

**American Freedom of Choice and the Protestant Intent:  
Contemporary Challenges**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY*

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Date: 23.07.2018

**DECLARATION**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled, '**American Freedom of Choice and the Protestant Intent: Contemporary Challenges**', submitted by me in partial fulfillment of requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**, is my original work and has not been previously submitted, in part or full, for the award of any other degree of this or any other university.

*Vareching Valui*

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**CERTIFICATE**

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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*Things start as an idea that either turns into something bigger or get lost like many of the thousand thoughts we have daily. These ideas are sustained by wonder and curiosity to see more, get more, feel more, and understand more. I thank God for enabling and sustaining me to keep the wonder alive to finish the work He started in me. It would have been impossible to finish this work without the gentle nudges of the Holy Spirit to not get discouraged when things seemed like it was going nowhere. So my gratitude goes to God who was there to be my strength.*

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*sometimes like knowing how to reach and write in English. I know she is the proudest today.*

## CONTENTS

	Pages	
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>i</b>	
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>ii</b>	
<b>CHAPTER I</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1-8</b>
	1.1. Research objectives	6
	1.2. Research Questions	6-7
	1.3. Hypotheses	7
	1.4. Research Methodology	7-8
<b>CHAPTER II</b>	<b>FREEDOM OF CHOICE: A WAY OF LIFE</b>	<b>9-24</b>
	2.1. Understanding Freedom of Choice	12-14
	2.2. The Importance of Choice	14-18
	2.3. The Idea of Freedom of Choice	18-21
	2.4. Freedom of Choice: The other side of the coin	21-24
<b>CHAPTER III</b>	<b>THE PROTESTANT INTENT: WHAT WAS MEANT TO BE</b>	<b>25-47</b>
	3.1. The foundations of the American Dream	26-31
	3.2. Christianity and Freedom	31-33
	3.3. “The Great Awakenings”	33-37
	3.4. Faith is personal, not Private	37-39
	3.5. The self and Freedom of Choice	39-42
	3.6 Spirit, Soul and Body	42-47
<b>CHAPTER IV</b>	<b>FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES</b>	<b>48-69</b>

4.1. A Christian Nation, Still	49-52	
4.2. “To Hate the Sin, To love the Sinner”	52-53	
4.3. Redefining Marriage and Family	53-66	
4.4. “Pro-choice and Pro-life”	66-70	
4.5. Old Faith, New People	70-71	
<b>CHAPTER V</b>	<b>CONCLUSION: BRINGING THE FALLEN APPLE BACK TO THE TREE</b>	<b>72-77</b>
<b>SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>		<b>78-85</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>S. No.</b>	<b>Figure Titles</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
Fig: 2.1	Breakfast cereal	10
Fig: 3.1	Puritan belief and ‘manifest destiny	27
Fig: 3.2	Third Great Awakening	36
Fig: 4.1	Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission	54
Fig: 4.2	Pro-woman Pro-life	66

## PREFACE

The United States of America is a country whose reach and influence is so vast and tempting. International relations today cannot be talked about without the role of the United States. It's eco-political influence and contributions are decisive of the turn of events in most situations. It is one of the nations which are referred to as "great powers". The United States stands out from all the other great powers because its influence has no limits in any fields. Before I could actually understand the concepts of nation-states I had already heard about the United States. It is a country that has fascinated and attracted many people worldwide. America is a very happening place. It is filled with varieties of lifestyle that that the rest of us dream to live. America is the land where the ideals become reality. It is the land of opportunity where things can happen. The American Dream is a dream not exclusive to Americans.

There are many values and ideals that are unique to the United States. One of these is Freedom of choice. Freedom of choice is a way of life that is very intrinsic to the functioning of the society as a whole and also individually. Freedom of choice has been a power source for making things happen because choice cannot be bargained. It gives a platform for rights and demands to be build upon. Freedom of choice is at the very core of the identity of the United States.

Freedom of choice allows people to forge their own American dream and live a fulfilled life. It gives people access to a good life by deciding what works best for themselves. Freedom of choice has aided in bringing so many dreams come true. However, there are new tensions arising as the society has become more pluralistic. The nation has always fear God and most of her values are based on the values inspired from the teachings of the Bible. With the growing influence of cultures and different thoughts freedom of choice has come under debates over certain issues that are not in line with the values that it upholds. America is always changing and always keeping up new trends. But at the same time she is deeply rooted and assumptions about where America is going just yet.



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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

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Choice is a way of life in the United States of America. There is an emphasis on the guarantee of the freedom to choose in the United States like no other country. It is one of the core values of the Americans. Freedom of choice is a way of celebrating one's own life; of being in control of one's own destiny; of having wellbeing in life. Freedom as a concept is a vast subject that can be studied is so many different angles. But the focus here will be on the ability to choose, basically freedom of choice. It is a generally accepted notion that freedom to choose means more autonomy for the individual and more autonomy is believed to lead to wellbeing. Thus, freedom of choice is a means to an end. Choice doesn't necessarily mean freedom and wellbeing but it is needed to come to the place of living out the full potential for an individual. Why is choice important? American society is fundamentally individualistic in character and choice fuels this individualism and the idea of being in control of and responsible for their own actions is highly valued in the American society. The idea of the independent and self determining individual is central not just to America's sense of self but also to their systems of government, law, finance and health care. Freedom of choice is more than an ideal in the United States; it is a lifestyle. The decisions that they make as an individual as well as a government is influenced by the values of freedom of choice. Freedom of choice has been a tool to liberate, to change destinies, to make a living, to make things happen, to become somebody and beyond. But at the same time, there has been so much striving because of the fight for the freedom to choose. Freedom of choice as an ideal was never something that was fought when America got its independence. It was a given. But to actually walk in it and live by it is a different story. The struggle is in what kind of choices.

The journey for the puritans began as a fight for religious freedom; to have a land that tolerated their religious freedom where they can worship the God from the Bible in

particular. They believed Christianity to be the true religion and therefore, conversions were also a priority to them. They believed for a community whose faith was in God and whose values were inspired by the scriptures. The biblical teachings defined their behaviors and the functioning of the society. Freedom of choice was based on the religious freedom to worship and serve God. It was a freedom from the tradition orders of the church in England that was strict and rigid. America then and America now has changed in so many ways. Along with the increase in population many communities have come to make their home in this “land of the free”. With it came different religions, cultures, traditions, values and also ideologies. America today has become a very pluralistic society. It fights to champion in tolerance and showing kindness. Americans have embraced many cultures, lifestyle, thoughts and ideologies in the name of tolerance and the freedom of choice that they always had. The concept of choice began to get expanded and now there are growing challenges. As one side of America struggles to hold on to the essence of their freedom of choice that was rooted and defined by Biblical principles and doctrines, the other side relentlessly fights to redefine and have their understanding of choice to be accepted. There is a growing unconventional cultural expressions of all the society who come from different cultures. They have an independent mind and it is important that one agree to disagree. There is a growing lifestyle of independence of thought expressed through cultural independence and independence of action expressed through economic independence. It is yet again a redefinition of the American dream that having a family, raising child and having a job is not the ultimate dream.

