

**Sermon on Freedom**  
**By Rev. J. Hugh Odhner**

Lessons: Genesis 2:7-9, 15-17; 3:1-7  
John 8: 2, 31-46  
True Christian Religion 475, 477

*"As long as a person lives in the world, he is kept midway between heaven and hell, and is there kept in spiritual equilibrium, which is freedom of choice."* (True Christian Religion 475)

A person can only be saved if he is in a state of freedom. Freedom of choice is necessary so that we can make our own choices about our eternal dwelling place. And this is only possible if the Lord permits evils which a person may intend doing. Such permission is for the sake of our salvation. In order that we may be saved the Lord provides that we should act from freedom according to reason. Even when we choose otherwise, the Lord is constantly trying to bend us to do good, .

But we may ask, what is meant by freedom? Freedom is a common word in the world, and almost everyone says they are for it. Usually when we think of freedom, we think of it as being the power to determine our own actions, that is, the right to do what we want to do, to act according to our own loves and desires provided we do not hurt anyone. Those in the church also tend to hold this idea of freedom, except that we regard it as a faculty or power with which the Lord has endowed us. This idea can be confirmed in Word, as in Divine Providence 75 which states, *"Man has reason and freedom, or rationality and liberty, and these two faculties are from the Lord in man."* Further, we may think that this freedom allows us to choose between either good or evil, and that until we make a choice, we are in the middle between good on the one side and evil on the other. The idea of freedom that a person may have is that the Lord grants human beings the power to choose and that this power is ours and no longer the Lord's. Certainly, we can find statements in the Word, which appear to confirm this belief. For example, our lesson from the True Christian Religion teaches that freedom of choice results from a person's being kept in spiritual equilibrium; that is being kept in an. "equilibrium between heaven and hell, thus between good and evil." Therefore the idea we may have is that freedom is an ability which the Lord gives to us and that, from this ability, we can

choose between good and evil. This is what freedom appears to be, and this is also what the Word teaches in some places.

But such an idea of freedom is not complete, nor is it in agreement with a great many other statements found in the Word. The idea that freedom is a single ability which the Lord gives to us so that we can choose between good and evil is an incomplete truth, an appearance of truth which agrees with our natural observations. And as is the case with all appearances of truth, it can be confirmed from the sense of the letter of the Word, because the sense of the letter contains many appearances of truth.

The idea of freedom which we may have, that it is an ability or power by which we can choose between good or evil and that until we so choose we are in neither good nor evil but in equilibrium, is an idea which, as said earlier, can be confirmed by some passages in the letter of the Word. But that it is not a complete and therefore not a correct idea, can be seen we observe that a great number of other passages do not confirm such an idea of freedom. Confirmation of an idea is not done by simply finding one or two passages to support an opinion, it is done by considering and comparing all passages which treat of the subject.

The True Christian Religion seems to say that freedom of choice results from a person's being in equilibrium between good and evil, and he must choose one or the other in order to be in good or evil. But freedom is not simply a choice between good and evil with us in the middle. Freedom, as taught in a number of other places in the Word, is not a neutral faculty but is the result of person's loves and affections. Because all human beings are born into the hereditary love of evil, the freedom arising out of this love is called infernal freedom. However, balancing this hereditary love, a person from the Lord also receives remains of good which enable a person to have a love of what is good. The freedom of this love is called celestial or spiritual freedom. Thus we read:

*"There is infernal freedom and there is celestial freedom. It is from infernal freedom to think and will evil, and so far as civil and moral laws do not hinder, to speak and do it; but it is from celestial freedom to think and will good, and so far as ability is given to speak and do it... all freedom with everyone is from his love; wherefore they who are in the love of evil perceive no otherwise than that infernal freedom is freedom itself; but they who are in the love of good perceive that celestial freedom is*

*freedom itself, consequently that the opposite is slavery to both."*  
(Divine Providence 43)

Infernal freedom is also called in the Word natural freedom. All people have natural freedom from birth. But celestial or spiritual freedom we receive from the Lord through remains and regeneration. Freedom is not of one kind, but of two kinds, the one being infernal or natural freedom, and the other being celestial and the spiritual freedom. Freedom then is not simply a choice between whether to do good or evil, but whether we act from the freedom we have been born into which is infernal, or the freedom we receive from the Lord which is spiritual. A person by nature is immersed in infernal freedom and would of himself rush into all evils, but the Lord by means of remains of good and more so through regeneration raises a person above his evil loves so that he can see, and if he wills to do so, act out of spiritual freedom. This is the equilibrium that we are held in. It is an equilibrium between two freedoms, one natural, the other spiritual.

