

Power versus Freedom

By Ronald L. Dart

If “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” how is it that God has not been corrupted? This is one of the old challenges that unbelievers like to toss out to Christians. Actually, it is a perfectly legitimate question, and the answer opens the door to understanding and resolving a wide range of issues relative to God and the Bible.

It was Lord Acton who coined the statement about power, and I am beginning to understand in new ways why it is so. And, perhaps, it is becoming clearer why the founders of this country were so dedicated to the balance of power, and preventing the centralization of power. There is now, and long has been, a struggle between power and freedom. I think it is fair to say that there is enmity between power and freedom. Freedom is a threat to power, and power is a threat to freedom, and it has always been so.

Can power corrupt God?

Why, then, does God not become corrupted by power? The answer is relatively simple, but for some reason, people don’t see it. God has a goal in mind that requires freedom for all concerned. Perhaps we can all understand how having an overriding objective tends to

diminish every other consideration.

So what is that objective? Before I answer that, I have to talk about the issue of freedom. It has been very much on my mind of late, because I fear a considerable loss of freedom is in the works for mankind if present trends continue. To explain this, at the risk of boring you, I have to go back to the beginning. There are loads of unanswerable questions that arise from the early chapters of Genesis, which serve as a distraction from what may be the most important bit of information found there.

You probably know the story. In the words of James Weldon Johnson, God stepped out on space, looked around, and said, “I’m lonely. I’ll make me a world.” And so he set out to create. He made the sun, the moon, and the stars; he created plant, insect and animal life. He planted a garden eastward in a place called Eden.

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And then he made a Man.

It is plain to see that man was the object of this whole exercise. Why that was so is a story all in itself. Then God concluded that it was not good for man to be alone. He put man to sleep, took one of his ribs, and fashioned a woman. To this pair, he gave the Garden of Eden with instructions to dress and keep it. So far, so good.

Why two trees in the Garden?

But God had done something else

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Revocable Living Trust

By Paula E. Hughes, J.D.

This type of trust is revocable because, if you change your mind, you can change the terms of the trust, or do away with it altogether. It is called a living trust because it is created and takes effect during your lifetime. A revocable living trust is a very flexible estate planning tool with many advantages.

- **Reduces probate costs:** You enjoy the use and benefit of your assets during your lifetime, but the living trust removes the assets from your estate for probate purposes. You may save the probate and administration costs you would incur if those same assets were included in your estate.
- **Speedy distribution of trust assets:** Because assets placed in the

revocable living trust do not pass through probate, your stated plan for the management and distribution of those assets can begin immediately following your death.

- **Flexibility:** The revocable living trust can be changed in whole or in part at any time during your life.
- **Control:** You may name yourself as trustee and continue to manage the assets of the revocable living trust during your lifetime. You will control the income, the principal, and determine for yourself how much you wish to use during your lifetime for your own benefit.
- **Investment management:** You may name a bank or professional trustee to manage the trust for you. If you elect to remain a co-

trustee, you will retain the right to direct investment goals and strategies while being free from the day-to-day issues of asset management

- **Confidential:** The revocable living trust is a private document. No one but the beneficiaries need to know its contents.
- **Charitable contributions:** You can provide for a gift to Christian Educational Ministries to be made from your revocable living trust after your death.
- **Tax savings:** All assets in your revocable living trust are subject to estate taxes, but the trust is an excellent vehicle to take maximum advantage of provisions of federal estate tax laws that actually

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We Shall Beat Our Swords Into Plowshares

By Lenny Cacchio

The title of this essay is a proverb that appears on a sculpture at the United Nations building in New York City. It's a wonderful aspiration, and it bears a striking resemblance to a prophecy in Isaiah: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they

train for war anymore" (Isaiah 2:3-4 NIV).

Notice the difference, subtle but significant, between the biblical quote and the U.N. version: "We shall," according to the United Nations. "They shall," in the biblical version, because the Lord "will teach us his ways" and because "He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples."

The United Nations mantra implies that "we" can bring peace and prosperity. The 65 years of U.N. mandates give more than a clue about their ability or lack thereof to get it done. "We" can't even achieve peace in our own

neighborhoods let alone in the world as a whole. A critical something is missing, "something" the U.N. won't acknowledge.

"He will teach us his ways." "The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." "He will judge. . . and settle disputes." When human beings take the serpent's words for truth ("Ye shall be as gods"), they must conclude that they can bring the millennium to earth through their own efforts. In relying solely on their own wisdom, they reject the only source who can truly bring peace, the Prince of Peace.