The United States has always been perceived as a Christian nation. It was home to many Protestant Europeans settlers. It also saw the Great Awakenings in waves over the years three times with some theologians and historians claiming a fourth. The Christian identity of United States has always been an important one. Christianity in many ways laid down the foundations for the moral, ethical values and principles for the United States. That is why we see so much strive in United States especially in the area of the struggle with morality. There has been, over the years, the separation of the moral and ethical conduct with the theological aspect that laid down those values and principle in the first place. It's

like a tug of war where America is trying to convince herself so hard that the government separates itself as a secular one while there really can't be a separation because the government is inspired to function and conduct it with ethics and principles inspired from the scriptures. They're just pulling the same rope.

It is my assertion that freedom of choice had a "protestant intent" that aimed to make an individual flourish as a free person under the will of God with his or her choices not for selfish gains that gratified the self but for the betterment of the society. By "protestant intent" I mean a freedom of choice that was intended by the believers when they embraced it as an ideal for the society when they migrated to America to look for hope for a better life for them and if not for them, for their children. They had a desire to be free from the persecutions they faced for their beliefs and faith as believers that saw the wrong conducts of the church of their time. When they fought to against the system they had to flee to a foreign land. And they came to America carrying a dream so big and so strong, the American dream is not just for Americans even today. America is the land of opportunity where anyone can make "it" happen!

The first section of the research is an introduction to the freedom of choice in America as a lifestyle in the present day and how it has set a standard for many nations that look to America as an ideal. Freedom of choice is the freedom from constrain in making one's own decision for a better future and to be in control of their own destiny. There is a sense of entitlement of one's own choice to either make good or bad choices. Madeleine L'Engle writes, "Because to take away a man's freedom of choice, even his freedom to make the wrong choice, is to manipulate him as though he were a puppet and not a person." Barry Schwartz also writes, "We want to be able to choose everything that matters, as well as the things that don't." The rationality of an individual to make choices is a given. Whether it happens to be a good or bad decision is another matter. The basis is that men are rational and they can make their own choices and when there is maximum autonomy to make choice there is maximum wellbeing. But this theory can be contested. There is no guarantee of wellbeing when an individual has maximum autonomy. Why is America still fighting to have a good life if having freedom of choice has always been a lifestyle today? Have they crossed a line in their passion for having freedom of choice that is no longer about wellbeing anymore but selfish gains? Why does America continue

to face so many challenges today with individual freedom? Is this more than cultural or political crisis? These are the questions I ask as I continue with the research and seek to find.

Freedom of choice has become very radical in various aspects. The following section of the research proposes to take it back to the biblical roots of freedom of choice or the free will to understand why it faces so many challenges today. Some of the biggest challenges that have divided the nation at present are the redefinition of marriage and family that has come with the fight for same-sex marriage. The other challenges that the research has taken up is the continuing debate over pro-choice and pro-life. These issues have heavily endorsed freedom of choice and it appears that freedom of choice has provided a footing for these issues to stand on. One fact that cannot be denied is that no matter how hard the opposite sides try to avoid the religious aspect of it on the political level it has been impossible. The emphasis on making scientific arguments and bringing scientific evidences do not go to the depths of our humanity as a community; as neighbors because the religious identity of the Americans has always been a part of the society. This has, I believe, brought in tensions because the freedom of choice as understood by the Protestants were not a means to use it apart from the will of God. However, there is also a rising trend of Christians on the liberal side fighting against anti-abortion movements and fighting for same-sex marriage rights. So America is not a nation that is predictable and one that follows a global trend. She is her own and so are her people. There are different kinds and types and definitely the research has taken me on a good journey of having to keep changing the way I see the United States of America

The research has Freedom of Choice as the main area of focus and the heart of it is to bring it back to Freedom in Christ. There are no major works of literature bringing these two together exclusively other than hints of it. This research links the freedom of choice to the freedom in Christ. They both have an end that has the well-being of the individual as the goal. They both seek to set people free. The freedom of choice can be aligned to use it to enjoy the freedom in Christ or be used to go far from it. Freedom of choice is a good thing. But when it becomes too much of the self is when the problem starts. A woman can choose to do anything with her body is what the pro-choice people in America claim, for instance. There is always the free will to do absolutely anything. Is

there a guarantee that exercising the freedom of choice by aborting the life inside will increase the well-being? What can freedom in Christ do differently? What it preaches is that it can set a person free of guilt and shame because there is the sufficient grace. As Paul writes in Corinthians “‘everything is permissible’ but not everything is beneficial.”

The research studies two main contemporary challenges that American society faces today that is based on the freedom of choice. The first is the redefinition of marriage and family as the fight for same-sex marriage continues. The legal victory is not even half of the story yet. Just because it has become legal does not mean that the entire society would suddenly become okay with it. So it is still a challenge. It has created divisions with divided opinions. The lines of religious freedom and anti-discrimination are getting blurred. The fight to make same-sex marriage a norm of the society appears to be coming at the cost of religious freedom. The reason that same-sex marriage faces opposition is also because of the religious roots of Christian values of Americans. But it's not just the non-believers on the other side that supports. There are Christians who claim to take their faith seriously yet support same-sex marriage. The basic understanding of the bible would preach the freedom from the self to get out of the sexual orientation that is particularly a union between a man and a woman. But the pluralistic nature of the society calls out for tolerance in the name of love and it is a complex matter at hand.

The second challenge that research deals with is the issue of pro-choice and pro-life. With the coming of feminist and gender equality movements, different issues have been taken up for lifting up women in the society and for giving them empowerment. One of these is the pro-choice movement. It seeks to give women the right over the decisions of her body without the state having power over it. Besides the scientific arguments that both sides use to identify the “thing” as a “baby” or just “fetus”, the two sides also have their faith to back up for their standing for or against the issue.

There has been a lot of expansion and addition to the concept of freedom of choice. There were no definitive lines from the beginning but there was an understanding of where it stood; the way to worship God the way they want and to be able to live flourishing lives by obeying God. However, there is no barely any limit to the understanding of freedom of choice at present. Constraints of any form are seen as threats to the individual's freedom. Thus, freedom of choice has not been more dynamic than ever at the present

age in the United States. But the question is whether Americans, in general, are living good, flourishing lives or not or whether there is wellbeing because of the exercise of this freedom to choose. There is still so much to strive for and work towards. But the concern is whether freedom of choice that preached of Christian freedom and the freedom from the self has moved further away to become a tool for the freedom of the self to serve the gratification of the self. It seeks to find whether the challenges that America face today has much to do with the Christian influence and whether pluralistic nature of the society has hindered to ensure the real freedom that the Protestants intended and envisaged.

### **1.1 Research Objectives**

The objectives of the research are:

- Understand the American freedom of choice as a lifestyle
- Study the roots of the freedom of choice and the compare it to what freedom of choice means to Americans at this age
- Understand the influence of the Christian value of freedom in the conceptual formation of freedom in Christ
- Study the growing trends backed up by freedom of choice and the issues emerging out of it
- Link the freedom of choice to the Christian freedom and make an analysis
- Gain a glimpse into where American society is headed with the freedom of choice in deciding the future of America

### **1.2 Research Questions**

- What are the growing trends in the American lifestyle in this age that are mainly backed up by freedom of choice?
- What are the growing issues that are resulting from the lifestyle that freedom of choice is supporting in Christian America?

