

March 2024

Dear Brethren:

Jesus Christ commanded His disciples, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). He told them, "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops" (Matthew 10:27). That gospel is actually *the good news* of the coming Kingdom of God, and it is God's intent that this message be proclaimed eventually to all of humanity. That commission indeed will be fulfilled at exactly the right time and not by presumptuous men hijacking that assignment, even as God has always brought to pass His decrees as He sees fit and *right on schedule*.

But stop and think about what is actually required in order for this *preaching of Truth* to be accomplished. Besides the need for an authorized messenger to be sent by God, it also requires *a platform* for communicating with vast numbers of people.

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and *how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?* And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring *glad tidings of good things!* (Romans 10:14–15) [emphasis mine throughout]

So then *faith cometh by hearing*, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17).

Preaching is worthless if there is no audience to actually hear the message. Without a platform to put preachers and hearers together, that proclamation of Truth becomes muted. This might seem obvious, but only if you take for granted the *freedom to speak* and the *freedom to assemble* in order to hear.

Jesus Christ's Example

Jesus Christ began the New Testament era by coming Himself in the flesh and proclaiming God's message to establish a Church.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me *to preach the gospel* to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, *to preach deliverance* to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, *To preach the acceptable year of the Lord* (Luke 4:18–19).

Jesus fulfilled that commission of His Father:

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, *preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God*, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: *repent ye, and believe the gospel* (Mark 1:14–15).

In order to be successful in His ministry, Jesus had to overcome many obstacles, especially the constant attempts to shut Him up. His message became hated by many powerful Jewish leaders of His day because they viewed Jesus' ministry as a particular threat to their authority. Unlike many other self-proclaimed prophets of the day who were tolerated because they came and went without fanfare, the message and miracles of Jesus stirred the populace as never before. Therefore, He had to be neutralized!

And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, *Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest*. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, *Master, rebuke thy disciples*. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out (Luke 19:37–40).

The speech of Jesus was considered "blasphemous" and "dangerous." At first, these scholars attempted to win by ridiculing Him in public, but they were always the ones who came away appearing like fools. Eventually, they pulled out all the stops to shut Him up and engaged in an elaborate conspiracy to have Him killed. In short, the message of Jesus was treated as "hate speech," and they felt justified in doing anything necessary to put an end to His ministry.

And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that *it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people*, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he

should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then *from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death* (John 11:49–53).

They knew that they were breaking many of their own principles of jurisprudence, but they justified it as a necessary evil in order to achieve "a greater good." Of course, *their retention of power* was always deemed to be "a good cause," worthy of any price to preserve it. So Jesus fulfilled His commission in a hostile environment that was against free speech.

The duly-commissioned apostles of Jesus suffered the very same persecution and restriction against their free expression of the Gospel:

And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And *they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day:* for it was now eventide (Acts 4:1–3).

The following day, the Jewish counsel questioned the captives and then threatened them for preaching about Jesus Christ. In private, they hoped that a mere threat would be enough to silence them:

Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, *let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.* And they called them, and *commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.* But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So *when they had further threatened them, they let them go,* finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people (Acts 4:16–21).

According to God's will, every one of these apostles, except for John, was eventually martyred for proclaiming a message that the authorities deemed to be hateful.

What about free speech in our day? Has anything really changed over the past two thousand years?

Christ's Ministry Tomorrow

Jesus Christ promised that His Work would never be nullified, and that His message would be proclaimed boldly in the days just before His Second Coming:

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come (Matthew 24:14).

This statement by Jesus is not *a commission* for anyone in particular to attempt to make it happen. (For comparison, the actual commission of chosen servants is found in Matthew 28:19–20.) Matthew 24:14 is merely *a pronouncement* by God of what He is going to do, even in spite of every attempt by man and Satan to prevent it. That proclamation will never be subverted!

