

Lesson 5: The test of liberty

Memory Verse: [T]he creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Romans 8:21)

Through your years in school you've become familiar with tests, or exams. These are normally a series of questions you are expected to answer to demonstrate how well you've learned the material presented or to demonstrate that you can perform the skills you were expected to master.

Few tests cover all the material you are expected to learn. Instead, they sample some of the material with the assumption that your knowledge of the overall subject is reflected in your knowledge of the material included on the test, assuming you didn't know ahead of time what questions would be on the test.

With Satan telling lies about God in heaven, and with those lies now being spread across the universe, God needed a way to demonstrate the truth; the truth that he was even more unselfish and giving than he expected his creatures to be. God needed to show that he kept his own design law while an enemy kept telling the creatures of the universe that he didn't.

So God created a new world. In this new world he would put new creatures who would have a new feature. He would give them a way to show their love for each other that would result in even more creatures for both them and God to love. And so God made earth with two kinds of creatures. They were very much the same, but they had differences that meant it would take both of them to fully represent the Godly character God designed them to have.

You and I know that Satan would tempt these new creatures into sin. He would think that he had ruined God's plan to demonstrate his love to the universe. But God, in his infinite wisdom, already had a plan for what to do if Adam and Eve would fall into sin. That plan would also demonstrate his unselfish character and his unchangeable love for every creature he had created.

The very presence of evil in the universe is powerful evidence that God gives his creatures freedom. Love cannot exist without freedom because love involves choosing to relate to and support someone. If that choice isn't a free choice then the service is obligation, not love. Since God's character is love, he designed his universe to operate on love, and that required that his creatures have freedom.

God could have created beings that had no choice but to serve him. That would have guaranteed that sin would never enter the universe. But such a move would have prevented love, so God took the much more difficult path of creating creatures who could choose not to serve him and not to live based on love. Because God is love he would have done nothing else.

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release for the prisoners.... (Isaiah 61:1)

Recently you repented and did what is right in my sight. Each of you proclaimed freedom to his countrymen. You even made a covenant before me in the house that bears my Name. But now you have turned around and profaned my name; each of you has taken back the male and

female slaves you had set free to go wherever they wished. You have forced them to become your slaves again.

Therefore, this is what the LORD says: You have not obeyed me; you have not proclaimed freedom for your fellow countrymen. So I now proclaim 'freedom' for you, declares the LORD – 'freedom' to fall by the sword, plague and famine. (Jeremiah 34:15-17)

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.... You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. (Galatians 5:1, 13)

But now that one of his creatures had misused the freedom God had given, God had to demonstrate that these new creatures had the same freedom. He needed a test, a simple test, so everyone watching would be able to see whether the new creatures would believe Satan's lies. So God took something they wouldn't need, food, and made it a test. And to make the test even easier, he gave them the answer ahead of time.

“Don't eat this fruit,” he said. They had fruit from all the other trees in the garden, so they had all the food they needed. “If you eat it, you will die.” This was a simple warning. To deviate from God's plan for life would take them out of the way of life. When there is no life, there is death. Should they choose to follow Satan in his rebellion, they wouldn't be able to say God tricked them.

Genesis 5:5 tells us Adam lived for 930 years. Was Satan right when he said “You will not surely die.”? We've already made the case that sin naturally leads to death. Had God done nothing about Adam and Eve they would have died, and their death would have been permanent and irreversible. But God intervened and created a special form of death, one we call the 'first' death.

God miraculously extended the life of Adam and Eve. And he set it up so that when they died it wouldn't be permanent. In essence God would “save” their characters like you might save a file on a computer. That way he could, at some point in the future, bring them back to life. Jesus spoke of this once and said that everyone, even the wicked, would come back to life:

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” (John 5:28, 29)

One important note about this. In order to save us God must change our characters. But he won't do this without our permission. Once we're dead, even though it's only the first death, we can no longer give our permission. So once we're dead God will do nothing to change our characters. We will be raised to life with the character we had when we died. So it's important for us to trust God now and let him change our characters while we are still alive.

Possible thought papers:

1. If God made us to be free, why did he write a list of ten rules for us to follow?
2. No human who has ever died has yet died the second death. What might this say about people like Nadab and Abihu, Uzziah, or even all the soldiers killed by the Israelites?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 15. Reflect on what the hope of the resurrection means to you.