Because we are already born into one of these freedoms, that which is infernal, if we do nothing, that is, neither reform nor commit actual evils, we still remain in evil, for then our choice is to remain in the evils we were born into. To do nothing is still a choice. We cannot remain neutral towards good and evil. If we choose evil, we act out of infernal freedom and confirm it; if we do not choose at all, we remain in the infernal freedom that we were born into and by default confirm those evils. It is like that servant in the parable who did nothing with the talent his master gave him. He didn't lose it, he simply didn't use it.

Because we are endowed with remains (or affections of good and truth) from the Lord, we have the ability to act out of spiritual freedom. By means of these remains the Lord is able to raise us up out of our hereditary inclinations. The Lord gives us an understanding which can be raised into the light of heaven. This enlightened understanding teaches what we ought to do, although our proprium (or self interest) hardly ever desires to do it. Still, remains can act to motivate that proprium and we can act according to the enlightened understanding. Two things are here evident. First, the person who starts on the road to regeneration in the beginning acts largely out of selfish reasons. For example, he wants to escape the torments of hell and enjoy the delights of heaven. Thus he acts largely out of his own self-interest, but still the Lord is able to work with this impure motive because the person is acting according to what is true. The second thing is that the person who begins to act out of spiritual freedom may at first feel that he is in no freedom. This is because his

proprial will is evil and thus he feels that infernal freedom is true freedom and spiritual freedom is a kind of slavery, or at least not very pleasant. So we read in the Word:

*"Spiritual freedom is from the love of eternal life. Into this love and its enjoyment no one comes but he who thinks evils to be sins and therefore does not will them and who at the same time looks to the Lord. When a man first does this he is in that freedom... At first this freedom does not seem to be freedom, yet still it is, but it afterwards appears so... This freedom increases as natural freedom decreases and becomes subservient." (Divine Providence 73)*

The Word teaches that in reality there is only one true freedom, and this is celestial freedom which is spiritual. Infernal freedom, which appears as freedom to the natural man is in reality slavery and bondage. This can be seen from this passage:

*"To do evil from freedom appears as freedom, but it is slavery, because that freedom is from the love of- self and the love of the world, and these loves are from hell. Such freedom is actually turned into slavery after death, for the man who has been in such freedom then becomes a vile servant in hell.*

*But to do good from freedom is freedom itself, because it is from love to the Lord and from love towards the neighbor, and these loves are from heaven... Because all good is from the Lord and all evil from hell, it follows that freedom consists in being led by the Lord, and slavery is being led by hell."*

(New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine 142)

In the True Christian Religion the second topic treated of in the section on Freedom of Choice is entitled *"The placing of the two trees in the garden of Eden, one of life, and the other of the knowledge of good and evil, signifies that freedom of choice in spiritual things has been given to man."* (True Christian Religion 466)

That tree of life signifies for each of us our living from God and God living in us. All things which we have from the Lord are meant by the tree of life. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil signifies our belief that we live from ourselves and not from the Lord -- which is the way it appears (see

Conjugal Love 135). So that there may be reciprocal conjunction with the Lord, that is, that the Lord conjoins Himself with us and we in return may conjoin ourselves with the Lord, the Lord has given us this appearance that we live and make choices from ourselves. Thus we feel that we have the power to choose between good and evil, and that we reform and regenerate ourselves. From the appearance we incline to think that freedom is our own – that it is our inborn right to be free. And this appearance is necessary with all of us, in order that we may act as if from ourselves in shunning evils and doing what is good. A person needs this as-of-self feeling and motivation. The Lord cannot reform and regenerate us unless we act as if we were reforming ourselves. It is most necessary that a person feels that he is acting out of his own power and freedom when he chooses to shun evils as sins and to do good. However, it is hurtful for us to confirm ourselves in that appearance. We must eventually come to acknowledge that it is the Lord who actually gives us the ability to shun evils as sins and to do good, and that in fact it is the Lord who really does these things. This takes time. In the beginning of regeneration it doesn't appear this way. However, the Lord is very patient with us. He knows the order and process of regeneration – He created it. Such an acknowledgment only comes through the temptations which we endure in the course of regeneration. In the Third Testament it is said that the celestial angels are in the greatest appearance that they live and act out of self, and that they are in the greatest perception and acknowledgment that they really live and act from the Lord. This is the state that we must also strive to come into. It isn't easy, and it doesn't come naturally, because it is spiritual, not natural. We can be confident, however, that the Lord is always working with us to bring us into genuine celestial freedom.