But rest assured that the very same ploys from the days of Jesus will be used in the last days to shut up the servants of God who will be sent to preach that very Gospel. There really is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. *And the gospel must first be published among all nations.* But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy [Spirit] (Mark 13:9–11).

This is a prophecy yet to be fulfilled in the future. We have not seen yet that prophesied Great Tribulation or the magnified proclamation of that Gospel that Christ promised to perform. Imagine how infuriated the majority of people on earth today will be when they hear the *real Truth of God* proclaimed against every human perversion that is being justified and glorified today. God will force them all to hear it, and no one will be able to "cancel" His servants. There is a reason why God's Two Witnesses will be despised, and the world will rejoice when their ministry is completed and God finally permits them to be killed (Revelation 11:10). In the mind of the world, this horrible "hate speech" will finally be extinguished.

God's Church Today Blessed by Free Speech

In the meantime, however, we have indeed been part of a miraculous Work of God, because Jesus Christ did indeed establish His Church in our day. And that Church was

established by Jesus Christ through the inspiration of a chosen servant, Mr. Herbert Armstrong. If anyone believes that Herbert Armstrong was not the man that God used to fulfill this commission, then pray tell, where did Christ fulfill His promise? It had to be done by someone, somewhere. The point of this *Letter* is not to provide evidence of this particular belief. We have fifty years of writings and sermons to substantiate our Faith. We are not in doubt. We have seen the proofs by all that was accomplished by the Radio Church of God during the twentieth century, and in a continuing remnant body to this very day.

The question is, what was a very key component, physically, in making it possible for Mr. Armstrong to begin that Work of God in the 1930s and to see it grow and flourish during the following four decades? We often take much of this history for granted. An environment of *true freedom of speech and assembly* is the answer!

Interestingly, it is very likely that these unique freedoms of speech, of religion, and of the right to assemble may have been orchestrated by God in this particular country to make possible the unhindered proclamation of spiritual Truth in the twentieth century and the raising up of that prophesied Church of these last days. In how many other countries on earth might Herbert Armstrong have been permitted freely to teach doctrines considered by mainstream world religions to be heretical? Would that work have flourished in a Catholic-dominated country which lacked guarantees against religious persecutions? Or how about one of the communistic/socialistic/atheistic countries? Yes, that Gospel of Jesus Christ was indeed spread to many nations around the world, but the physical seat of that Work was located in the USA. Is that just a coincidence? That Gospel only spread out from here to other so-called "free countries" as a result of the roots established in the USA.

It is easy for Americans, in particular, to take for granted the right to speak freely and to practice religion without governmental interference. After all, those principles are enshrined in the *First Amendment* of the United States Constitution:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Few of us may understand how unique is such a foundational law compared to the history of past human governments, because most of us have grown up with these "guarantees." Yes, the majority of nations today (as well as groups like the United Nations) pay lip service to the idea of free speech as a "human right," but that is largely due to the unique influence of American values in this modern world over the past two hundred years. Prior to that emergence, it was mostly assumed that "the king" had a sovereign right to

control speech. The "American experiment" has been quite singular in human history in challenging that philosophy. And it was within the cocoon of this unique government permissiveness that the Work of God was established and allowed to flourish during the last century.

Free Speech Fakery

Many others now profess agreement with the principles of free speech and individual expression of ideas, but then they quickly use caveats to undermine anything that government officials or social planners still do not like. In practice, their "freedoms" mostly turn out to be empty platitudes. Even as did the Pharisees in Christ's day, governments today will rail against "hate speech" to justify squelching anything that they deem to be a threat to their own powers.

It really is true that *free speech only exists when people that you disagree with are allowed to speak things that you hate*. Otherwise, it is all just a pretense and an exercise in semantics.

