your beds many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that for one chance, just one chance to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they'll never take our freedom!*

ⁱ <https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/learn/deep-dives/give-me-liberty-or-give-me-death/>

ⁱⁱ Just last week, The Gospel Coalition Canada posted an abysmal article whining about American Christians supporting the few Canadian pastors who've stood against tyranny and gone to jail for their faith and for their flocks. Yet instead of commending these men, they slander them and imply that American Christians stop standing for freedom and rather join more secular countries, like Canada, in their increasing bondage! See here for an excellent rebuttal: <https://trinitybiblechapel.ca/we-found-billy-a-blessing-of-persecution/?fbclid=IwAR01RfSPCAtbSic1JNinJVM9Qf-6fcYYE1333cBPpcRMSBMufDY2qeilaE>

ⁱⁱⁱ As the Declaration of Independence begins: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men...." (July 4th, 1776). Is this more John Locke than Bible? Historian Glenn Sunshine answers that question and shows where we biblically can and cannot agree with Locke, plus the extent of his influence upon America's founding fathers, in this excellent book: <https://www.amazon.com/Slaying-Leviathan-Government-Resistance-Christian/dp/195241072X/>

^{iv} Here are but three of hundreds of credible, empirical sources exposing and proving the Covid lies, propaganda and tyranny of the past 20 months: <https://brownstone.org/articles/the-six-major-fails-of-anthony-fauci/>; <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0982456069>; <https://www.pandata.org/>

^v <https://www.gracechurch.org/news/posts/2254>

^{vi} <https://founders.org/2021/08/13/vaccine-mandates-and-the-christians-liberty-of-conscience-from-2021-to-1721-and-back-again/>; <https://warrentondeclaration.com/>; <https://doctorsandscientistsdeclaration.org/>; <https://brownstone.org/articles/20-essential-studies-that-raise-grave-doubts-about-covid-19-vaccine-mandates/>; <https://brownstone.org/articles/this-is-not-a-pandemic-of-the-unvaccinated/?s=09>; <https://www.aier.org/article/resisting-tyranny-depends-on-the-courage-to-not-conform/>;

^{vii} <https://apologiachurch.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Medical-Statement.pdf>

^{viii} <https://www.gracechurch.org/cantrell/posts/2127> (Note: the government actually *does* have a God-given coercive "power of the sword" against evil; the problem comes when that power is misplaced and abused outside of their lawful realm.)

^{ix} <https://brownstone.org/articles/the-war-weve-lived-and-the-birth-of-the-new/>

^x <https://dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/aphorisms-on-liberty.html>

^{xi} https://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/DETOC/1_ch17.htm

^{xii} Toby Sumpter (<https://www.christkirk.com/sermon/christian-basis-for-freedom/>)

^{xiii} <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-3102>

^{xiv} <https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2021/10/essence-freedom-bradley-birzer.html>

^{xv} <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/996/pg996-images.html>

^{xvi} <https://oll.libertyfund.org/quote/benjamin-franklin-on-the-trade-off-between-essential-liberty-and-temporary-safety-1775>

^{xvii} <https://www.gotquestions.org/free-will.html>

^{xviii} <https://twitter.com/truthwins/status/1452477298414800904>

^{xix} <https://www.jubilee-centre.org/cambridge-papers/peacebuilding-ending-apartheid-jeremy-ive>; <https://www.amazon.com/Footprints-African-Sand-Life-Times-ebook/dp/B07NP6TDY5> (Michael Cassidy's autobiography); <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1994/august15/4t9019.html>; <https://www.amazon.com/Story-Church-South-Africa/dp/1839731583/> (Kevin Roy's excellent history of Christianity in S.Africa)

^{xx} <https://pacificlegal.org/eternal-vigilance-the-price-of-freedom/>

^{xxi} <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/january-5-1967-inaugural-address-public-ceremony>

^{xxii} See Dennis Praeger, *Still the Best Hope* (2013, Broadside Books)

^{xxiii} <https://www.juliusruechel.com/2021/03/preparing-ground-for-mass-hysteria-what.html>

^{xxiv} <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B200723>; <https://www.gracechurch.org/cantrell/posts/2127>

^{xxv} <https://www.antiochbiblechurch.org.za/multimedia-archive/when-to-resist-evil-matt-539/>;

https://youtu.be/_9TyCkoMEUM

^{xxvi} <https://www.gracechurch.org/news/posts/2254>

^{xxvii} https://www.cpjustice.org/public/page/content/2017_kuyper_lecture_remarks

^{xxviii} <https://brownstone.org/articles/vaccine-passports-institutionalized-segregation/>;
<https://slowtwrite.com/unvaccinated-people-are-not-the-virus/>; "Vaccine passports will not be about health, vaccine passports are part of a financial transaction control grid that will absolutely end human liberty in the West." (<https://twitter.com/WeAreTheNewz/status/1459795966094192644?s=09>);

^{xxix} <https://off-guardian.org/2021/11/12/letter-to-a-colluder-stop-enabling-tyranny/>

^{xxx} <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/martin-niemoeller-first-they-came-for-the-socialists>