

## L E S S O N S

### 1<sup>ST</sup> Lesson: Exodus 5: 1-3

1. And afterwards Moses and Aaron came, and said to Pharaoh, “Thus said Jehovah the God of Israel, ‘Let My people go, that they may celebrate to Me in the wilderness.’” 2. And Pharaoh said, “Who is Jehovah, whose voice I should hear, to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, and also I will not let Israel go.” 3. And they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us; let us go, we pray, a way of three days into the wilderness, and let us sacrifice to Jehovah our God; lest He fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.”

### 2<sup>ND</sup> Lesson: John 8:31-36

31. Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed in Him, “If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples. 32. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” 33. They answered Him, “We are the seed of Abraham, and were never under bondage to anyone; how sayest Thou, ‘You shall be made free?’” 34. Jesus answered them, “Amen, amen, I say to you that everyone doing sin is the servant of sin. 35. And the servant abides not in the house for ever; the Son abides to eternity. 36. If then the Son free you, you shall certainly be free.”

### 3<sup>RD</sup> Lesson: Divine Love And Wisdom 264

By rationality is meant the capacity to understand what is true and thereby what is false, also to understand what is good and thereby what is evil; and by freedom is meant the capacity to think, will and do these things freely...Every man from creation, consequently from birth, has these two capacities, and that they are from the Lord; that they are not taken away from man; that from them is the appearance that man thinks, speaks, wills, and acts as from himself; that the Lord dwells in these capacities in every man, that man by virtue of that conjunction lives to eternity; that man by means of these capacities can be reformed and regenerated, but not without them; finally, that by them man is distinguished from beasts.

Freedom and Rationality  
A Sermon by  
Rev Michael. E. Ferrell

And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. John 8: 32

Introductory Ideas:

Consider whether or not you are free. On the one hand you are free to do what you want, as you please. It is also your choice not to do something unappealing to you. There are times when a person does not do exactly what he wants. An urge or impulse is not acted upon. In a moment of anger or agitation words are not spoken but kept inside. And, it is wise, before engaging in any behavior, to consider the opinion of others and any possible repercussions. But you are still free to do what you want or not pursue a particular course of action.

A person is also free to think as he pleases. Unless there is some outward manifestation (words, temperament, gestures) a person's thoughts are private, shielded from the view of other people. As human beings, we are receptacles of the Divine, created in the image of God. As the Heavenly Doctrine explains, we are very different than animals in many respects, especially from the fact that "man is able to think and to reason about whatever he encounters" (AC 1594:2). Consequently, a person is able to construct opinions, reach conclusions, formulate ideas, and make judgments. A person can engage in this kind of thinking on just about anything and even on subjects of which he knows little or nothing. In respect to whatever a person does, he is free to form any opinion about that.

Human beings possess two distinct faculties. One is freedom and the other is rationality. These capacities are human characteristics a person has from the Lord (DP 73). Animals, in contrast, do not have freedom and rationality (DP 74). Because we are free, we are therefore capable of receiving love from the Lord. And by means of our rationality, we are able to receive truths. These two together, freedom and rationality, are truly human and make it possible for us to be regenerated.

Freedom:

Just what is freedom? Freedom is a state characterized by the *absence* of any *restraint* that inhibits the exercise of one's own choice. To look at it another way, freedom is a state in which a person is able to do as he pleases *without coercion* that bends him in a direction against his will. From the Heavenly Doctrine we learn that "the *capacity to act* is called freedom" (DLW 425, emphasis added). While it seems that freedom involves making a choice and acting upon it, freedom is the capacity to act regardless of the choice or whether or not the act is voluntary or

coerced. Whatever the underlying motivation, the ability to act is still present. Freedom is simply the capacity to act.

But the capacity to act in and of itself and by itself is hollow if there's no underlying motivation. Animals have the ability to act. And so the Heavenly Doctrine teaches that first, "freedom [the capacity to act] is of love or affection" (AC 3043:2) and secondly, "all freedom is of love, for that which a man does from love, he does from freedom" (AC 9460). In a sense there is a unity of love and freedom. What a person loves is what a person loves to do. And whatever a person loves to do is from the delights from what it is he is doing. It seems quite circular – you love what you do and you do what you love. It's not circular – there's a unity of love and freedom.

Now the reason the Lord created humans with the capacity of freedom is that we may receive love from Him. The Lord's Divine love and truth flow from Him like the heat and light of the sun. The Lord's love can dwell within us and influence us to live a heavenly, useful life. But we must open ourselves and freely receive His love. It is contrary to order and the Lord's love to force anyone to receive of Him. Yet He continuously endeavors to help us exercise our freedom in a manner in which we willingly receive of His love. Love from the Lord is true freedom while love originating from self is not freedom. Consider this teaching in the Heavenly Doctrine:

Few know what freedom is, and what non-freedom is. All that which is of any love and its delight appears to be freedom, and that which is contrary to these, [love and its delights] is non-freedom. What is of the love of self and the love of the world, and of their cupidities, appears to man as freedom, but it is infernal freedom; while what is of love to the Lord and of love toward the neighbor, consequently of the love of good and truth, is freedom itself, and is heavenly freedom. AC 2870

Therefore, freedom arising out of love of self is not freedom but appears as such to the person. For example, a person may do something good because he seeks to enhance his own reputation, honor, or gain. In these situations the act itself is not loved. The benefit to one's honor or reputation is loved. On the other hand, a person may want to do something wrong but instead exercises restraint because of fear, punishment, or some form of reprisal. In these situations the value in not doing something wrong is not loved. It is the preservation of one's self that is enhanced, or loved, when a person refrains in order to avoid fear or punishment.