Isaiah again: "No one calls for

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that people seem to have a hard time understanding. He planted two trees in the Garden. The Tree of Life, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He told his man and his woman that they could eat of any tree in the Garden except one: The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Now here is the burning question: If he didn't want them to eat of that tree, why was it there? (You may want to write that question down and give it some thought. Ask your Sunday School teacher about it.)

Here is the answer: If you aren't free to disobey, you aren't free. And God wanted a man who was *free*. Man's freedom was an imperative of what God was doing with him, and so, man had to have a choice. If you ever need an example of what they call "free moral agency," this will serve well enough. One of the most interesting aspects of the story is that, having told them this, God left them completely alone in the Garden. Except for a snake.

You know the story, and the argument the serpent makes against the command. But God is not present to argue with the snake. He has already told them. You can have every tree in the Garden but not this one. Well, they ate of the tree, their eyes were opened, and they knew they were naked and they proceeded to cover up.

Man granted complete freedom

Then God came to the Garden and called out for them, "Where are you?" At this point, there should be many furrowed brows. What do you mean, "Where are you?" Isn't

this God, who knows everything? Yes, it is God who knows everything he wants to know. What he had done was to leave instructions and then leave these two beautiful, naked, creatures together—entirely alone. He did not hide in the bushes and watch.

This was an essential element of granting to man complete freedom. God wasn't going to stand around and nag them. Now why did God do it this way? Why didn't he make creatures that could only do the right thing? Actually, he did. We call them cows or sheep. What God wanted were sons to share eternity, sons who chose God freely, and not because they had no choice.

So freedom was at the top of God's agenda, right from the get go. Why does power not corrupt God? Because he is absolutely committed to man's freedom and cannot get what he is after without it. This simple idea has far-reaching consequences.

Let's bring Jesus into the scene and consider the impact he had on the power structure of the time. Let me draw you a picture. Jesus was in a synagogue on the Sabbath day, and there was a man there who had a withered arm. The leaders were watching him to see whether Jesus would heal on the Sabbath day. Jesus knew the arguments about Sabbath observance. He kept the Sabbath himself. The leaders there intended to put Jesus on the spot. They asked him if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath day (Matthew 12:10 ff.).

Jesus' impact on the power structure

Jesus challenged the argument on

its merits: "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then, Jesus told the man with the withered arm to stretch forth his arm. He did, and it was made whole on the spot. It was the most vivid answer that could have been given.

What followed would have been, in the normal course of events, an insane response. The Pharisees held a council on how to destroy Jesus. Time after time, Jesus had healed the sick, released burdens, freed people captive to disease. And time after time, the fear of him and the hatred grew. But not among the common people. They had no problem with Jesus, but followed him everywhere and hung on his every word. What was the difference between, say, the Pharisees and the common folk? In a word, it was power. Somehow, the story of their deliberations and a bald statement of their motives leaked out, and we know what happened.

It seems clear enough what the problem was: They feared the loss of power. And it is probably the fear of the loss of power that causes power to corrupt. Maybe that is a clue to understanding why an all-powerful God is not corrupted by power.

There is much more to say in developing this complex theme, and I say it in a new program titled, *Power versus Freedom*. It has not yet been aired, but you can have a *FREE* CD of it right now. Just check the box on the enclosed

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card and send it back to us. We have included an envelope for your convenience. You will want to have a copy of this, because it resolves some of the more complex questions ever asked about God, power, and man.

Feast Ushers Needed

The Feast of Tabernacles in Destin/Fort Walton Beach, Florida, is coming soon and we need your help! Warm, friendly faces are needed to greet people and help them find their seats for worship services. Young adults would make a great addition to this team! This is a wonderful opportunity for you to make your contribution, meet many people, and feel a part of this great Feast. If you are interested in serving, contact Jenee Zaydon at feast@zantedesign.com.

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justice. . . They rely on empty arguments and speak lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil. . . Their deeds are evil deeds, and acts of violence are in their hands. Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace” (Isaiah 59:4, 6-8).

We shall beat our swords into plowshares, but first have we have to learn how.

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reduce your estate tax. Additionally, the value of assets distributed to a charitable institution immediately after your death is not included in the value of your estate for estate tax purposes.

Although there is no immediate charitable deduction when you create a revocable living trust that includes a gift to Christian Educational Ministries, the benefit is that you maintain control of the assets and the flexibility to change your plan in the face of changing circumstances.

Be sure to consult your tax advisor or an estate planning professional before implementing any ideas from this article. (Next month: *Charitable Remainder Trust.*)

In Memory

Christian Educational Ministries is very grateful for a generous contribution made in memory of 28 year old Mark Stahl who was killed on the freeway in Waco, TX on March 25, 2009. Our sympathy and prayers go out to his parents, Dean and Carol Stahl, and his family.

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and equipped for every good work.*