Today, many nations and global consortiums are seeking to neutralize what they deem to be "misinformation" or "disinformation." We now have an explosion of professional "fact checkers." But all of these new programs are just clever ploys intended to wrap the same old censorship schemes in a cloak of "public service." They always claim that they are merely seeking to protect the populace from "dangerous" expressions that will do gross harm. Of course, they then are the ones to establish the "arbiters" who will decide what speech is dangerous or not. The end result is that—as in all times before—the ones who hold power get to control what is allowed to be said and who is allowed to assemble publically to say it. It is always according to their own selfish whims, just like in every past regime of human history. There is no actual "free speech" at all!

By contrast, until recently, the high courts of the USA have still been defending true freedom of expression against those seeking to infringe upon these "inalienable rights." But that likely will not last much longer. All that is required is a change in the makeup of the Supreme Court in order to see previous free speech guarantees toppled. In the meantime, attempts by state and federal agencies to suspend free speech "for cause" have mostly been blocked. Enjoy that freedom while it still lasts. It has been an unusual benefit in our day, and one that will soon expire.

The Real Value of Free Speech

What is the real value of the ability to speak freely, without threat of reprisal?

George Washington said, "If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter."

Benjamin Franklin stated, "Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freeness of speech."

All of those activities to subvert real freedom of expression are being planned and executed, step by step. And the people en masse are being led to that slaughter.

God has already told us what will happen in the days leading to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ:

For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And *this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations*; and then shall the end come. . . . For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened (Matthew 24:7–14, 21–22).

There are many details that God has chosen not to provide to us, but what is certain is that these horrible events on the earth will hardly occur in an environment where freedom of speech and assembly are tolerated. In fact, the elimination of these special freedoms which we take for granted might be one of the early indications of things to come.

Loss of Freedom Is a Test

Rather than becoming enraged at the unfairness of these losses of special freedoms, the true people of God should respond with a different orientation. Do not allow yourself to

get caught up in any political activism to "preserve your rights." God gave them, and God will take them away according to His perfect Plan. It is very likely that a strong catalyst for that prophesied tribulation and the death of millions upon this earth will be a clash between those who hold power vs. those who rise up to preserve their "human rights" against tyranny. If you are not very careful, it could be easy to "pick a side" and engage in an attempt to preserve your freedoms. That would be a mistake.

Jesus Christ promised that many of God's true people are going to get caught up in severe persecution and tribulation (Revelation 7:14; Daniel 11:33–35). But it should not be because they joined some *human cause* to preserve the U.S. Constitution, or any other human institution. God is the One who sets up and takes down all rulers. Do not fall into the trap of the Israelites of old, who felt enraged by God-permitted intruders and thought that they had a "right" to defend what was "theirs." No, some of the faithful children of God will likewise suffer persecution and even death, but it will be because they followed in the footsteps of Jesus Christ to *hold fast to the Faith*, not because they took sides politically in the affairs of men.

Jesus Christ did not die as a martyr because He became a political activist. He died because He refused to allow any man to shut Him up from proclaiming the Truth of His Father. When our long-held freedoms of speech and of assembly finally disappear, your "battle" will be to continue to *obey God personally*, in spite of living in a hostile environment. When your religion becomes illegal, will you still assemble before God on Sabbaths and Holy Days? Or will you allow the threats of tyrants to make you stay home?

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and *I will not fear what man shall do unto me* (Hebrews 13:5–6).

We have enjoyed an unusual blessing in being able to practice our religion during the past century without worry of government intrusion. We have enjoyed incredible freedom to speak and to assemble. That was hardly true for any other generation of people whom God called into this Way of Life. Count it as a special gift! And when God finally removes that gift, which He certainly will, rather than mourn and fight to get it back, embrace the next phase of your spiritual development, which is to learn to practice your Christianity fearlessly, even as Jesus Christ showed us by His own perfect example.

If we take these principles to heart, we will avoid serious traps of the future, and we will be ones who can let the true light of Jesus Christ manifest in us by our quiet practice of Faith.

With love and appreciation for all the children of God,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.

Jon W. Brisby