**Amen.**

**Prayer:** *O Lord, lead us to abide in Thy Word, that we may know Thy Truth, and Thy Truth shall make us free. Amen. (cf. John 8:32)*

## **LESSONS**

### **Genesis 2:7-9, 15-17; 3:1-7**

7 And Jehovah God formed man -- dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of lives, and man became a living soul.

8 And Jehovah God planted a garden in Eden from the east, and there He set the man whom He had formed.

9 And out of the ground Jehovah God made to grow every tree desirable to behold, and good for food; the tree of lives also, in the midst of the garden; and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

15 And Jehovah God took the man, and placed him in the garden of Eden, to tend it and keep it.

16 And Jehovah God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden eating you may eat.

17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it; for in the day that you eat of it, dying you shall die.

### **Gen. 3:1-7**

1 And the serpent was more cunning than any wild animal of the field which Jehovah God had made; and he said to the woman, Has God indeed said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

2 And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the tree of the garden;

3 but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

4 And the serpent said to the woman, You shall not surely die.

5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as God, knowing good and evil.

6 And the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* longed for by the eyes, and the tree *was* desirable to make *one* wise, and she took from its fruit and did eat, and she gave also to her man with her, and he did eat.

7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves coverings.

### **John 8:2, 31-46**

<sup>2</sup> Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them.

<sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. <sup>32</sup> And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." <sup>33</sup> They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How *can* you say, 'You will be made free?'" <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. <sup>35</sup> And a slave does not abide in the house forever, *but* a son abides forever. <sup>36</sup> Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. <sup>37</sup> "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.

<sup>38</sup> I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father." <sup>39</sup> They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. <sup>40</sup> But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. <sup>41</sup> You do the deeds of your father." Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father--God." <sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.

<sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. <sup>44</sup> You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not* stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it. <sup>45</sup> But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. <sup>46</sup> Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? <sup>47</sup> He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

### **True Christian Religion 475, 477**

**TCR 475. IV.** As long as a person lives in the world, he is kept midway between heaven and hell, and is there kept in spiritual equilibrium, which is freedom of choice.

In order to know what freedom of choice is and the nature of it, it is necessary to know its origin. Especially from a recognition of its origin it can be known, not only that there is such a thing as freedom of choice, but also what it is. Its origin is in the spiritual world, where a person's mind is kept by the Lord. A person's mind is his spirit, which lives after death; and his spirit is constantly in company with its like in the spiritual world, and at the same time by means of the material body with which it is enveloped, it is with men in the natural world. A person is not aware that in respect to his mind he is in the midst of spirits, for the reason that the spirits with whom he is in company in the spiritual world, think and speak spiritually, while his own spirit thinks and speaks naturally as long as he is in the material body.

[2] But to make it comprehensible how a person can be kept midway between heaven and hell and thereby in spiritual equilibrium from which he has freedom of choice, it shall be briefly explained. The spiritual world consists of heaven and hell; heaven then is overhead, and hell is beneath the

feet, not, however, in the center of the globe inhabited by men, but below the lands of the spiritual world, which are also of spiritual origin....

[3] Between heaven and hell there is a great intervening space, which to those who are there appears like a complete world. Into this intervening space, evil exhales from hell in all abundance; while from heaven, on the other hand, good flows into it, also in all abundance. It was of this intervening space that Abraham said to the rich man in hell:

*Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they who are there cross over to us (Luke 16:26).*

Everyone, as to his spirit, is in the midst of this intervening space, solely for this reason, that he may be in freedom of choice.

**TCR 477.** A person is kept in this great intervening space, and midway therein continually, for the sole purpose that he may have freedom of choice in spiritual things, for this is spiritual equilibrium, because it is an equilibrium between heaven and hell, thus between good and evil. All who are in that great intervening space are, as to their interiors, conjoined either with the angels of heaven or with the devils of hell... After death everyone betakes himself to his own in that region and associates himself with those who are in a love similar to his own, for love conjoins everyone there with his like, and causes him to breathe out his soul freely, and to continue in his previous state of life. But the externals that do not make one with his internals are then gradually put off, and when this has been done the good man is raised up to heaven, and the evil man betakes himself to hell, each to such as he is at one with as to his ruling love.

**AMEN**