- Is America's growing focus on the "freedom of the self" rather than on the "freedom from the self" leading to the distortion of the true essence and purpose of Freedom of Choice?
- Is Freedom of Choice which was inspired by Christian freedom to live the abundant life through surrender of the self becoming a tool to embrace and conform to the very thing or way of life it frees people from?
- What is the Christian community's understanding and perspective especially among Catholics and Evangelicals on the Freedom in Christ relative to the everyday life?
- Is Freedom of Choice that is rooted in Freedom in Christ the answer for the wellbeing that America has been seeking?

### **1.3 Hypotheses**

- Pluralism is straining the original Protestant intent behind freedom of choice in United States.
- Freedom of choice as understood in United States today has failed to ensure the real freedom for individuals that Protestantism originally envisaged.

### **1.4 Research Methodology:**

The research is a secondary research. Primary and secondary sources have been utilized in the researching of the research paper. Works of literature have been reviewed to study and collect information. There is a thorough background reading to further the basic concepts that the research is based on and also to answer the research questions. Sources such as books, articles, newspapers, journals, magazine, sermons, podcasts and other relevant websites which are run by major religious (Christian, in my case) organizations are utilized for the research. Books on everyday lifestyle of the American society to more in-depth American text and religious text are studied to gain an understanding of the American culture relative to choice and freedom. There were many interactions with a

few pastors to gain a better understanding of certain concepts that related to the Scriptures from the Bible. The research is deductive and analytical.



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## CHAPTER II

### FREEDOM OF CHOICE: A WAY OF LIFE

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In the reality of our day to day life today we are always looking for the best option to choose from. For everything that we do we have multiple options to choose from. The torn jeans to the suits that we wear, the Chinese to Italian food that we eat, the vehicle that we fancy, the education and the career options that we pick are increasing rapidly. It's a very competitive world that we are living in today. Americans pride in calling their nation “the land of the free”. It was for freedom that America came to be what America is today. The history of America is a history of people fighting for their freedom. And over the centuries freedom has come to be defined more broadly in every era. Under the bedrock of all the struggles to become freer lies the strong conviction that one has a right to be in control of their own destinies, a freedom of choice. America has taken much bigger strides compared to many nations when it comes to freedom of choice as a lifestyle. And American has been the standard that many societies strive to aspire to reach and be like. The American Society continues to inspire nations around the world when it comes to having freedom of choice as a lifestyle in the daily life. Freedom of choice is a way of life the American society hold dearly and fights to protect. The American society celebrates freedom of choice in their everyday life at every stage of life. The freedom of choice paves a way to shape the individuality of a child from early on. What are choices without freedom? We get the most out of the choices in front of us by having the freedom to make those choices. Having choices ensures that we do not have to settle for imperfections. We get to choose what works for us best. In other words, we get to be our best self.

Vir Das, an Indian comedian, did a stand up on Conan<sup>1</sup> where he describes his experience at the supermarket in the United States. He talks about how there was an aisle which was

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<sup>1</sup> Conan is a late night talk show that is aired on TBS in the United States. The show is hosted by Conan O'Brien and is accompanied by Andy Richter.

sixty feet by ten feet just for cereals. He joked that he wanted to be in the United States not for comedy but for cereals. Jokes aside this is just an instance of the amount of choice one has even to choose a cereal for breakfast. And cereals, as breakfast, is just one of the items to choose from for breakfast. In the last couple of years, the number of different types of cereals has reported to have grown from 160 types of cereals in 1970 to 4945 in 2012.

### Breakfast cereal<sup>2</sup>



(Fig: 2.1) a picture of the cereal aisle that depicts the growing options available to choose from in consumption. [Photograph: Mike Mozart, [Flickr](#)]

Likewise, in every area of the everyday life choices are increasing. America's fight for the freedom of choice is not over. They continue to fight. There are new causes to fight for and old victories to guard and protect. There are bigger issues to deal with that touches the core of the identity of an individual defined by freedom of choice. There are issues which have divided the opinions of the country into almost half. Some of these are issues concerning same-sex marriage and issues regarding abortion. We will study these issues with more details in the following chapters. This chapter will basically study the nature and aspect of the American freedom of choice and why the American society values it so much.

<sup>2</sup> Aichner, T. & Coletti, P. J Direct Data Digit Mark Pract (2013) 15: 20. <https://doi.org/10.1057/dddmp.2013.34>

Here's what Madeleine L'Engle an American writer had to say about freedom of choice,

“Because to take away a man's freedom of choice, even his freedom to make the wrong choice, is to manipulate him as though he were a puppet and not a person.”

Or what Barry Schwartz, professor of social theory and social change at Swarthmore College and author of *The Paradox of Choice* states,

“We want to be able to choose everything that matters, as well as the things that don't.”

Freedom of choice in these perspectives is not so much about what it achieves as much as it is about having it. Freedom is a big part of the American identity. Freedom of choice is a right so plainly obvious and without question that it did not need a special mention in the Constitution because it defined the rights they had in it. It is an inherent part of the human existence and is a part of the law and principles of America. The Bill of Rights gives the freedom to choose. It does not make it compulsory for anyone to follow a certain religion or bear arms for instance.

In the garden of Eden God placed the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” in the middle of the garden. God told Adam and Eve that they could eat from any tree in the garden except from the “tree of knowledge of good and evil”<sup>3</sup>. From the beginning, God did not take away the free will of Adam and Eve to choose for themselves after He created them. The free will was something that God gave Adam and Eve from the time that they were created. God placed the tree in the middle of the garden along with the other trees so that they could make their own choices ultimately. America's beginnings are very much influenced by Christian values. America's freedom of choice has its foundations in the teachings of Christian freedom and the free will of the man. But what fuels the fight for freedom of choice today in America is a question worth asking. What was understood of as an abundant life by the forefathers who first put their feet on the shores of America we know today appears to be far from what is being pursued today.

What does it mean to choose? At every point, we are choosing. Even the fact that we get up in the morning and get out of the bed is a choice that we make. The fact that we brush our teeth is a choice. There is always an alternative even in the things that appear to be

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:9 NIV

routine, mundane or done out of habit<sup>4</sup>. Albert Camus<sup>5</sup> asked, “Should I kill myself, or have a cup of coffee?” It sums up the point being made here. Choice is behind all that we do. It can be conscious or otherwise. It is intentional or unintentional. There could be many option or very few options. But we do make choices. But Schwartz believes that it is a good thing to be an “automaton” because deliberation and conscious choice on every little activity would be too much of a burden for anyone to bear. In Schwartz’s words,

“The transformation of choice in modern life is that choice in many facets of life has gone from implicit and often psychologically unreal to explicit and psychologically very real. So we now face a demand to make choices that is unparalleled in human history.”