The Lord teaches us that true freedom is to love Him and our neighbor. We are encouraged to exercise our freedom appropriately by freely choosing to love and do what is good. The Lord has given us a wonderful and quite simple prescription how to receive good: "All good flows in from Him, and the ones who love Him are those who refrain from evil; for evil stands in the way and repels [rejects] the inflow of good from the Lord. Consequently once evil has been removed good, which is constantly present from the Lord and trying to enter, is received" (AC 8880). So

long as a person shuns evil, as of self, he makes it possible for its removal. Then as love from the Lord flows in, the Lord may inspire him to freely choose what is of good and love. But we must remember that a life of freely choosing heavenly good and love is not possible unless a person abstains from evil because evil obstructs and stands in the way.

### Rationality:

While freedom pertains to our capacity to act from what we love, we consider now the subject of rationality. In turning to the Heavenly Doctrine we see that “the *capacity to understand* is called rationality” (DLW 425, emphasis added). We seek to understand the knowledge we gain from instruction and life experiences. We can think about the things we’ve learned and formulate opinions. Our mind engages in analyzing and comparing, constantly looking at the world around us and people we encounter all in the effort to understand the reality of our existence. Like our freedom, our rationality by means of which a person can think, is not a person’s own, but is the Lord’s gift (DLW 23).

In general, man’s rationality is the “capacity to understand” (DLW 245). There’s a wide range of knowledges within our comprehension. But more particularly man’s “ability to understand what is *true* and what is *good* is called rationality” (DLW 240, emphasis added). And now we consider two specific reasons the Lord has created within us the capacity to understand what is true and what is good.

First, the Heavenly Doctrine accurately, without fail, describes man: he does not know what truth is; he does not know what falsity is; whatever favors his idea of good he calls truth; and as a result that which he calls truth and believes to be truth, is falsity (AC 857, AC 1661, AC 2434, AC 3701:2). Given our propensity to distort reality and consequently deceive ourselves, we must receive instruction from the Word about what is true. Our spiritual development depends upon our knowing, in any given situation, whether an idea is true. Do you adopt this idea? Or is another idea the more appropriate?

The Heavenly Doctrine provides an answer: “all truth looks to good” (AC 2372) and “in itself truth is good” (AC 3049). To test the truthfulness of an idea a person may ascertain whether or not it looks to good. To test the truthfulness of an idea a person may determine whether or not it is in harmony with love of the Lord and the neighbor. Does the idea serve these two objectives? One reason the Lord gives us the capacity to understand is because we don’t know what truth is and need to be instructed.

There’s a second reason for our capacity to understand. The Heavenly Doctrine accurately describes another aspect of man: he does not know what good is; he does not know what evil is; and, to his spiritual detriment, he calls his evil good because he feels it as delightful (AC 4818:6,

AC 1661:2, DP 298:3). Accordingly, we must be instructed in what good is. Then we can know the kind life the Lord wants us to live. And furthermore, we must be instructed what evil is. In that case, we may know what evils to shun as sins against the Lord and the neighbor.

Inasmuch as we must shun evils because evil stands in the way and blocks our reception of good from the Lord, evil also adversely effects our reception of truth. The Heavenly Doctrine give us some very useful insights: a person in evil must be careful because “evil hates good” (AE 1014:2) and causes the person to reject good when it is contrary to his loves. The danger of delighting in evil is that the person opens himself to reasoning in a manner to excuse the evil. And any idea making evil allowable is false and the Heavenly Doctrine says “falsity hates truth” (AE 1014:2). The reason for this is because falsity with a person steers him away from the good that truth teaches he must do.

Concluding Ideas:

Freedom is our ability, from the Lord, to act. Our freedom relates to what we love and what we do as an outward manifestation of that love. We know how we should live, that we must live according to the Lord’s commandments of His Word. We may turn to Him to help us to choose what is good from Him. As to our rationality, it is our capacity to understand what is true and good. Our rationality also serves the use to help us know and distinguish between good and evil. We can turn to the Lord in His Word so He may teach us.

We must be careful that we do not abuse our freedom and rationality. When a person willingly, knowingly, and with delight engages in sin this is an abuse of freedom. The Lord gives us freedom (ability to act from love) in order that we might shun evils as sins and in their place do what is good. Engaging in sin is contrary to order. Engaging in sin is a perverted use of freedom for a reason not originally intended by the Lord. Our freedom (ability to act from love) is given to us that we might receive love from the Lord, live an angelic life, and thereby allow the Lord to lead us to heaven.

We must likewise be careful that we do not abuse our rationality. This happens when a person willingly, knowingly, and with delight engages in sin (abuses his freedom) but afterwards fabricates some justification. In this case, the person creates an idea to make his evil to be good. A person’s idea that justifies evil is false. In this case the person misuses his rational faculty and corrupts his thinking and ability to make good judgments about himself and the nature of his life. In this case he has redirected his rational ability away from the Lord and heaven, but downward toward himself and hell.

The Lord says, “If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8: 31-32). *AMEN.*