He believes that “we are trapped in what Fred Hirsch called ‘the tyranny of small decisions.’” Despite this “tyranny”, there is no denying that freedom to choose will always be opted over not having the freedom to choose. The burden is in the pressure to make all these choices that are available and increasing day by day. However, the main contention that I want to make is whether well-being is dependent on the availability of the freedom to choose.

## 2.1 Understanding freedom of choice

Freedom of choice in the most basic sense is the autonomy that an individual has in deciding from more than one option without external constraints. Choice is a sign of freedom. But is there really more freedom when there are more choices? The freedom to choose is powerful. It allows people to individuate themselves and makes them independent individuals. It allows them to express themselves and gives a sense of being a boss of their own destinies, a control over who can influence what happens in their world. American lives revolve around the availability of a wide variety of styles, fashion, jobs, flavors, religion, and ideologies that permit people to pick their favorites and “have it their way”. Freedom of choice is a lifestyle starting from choosing a breakfast cereal from the range of brands in the aisle of the supermarket to choosing a life partner. From a

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<sup>4</sup> Schwartz, Barry (2005), *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less – How the Culture of Abundance Robs Us of Satisfaction*

<sup>5</sup> Novelist and existentialist philosopher

young age most families encourage their children to make their own choices. Their preferences are respected because they believe it adds to their individuality by developing their choice. The freedom of choice that American children have reached is to the point of parents not having any say in who their own child identifies himself or herself to be and becomes. The American society celebrates freedom of choice in their everyday life. The freedom of choice paves a way to shape the individuality of child from early on. What is freedom without the ability to choose and vice versa? We get the most out of the choices in front of us by having the freedom to make those choices. Having choices ensures that we do not have to settle for imperfections. We get to choose what works for us best. In other words, we get to be what we believe will be our best self according to our own judgments.

Freedom of choice is an everyday lifestyle in America. Freedom of choice is a very crucial part of the everyday life of an American. The ability to exercise freedom of choice is believed to bring the maximum well-being to an individual. The Rational Choice Theory argues that the more the freedom a decision maker has is always better than having less freedom. This allows the individual to maximize utility by finding the most satisfying match between the alternatives that are laid out and the preferences of the individual making the decision<sup>6</sup>. Basically, there has to be a minimal constraints to make decisions or choices. It does not matter as much what the consequences of the choices will be because according to this theory the decision maker had the freedom to weigh out his or her options rationally and not under constraints. However, this does not mean a life of tyranny because complete freedom and individualism would create a life that would be impossible to live<sup>7</sup>.

Amy Choi<sup>8</sup> argues that,

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<sup>6</sup> Bottia, Simonana and Hseeb, C.K. (2010), "Dazed and confused by Choice: How the Temporal Costs of Choice Freedom lead to Undesirable Outcomes", *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision processes*, 112, (2): 161-70

<sup>7</sup> <https://ideas.ted.com/how-cultures-around-the-world-make-decisions/>

<sup>8</sup> Amy s. Choi is a freelance journalist, *writer and editor based in Brooklyn, N.Y.*

“Somewhere between tyranny and radical freedom resides a mixture of constraints, social norms, legal constraints and individual freedom of choice that enables people to lead satisfying, meaningful and authentic lives.”

Choice and freedom overlap and we can't put one without the other. It is one thing to be free and another to stay free. The ability and the availability of the freedom of choice is the means to achieving true freedom. But what is it to be free? Negative freedom that was propounded by philosophers like Jeremy Bentham and Isaiah Berlin stated that it is the absence of external obstacles that prevent an individual from doing what he or she wants to choose to do. In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes states that freedom is the “non-obstruction of action”<sup>9</sup>. Freedom then, in this sense, is marked by the absence of something like an obstacle because coercion is seen as a threat to freedom. Therefore, Bentham argues that in the absence of coercion is liberty<sup>10</sup>. Likewise, Berlin also argues that a man is deprived of freedom when a man is coerced. This then further leads to the question of where to draw the lines that prevent other people from interfering in the matters of the individual. Berlin and Hayek asserts that a “frontier must be drawn between the area of private life and that of public authority.”<sup>11</sup> Freedom is understood differently by everyone. Freedom could just mean the ability to provide for one's family or to have a job or to start one's own business. For some, it could be about the freedom to practice a religion of one's choice. For others it could be who to go to bed with at the end of the day. Despite the different ways of understanding how life in freedom is to be lived out the core understanding is that everyone has freedom and is allowed to use their freedom. The Constitution of the United States guarantees the right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”<sup>12</sup>. The “pursuit of happiness” cannot happen without having the freedom to make choices that one believes is best for him or her.

## 2.2 The importance of choice

American society is fundamentally individualistic in character and choice fuels this individualism and the idea of being in control of and responsible for their own actions is

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<sup>9</sup> Hamilton, Lawrence (2013), “Real Modern Freedom”, *Berghahn Books in association with the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*, 60(137): 1-28

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> <https://rcg.org/realtruth/articles/160615-001.html>

highly valued in the American society. The idea of the independent and self-determining individual is central not just to America's sense of self but also to their systems of government, law, finance and healthcare. Everybody seeks freedom. They speak up for Freedom and do not stay silent. In other words, freedom has so many advocates with everybody speaking up for freedom<sup>13</sup>. Students and working people alike want more freedom; senior citizens, LGBTQ community, and every section of the society want freedom<sup>14</sup>. There have been and continues to be many heated debates and discussions over issues backed by choice. This comes with the fact that choice is a fundamental American value. And especially for Americans, the idea of choice is an ideal that brings independence from societal constraints. The constraint on even smaller choice can seem like a threat that leads "Americans to overemphasize the role that choice has in shaping the life outcomes".<sup>15</sup>

The desire for choice in the American society has been displayed in different aspects of the society; be it politically, commercially or spiritually. Governance in the United States has not been without the demand for a voice of the people in the functioning of the government. Coming back to the example of the cereal aisle the demand for a huge variety of goods and services in the United States is a glimpse of the commercial aspect of choice. On a spiritual level, the defining of the self and the creation of the desired kind of individual life that one believes is best for the self through choice is a continual demand. Freedom of choice does not limit to just the political or economical choice. Freedom of choice over the determination of self also includes freedom of choice to choose basic things like beauty; the choice over the body of the self to even create and change the body that the individual wants to improve on. The advancement of modern medical innovations now provides multiple options to decide how and what an individual chooses to look like. There are many cosmetic surgical procedures like eyelid surgery, facelifts, breast augmentations, tummy tucks, liposuctions etc. These choices are

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<sup>13</sup> [http://melbarger.com/Freedom\\_to\\_Choose.html](http://melbarger.com/Freedom_to_Choose.html)

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/understanding-psychology-of-american-idea-choice/>

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becoming less frowned upon as they have become a “commonplace tool for self-improvement”<sup>16</sup>.

The choice one makes is believed to be the real self of the individual. Therefore, actions and behavior done out of the expectation of the society or because of an allegiance to the tradition is believed to be not genuine or not the real self. Amy S. Choi<sup>17</sup> writes,

“My fellow Americans and I believe that choice allows us to individuate ourselves, to prove that we are free. Our preferences, therefore, become who we are. We feel acutely the need to construct a personal narrative out of our choices and, thus, construct our own identity. There’s a certain degree to which this is sheer lunacy, and also fallacy. Because our cultural responsibility to revere choice has been instilled in us since before America was America. In other words, we never chose choice.”

Iyenger also says in a talk she gave in TED Talk titled “The Art Of Choosing”, “the idea of personal autonomy” has been made such a “dogma that it almost became a religion itself.” Freedom of choice has been put in such a high pedestal that it has almost become an end itself rather than to lead to something better.

There is a heavy influence to be able to make choice by having preferences and the idea of the self through the preferences that an individual have. In other words, the preferences of the individual define the person. Personal autonomy is greatly valued to be the best self of an individual by bringing wellbeing. Individual freedom and individual choice are concepts that are ideals that the American culture value compared to any other cultures. It is a generally agreed understanding that the more the choice one has the autonomy of the individual is also increased. Therefore, this would imply that greater choice leads to greater wellbeing. And this concept of personal autonomy was brought to the United

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<sup>16</sup> Barry Schwartz and Andrew Ward, *Doing Better but Feeling Worse: The Paradox of Choice*, Swarthmore College

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States mainly by the Protestant colonists<sup>18</sup>. The influence of these people who stepped into the land of that is now known as the United States of America is deep and wide. The values and ethics that they planted in America are so deeply rooted that America continues to be very much viewed as a Christian nation despite the debates that it no longer is a Christian nation. However, this will be studied in more details in the following chapter.

When we put the way American society does life against the rest of the world there is a uniqueness that makes America the way it is. Markus and Schwartz in *“Does Choice Mean Freedom and Well-Being?”* give two basic model of self that highlights what makes American society different from other communities. The American society has the “independent model of self” where the self is independent and freely choosing and the individual alone is responsible for her own well-being or behavior. On the other hand in the “interdependent model of self”, people who are interdependent and bear some responsibility for each other whereby well being comes from being part of normatively good relationships. From the perspective of an interdependent model of self, social relationships, roles, norms, and obligations are often more valued than self-expression. America has an independent model which values uniqueness and to stand out from the crowd rather than fit the mold. For example, when they compared advertisements in magazines of both East Asian and United States and analyzed those ads in news, home, fashion, youth and business magazines it was seen that East Asian ads most commonly invoked themes of respect for groups values that followed a trend, and of living in harmony with others while the America ads had themes that focused on choice, freedom, uniqueness, and rebelling against the general norms.

Choice enables people to live lives that they have a sense of being in control and in charge of the outcomes of their destinies. It helps them to improve the quality and the situation of their life by taking the best option available. An individual can flourish when he or she can pursue the set goals one has placed for oneself according to the preferences. Less restriction of choice ensures that an individual is not deprived of the opportunity to

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<sup>18</sup> <https://ideas.ted.com/how-cultures-around-the-world-make-decisions/>

pursue happiness and a life that will bring satisfaction. To have autonomy over one's life means to have choice and autonomy is essential to have wellbeing. The self is defined by choice. It is a tool for living an independent life and having choice also means the individual is independent. Choice makes an individual different. It is an expression of the nature and character of a person. In the United States, children are expected to move out of their parents' home as soon as they become adults and pursue their own dreams and purposes. Therefore, from early age parents encourage children and give them space to make their own choices by finding their preferences<sup>19</sup>. American society has always value individualism and freedom of choice has aided in making it a reality. An independent person is not held down by history and traditions and also the society that he or she lives in. Therefore, one ought to have their own way of thinking, cultivate and discover one's preferences and set goals for his or life. In this way, no one else but you are responsible for your own actions whether you reach your full potential or do not succeed in reaching that potential because of wrong choices made<sup>20</sup>. This idea of the freedom of choice is based on the understanding of the man who is rational and is reasonable<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, the success or failure of an individual is solely on the himself or herself.

### **2.3 The idea of Freedom of Choice**

When the pilgrims first washed ashore America was not the America we know today. It was a land they risked to travel to find a new home where they came seeking for a life better than the one they were living in. The "New World" was the only place that they believed would provide a place for them to live as they wanted to. They had been persecuted for their religious beliefs and therefore, they sought freedom in the "New World". Physical hardships that came along with uprooting their home to a new continent far away were a sacrifice they were willing to pay to live a life of freedom to practice

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<sup>19</sup> Markus, H.R. and Barry, Schwartz (2010), "Does Choice Mean Freedom and Wellbeing?", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37 (2): 344-55

<sup>20</sup> ibid

<sup>21</sup> ibid

what they believed in. Ryan L. Caswell writes that “from the pilgrims to America’s Founding Fathers, freedom has always been woven into the fabric of U.S. society.”<sup>22</sup> They believed that “all men were created equal” and therefore were “entitled to seek life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” The way they lived life and the way the society functioned has set the path for the United States to call and believed itself to be a “Land of the Free” and “Home of the Brave” and a “place where people could live as they saw fit”. And America has stood as a symbol of hope for anyone who is willing to work hard and be determined to build a good life for himself or herself by using that freedom that he or she gets<sup>23</sup>.

In Eric Foner’s book *Give me Liberty!: An American History*, the historical account he gives is a detailed study from the beginning that colonizers started to settle down in what was then known as New England. It was founded by a religious group who were escaping from persecutions in England for seeking to worship God the way they wanted. They established America with the hope to build communities that were rooted in the understanding of the principles of the Bible. The emigration to the colonies gave many of the settlers the opportunities that they had not enjoyed back home. They had access to land, they had the freedom to worship they way they wanted and as converts and born again Christians they also the right to vote. However, the ideas of freedom did not exist like the modern ideas of freedom. For instance, equality before the law was non-existent. Women and non-white had far fewer rights and different rights were given according to the property a man owned. And besides these, those colonists that sought for freedom of religion for themselves refused to extend the same to others. However, freedom played an important role in colonizing America. And bringing the gospel of Christ was the basis of the liberation that was brought for the Native Americans. This was also the period when the expansion of England’s empire was occurring as freedom was also coming to be seen as the defining characteristics of the English nation. And the Europeans arriving in the New England were convinced that the Native Americans were in great need of converting to Christianity, which they believed to be the true faith.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://rcg.org/realtruth/articles/160615-001.html>

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

The Europeans held numerous ideas of freedom that were a collection of rights and privileges that were distinct and were enjoyed only by a few. However, the most common idea of freedom that was understood was more of a moral or spiritual condition and less as a political or social status. Freedom to them meant the freedom from sin and the sinful life by accepting the teachings of Christ in the Holy Bible.

America has very different notions of freedom today when it comes to freedom of religion. But in the beginnings, the Christian liberty had little to do with religious tolerance because the colonizers believed that there was a need for religious uniformity to bring about public order. A person's religious beliefs and practices as a private matter is a modern idea far from the colonial era which was almost unknown.

John Winthrop who was the governor of Massachusetts explained the Puritan conception of Freedom in a speech to the legislature in 1645 by distinguishing two kinds of liberty. They were "natural" liberty "moral" liberty. The "natural" liberty was one which has no restraints on actions which would also mean it was "a liberty to do evil" and which Foner writes was "false idea of freedom supposedly adopted by the Irish, Indians, and bad Christians generally". On the other hand, the "moral" liberty meant "a liberty to that only which is good." This idea of freedom went well with restraints because Winthrop regarded true freedom to be one that depended on "subjection of authority".

The definition of freedom continued to be shaped and formed. The end of Civil War in 1865 came with it a redefining of freedom as well as rights for all the Americans. American society continues to delve in deeper to freedom by extending the arms of the concept of freedom in their everyday life. Franklin Roosevelt declared four essential freedoms:

"Freedom from want, Freedom of worship, Freedom from fear, Freedom to express oneself."

But in the past few decades, freedom has come to mean, almost exclusively, freedom of choice. And the role of freedom of choice allows them to make decisions in all areas of their life including education, career, love and romance, sex and gender, parenting, religion and so many more. It is considered to be bedrock to increase the quality of life. The U.S. ideals of freedom, equality, self-governance, and the pursuit of happiness are

based on the idea of a free individual who has the right to govern himself or herself and to pursue the achievement to the full potential.

Isaiah Berlin, therefore, distinguished between “freedom from” and “freedom to” as “negative liberty” and the other as “positive liberty” respectively. The focus of freedom from the beginning was mostly on the “freedom from” part because there was a need for minimum interferences based on past experience. When the part of interferences from the state or authority is taken care “freedom to” gets to be lived out. However, freedom doesn’t mean the same to everyone and the tangle of choice and freedom is very much socially constructed influenced by the values and beliefs of the society. Choice is a good thing but whether it enhances freedom and wellbeing is worth contesting.

#### **2.4 Freedom of Choice: The other side of the coin**

Barry Schwartz argues in his book *The Paradox of Choice* that choice is essential to autonomy because it brings well being but on the other hand the fact that some choice is good doesn’t mean more is better. According to him, too much choice could even lead to a clinical depression because it contributes to bad decisions, anxiety, stress, and dissatisfaction.

In his words,

“Freedom is essential to self-respect, public participation, mobility, and nourishment, but not all choice enhances freedom”.

His main argument is that despite the fact that the United States was founded on the core value of freedom of choice it does America no good to equate freedom too directly with choice because increasing options do not increase freedom. Rather freedom is enhanced when good choices are made. He basically argues against the assumptions that more choices create greater wellbeing.

Freedom of choice brings with it many benefits but does it come with a social cause? The fact that so much focus is given on choice as the decider of what becomes of an individual may make people less sensitive to an individual whose life is not going well. An individual’s failures can be blamed as an outcome of his own bad choices. Having

choices can give a sense of being in control of one's own life and having an influence in the course of one's own life. However, life comes with its own factors that drive the course of the journey and choices are only a part of it and not the whole of it. Because the fact is that even people who make all the right choices may still suffer in life and do not always succeed and do well. A person could be eating all the right food and exercising the right amount or driving carefully but sicknesses come and accidents happen.

Are constraints needed? Some would argue that a good life may require constraints, whether imposed by the self, the state, the family, the school, or religious and cultural institutions. Whether constraint is perceived as a threat to freedom is governed by a cultural and class-based understanding of what freedom means. Schwartz and Ward (2004)<sup>24</sup> argue that “choice, and with it freedom, autonomy, and self-determination, can become excessive and that when that happens, freedom can be experienced as a kind of misery-inducing tyranny”. They continue to argue that “unconstrained freedom leads to “Paralysis” and that “self-determination within significant constraints—within “rules” of some sort—that leads to well-being, to optimal functioning.” and the task at hand is to figure out which constraints are the ones that will achieve optimal functioning. Having the freedom of choice is not the end in itself. What is freedom of choice if it doesn't really bring a life that is meaningful and has a purpose.

Individual freedom and autonomy is undeniably one of the core values upon which the United States was founded and is still committed to. Despite this fact, Barry Schwartz (2005) argues that liberty should not be equated in direct proportion to choice. He doesn't agree that an increased availability of options increases the freedom. Rather making good choices about the things that matter helps us make the most of the freedom at hand. This also he says helps one to unburden concern from things that do not matter as much.

At the rate that America is pursuing its freedom of choice it has become a doorway to all freedoms and there is a reduced clear-cut mark to define where the boundaries end. Like

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<sup>24</sup> Barry Schwartz and Andrew Ward. (2004). "Doing Better But Feeling Worse: The Paradox Of Choice". *Positive Psychology In Practice*. 86-104. <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-psychology/221>

every other society American society also strives for greater wellbeing. It is generally believed that more freedom and autonomy leads to greater well-being and the more choice the greater freedom and autonomy. Therefore, the logic would be that the more choice the greater the wellbeing. This assumption is however contested because having choices does not always mean people make the right choices and increase their wellbeing. But like the quote in the beginning, by Madeleine L'Engle it is about the freedom to make bad choices as well for the American society. But making the wrong choices and leaving a defeated life has no element of freedom in it. So is the freedom of choice leading American people to a path of greatness or will it lead to its downfall? There is a diminishing constraint on the choices that an individual makes and the individual is identified by the choices he or she makes. The freedom of choice focuses on the self while freedom in Christ preaches the end of the self.

Over the years the freedom of choice has gotten adulterated as much as the religious mixture of the United States and also the growing influence of liberal ideologies that depart from the theological doctrines. The freedom of choice has much to do with individuality and identity like the freedom in Christ. They both talk of giving individuals identities and allowing them to live up to their full measures and capabilities. It is a concern for many in regards to where America is headed today with the freedom of choice backing up the many decisions of the society.

The United States continues to strive for freedom of choice as the culture changes and different understanding of the self and freedom increases. America doesn't believe that the society is already there yet when it comes to treating everyone equally and giving them the freedom to be their best self. Iyengar argues, "we're certainly not the most radical in offering freedoms, such as with gay rights or getting women the right to vote. We are not the first ones to actually empower people with autonomy."<sup>25</sup> Thus, there is still a lot of issues that are being taken up by the government as well as the issues that are being raised by the citizens of United States.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://rcg.org/realtruth/articles/160615-001.html>

Even when it comes to choosing how to love there are choices available to Americans. There are different arrangements of intimate relationships. There are not too many surprises anymore because what used to be usual has now ceased to be. There are transgender couples married like heterosexual couples who are accepted and applauded. A former female marries a formal male with their genders now reversed. And the society is slowly getting used to these scenarios. There is a greater tolerance for the increasingly diverse trends of romantic relationships<sup>26</sup>.

I came across a meme on the internet with contents regarding identity. It was about a person's desire to be like a celebrity. The response from another person in the meme went something like 'it's 2018, just identify as him.' It was meant to be taken on a humorous note. But it also was a projection of the cultural trend of the freedom to choose who to be. Identity has become a choice like never before in the modern society. Besides nationality, religion, ethnicity, race, economic and social status, a more modern understanding of gender has also been added. And identity has become less of something that a person inherits<sup>27</sup>. The freedom to choose makes it possible for someone to find new identity not just in terms of social status through hard work but as a gender that is not necessarily conventional.

The ability to exercise freedom of choice is believed to bring the maximum well-being to an individual and lived a fulfilled life. The focus in this research is to link back the lifestyle of freedom of choice to the basic foundation which I believe comes from the freedom in Christ.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-psychology/221>

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*



## CHAPTER III

### THE PROTESTANT INTENT: WHAT WAS MEANT TO BE

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Every society needs foundations to build their nation on. These foundations are values and principles that the society lives by and ideals and dreams that they strive to achieve. The functioning of the nation is thus based on the core values and ideals that the society hold true to and aims to move towards. Besides many others, the Americans have a society that believes in and encourages hard work and determination to build a good life. Therefore, anyone through merit and hard work can climb the status than the one he or she was born into. And this has been made possible because America valued freedom of choice as an ideal for the society. To have freedom of choice is not a debate but the interpretation of it has definitely not been the same over the course of American history. It helps to go back to the perceptions of the first immigrants, to catch a glimpse of the idea of freedom and the vision they carried for the generation ahead to understand where America stands today. I like to call this the “protestant intend”; the path for the future generations to take. The protestant intend because the history of United States and how it came to be had a very Christian beginning and the roots of Christianity in the United States is deep and is there to remain for a long time to come. According to many researches there seems to be a decrease of Christians in the last few years. For instance, a 2014 study of Pew Research found that there was a decrease of around 8 percent of people who identified as Christians, seven years prior to it. The same study also found that the “Millenials”<sup>28</sup> were more unlikely to affiliate themselves to any “organized religion”. The study also showed that over 36 percent of these “Millenials” were not affiliated to any denomination. A pew research from 2012 reports that 86% of the American population were Christians who identified themselves as “Catholics, Orthodox or some other Christian religious faith.” This is more than any other regions of the world. Up till 1910, the study stated that the Christian population was 96%. And so it is most

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<sup>28</sup> Pew research: those born between 1981 and 1996 and the first generation to come of age in the new millennium

likely that any ideals and values that America holds onto would have a Christian understanding of it even if was not always pronounced openly. This was partly because there was basically no need for it, it was the way of life.

The teachings of the Bible have been very much a part of the values that the American society has embraced. The “right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” given by the Constitution has its roots in the Christian values of freedom and living an abundant life. The Constitution provides this right to be able to pursue these rights. The Founding Fathers of the United States in the most natural way endorsed Christian values in their vision of the American Dream. The freedom of choice is also a result of the Christian liberty that preaches one to be their best self. There is no American history without its fight for freedom of religion. It was filled with the hope to have the freedom to worship God the way they wanted and the way of life to be defined by it.

I have linked the freedom of choice to the Christian freedom because the freedom of choice was inspired by the Christian ethos. The basis of the freedom of choice is birth in the Christian freedom that was preached in Europe and with more intensity in the New England. I have stressed on the Christian freedom as the freedom in Christ because the freedom that the Bible talks about is rooted in the freedom that is found in Jesus Christ. In its true meaning freedom in Christ means that freedom is found in Jesus Christ and not apart from Him. The freedom in Christ gives individuals an identity of who they really are in Christ. This freedom that they sought for the God the forefathers of the Americans loved was forged into the “American Dream.” It all began with faith and America is still standing up for the faith they received in the beginning.

### **3.1 The Foundations of the American Dream**

“American Dream” has become the ideal not exclusive to the United States. People come to America to find opportunities where they can move up the ladder of status they were born into through hard work and merit. The waves of immigration following the first

pilgrims in United States came with the idea of living a life better than they had and this idea forged into the idea of the “American Dream”. America was inspired by an imagination of these first people who imagined a life where there was freedom to live a life as they saw fit, if not for them then for the generations that came after them. Shared history, geography, language, religion and many other aspects of identity bring people together to form a nation and a state. The uniqueness about United States is that it was inspired by a “collective imagination” of a “New World” that offered freedom and opportunities for anyone who is willing to work hard. The America Dream” cannot be discussed without going back to the times of the “Puritans”.

*“PURITAN BELIEF AND 'MANIFEST DESTINY'”<sup>29</sup>*



(Fig:3.1) “They sailed from England with a dream. Their Puritan vision was for the New World to be a 'city set upon a hill', and a light to the world. This later overflowed into a sense of **'manifest destiny'** and a belief that America will lead the world into a new era of peace and security”.

Around the 1620s the pilgrims arrived and in 1630s the Puritans came to leave their mark as a “Christian force”<sup>30</sup> in the land of the Americas. The “Puritans” were members from

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.endtimepilgrim.org/puritans03.htm>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1601-1700/who-were-the-puritans-11630087.html>

Church of England<sup>31</sup> who wanted to bring a religious reform in England in the sixteenth century. They fought to “purify” the Church of England from the remains of the Roman Catholic influence<sup>32</sup>. They fought to reform the Church and thus transform the nation. This came with a price. They were persecuted quite heavily by both the crown and church in England and therefore had to migrate to the English colonies of the New World in the late seventeenth century. This migration led to establishing the religious, social, political and intellectual foundations in the New World and since then American life continues to reflect the original ‘American Dream’.<sup>33</sup> The “Holy Commonwealth” was an ideal of the Puritans that was a community that taken to the American colonies, particularly Virginia and then New England where the Massachusetts Bay Colony was an important landmark.<sup>34</sup> It was founded in 1629. There was a migration of around 80000 puritans from England and Europe in a short period from 1630 to 1640. The decade came to be known as the Great Migration.<sup>35</sup>

The Puritans had a dream. Everybody has a dream but what made the Puritan’s dream exceptional was that it was powerful enough to have a great amount of impact that trickled down over the years to come though they did not envision the impact it would have because there was no intention to do so. The generations that came after them had mixed feelings about the Puritans but as Jim Cullen writes “you’ll never really understand what it means to be an American of any creed, color, or gender if you don’t try to imagine the shape of that dream and what happened when they tried to realize it.”

The different variants of Protestantism had always had the same core foundation which believed that reform for the fallen corrupt world was needed. Opinions have been

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<sup>31</sup> Jim Cullen: in the sixteenth century by Sir Thomas More, a man who persecuted English Protestants before himself becoming a martyr at the hands of Henry VIII, who decided they had the right idea after all and founded a Protestant sect of his own, the Church of England. In his classic work *Utopia*, first published in 1516, More imagined a place inspired by the discovery of a previously unknown hemisphere, in which he had a keen interest where the opportunity to create a new society would lead to religious freedom and a communitarian approach toward property.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Puritanism>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/puritanism>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Puritanism>

<sup>35</sup> <https://owlcation.com/humanities/Why-Did-the-Puritans-Really-Leave-England-For-The-New-World>

different on how to reform it, however. And as for the early Puritans, who migrated from England to come to America, reform meant starting fresh new lives that consisted of “building a new society of believers for themselves and their children.”<sup>36</sup> They had a religious mission with a dreamed of a society where there was religious freedom and were governed by the values and principles that were inspired by the Bible in the “New world”<sup>37</sup> And so putting their faith in a God they believed was on their side they took a risk to come to America and they Gog their America dream to become masters of their destiny<sup>38</sup>. Quoting Jim Cullen, he says;

“The free new world of their dreams was to be a place of, by, and for the Puritans...But the leaders of the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies planned to be in charge in both sacred and secular Realms which, while separate, were nevertheless intertwined. No one could join their churches without giving convincing testimony of their religious commitment, that is, without “conversion.” And no one could vote in secular matters who were not a member of the church.”

These people’s life revolved around their faith. They were serious enough to the extent of creating a community only for the people who shared the same faith. This was marked even in the social and political life of the community.

But the Puritans were not always regarded on a positive note even in America. Some examples of the terms that Puritans have received are “unpleasant people”, “source of defects in American society”, “people who massacred Indians and established the self-righteous religion” and so on<sup>39</sup>. This was so because religious tolerance for religion apart from the Christian faith was out of the picture. Their convictions were too take out everything that did not come in accordance with the scriptures and to root out the traditions that were followed in the churches which were not biblical. And this was the dream they brought to the land of the free. They had a dream but everyone shared a different way of reaching the dream that resulted in series of events that was not always

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<sup>36</sup> Cullen, Jim (2003), *The American dream*, New York:Oxford University Press

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*

pleasant. There was a lot of hypocrisy, greed, arrogance, and also destructions of the Indians in the name of conversion<sup>40</sup>. They had a dream like the others that came before them but what made them more unique was their dream to make the world a “better place, a more holy place.”<sup>41</sup> And despite their shortcomings, they were able to bring some important reforms shaped by the worldview and the American dream that the Puritans instilled in America. From end of slavery to establishing universities the puritans inspired a way of life that Americans have their standing on today. They put down the highest ideals of a right to “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” on the Declaration for the present day America. Jim Cullen (2003) writes,

“A piece of wishful thinking composed in haste, the Declaration was born and lives as the charter of the American Dream. It constitutes us.”

Many social movements were to follow based on these foundations that were laid down. And even years later, the famous speech of Martin Luther King Jr in 1963 echoed this dream when he spoke,

“I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

The American dream, thus, began to change and mean different dreams to different generations that followed. From the beginning, merit was the ladder to climb the social structure. Merit was a way to gain eminence. It meant many things but it certainly did not come with “inherited privilege”. Social mobility was not fixed because one could climb up the social status through hard work and the merit that came with the hard work. It was admirable to be self made by forging one’s own success like Andrew Jackson who won the hearts of the people because of his embodiment of the American Dream<sup>42</sup>. And for Abraham Lincoln the live the American Dream of upward mobility that was one that fused “earthly goals” with “heavenly means.”<sup>43</sup> This dream of a good life was never separated from the spiritual side. It was in other words a “spiritual affair” as Jim Cullen puts it. And as the Puritans believed, “True freedom...is maintained and exercised in a

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<sup>40</sup> ibid

<sup>41</sup> ibid

<sup>42</sup> ibid

<sup>43</sup> ibid

way of subjection to authority.” This meant that freedom was always believed to be found in the willing surrender to God’s will and the choice to submit to authorities that have been appointed by God that ruled in the name of God.

### **3.2 Christianity and Freedom**

John MacArthur in his sermon titled *Freedom in Christ* talks of how it was “critical in the Reformation to set people free not only of the bondage of sin, but the bondage of false religion, which had held the Western world captive for about a thousand years”. Under the Roman system the church had been held captive for a thousand years. And the Reformation brought “the liberating, freeing gospel that delivered souls from the bondage of error and the bondage of sin”. He continues to establish the importance of personal freedom in the contemporary men and women and they have the freedom to “control their own thoughts as to what they think, and their own exposure to things they might not want to hear” and which he believes is confused understanding of freedom. He continues saying that,

“There is no recognition of accountability, responsibility, or judgment. And so we hear that people demand freedom to say what they want, freedom to think what they want, freedom to do what they want, freedom to disagree, freedom to dissent, freedom from authority, freedom from ethics that are imposed on them – freedom.”

Religions around the world offer freedom or some paths to freedom. He calls them out as lies because to gain freedom is to be free of oneself. And the way to free oneself is to look in the inside of oneself because that is where the problem is and not on the outside. And the answer to free oneself from the self is to become different through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Bible provides the conceptual understanding of Freedom in Christ. The books of the New Testament and specifically the letters written by Apostle Paul have huge resources to explain the finished work of Jesus Christ that sets sinners free and gives a new identity in Him. A believer is made free from sin and given a righteous standing

before God made possible by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Sin is no longer the master because there is no longer the requirement of living under the law but under the freedom of God's grace (Romans 6:14). The fifth chapter of the book of Galatians in the Bible largely comprehends the freedom that is in Christ. The first verse of the chapter writes that Christ has set us free to live a free life, one that is free from the "yoke of slavery". The yoke of slavery here is a reference to the yoke of the law because the following verse talks about how the effort to receive justification from God through the law renders the gift of freedom through Christ of no value. Further down Paul writes to the Galatians that if they use the religious traditions which were basically the law that required circumcision to be considered clean before God they get cut off from Christ because they fall out of grace. It can be easily misinterpreted from these passages that Paul was preaching lawlessness.

Before we go further let us go to another scripture that established why the law existed. Paul writes in Roman 7 that the purpose of the law is to show what sin is and reveals our sinfulness. Paul writes that if the law had not told him that he should not covet he would not have known that coveting is a sin. Well then the reason Christ died on the cross was to do away with sin once and for all. This means He had to free us from the bondage of the law as well to free us from sin.

Coming back to address the possible misinterpretation Paul himself clarifies this. Firstly, one could be led to think that if they are free from being under the law they could be free to do anything. Well the Bible does not force anyone into doing anything because man was created with a free will. That's what choice would be. Exercising the free will does not necessarily lead to living a free life. But, the matters of being free are relative to the free will only to the point that you make the choice to choose freedom. Freedom from the yoke of the law means to be free from the mindset that leads anyone into thinking that the forgiveness of sins and righteousness comes from self. To come under grace means to come to a submission that we fall short of the standard of God and therefore we cannot earn the favor of God by works rather good works comes as a result as the beneficiary of God's grace. But that it is a free gift and God no longer judges the sins of men. Rather where sin is great the grace of God is greater. The grace of God is not a license to sin as Paul writes Romans 6 that those who are already dead cannot continue to live in sin.



Because the grace of God empowers the believer get out of the self by becoming less of himself and more of who God is for him.

The freedom that is received through Christ is the freedom of the self from the desires of the flesh. What it preaches is that one can free from pride, lust, addiction to substances, anxiety, poverty, fear and all that one can think of that keeps an individual from living the full life that Christ exchanged His life with.

### . 3.3 “The Great Awakenings”

“Faith can provide the fire, the passion, the strength, the perseverance, and the hope necessary for social movements to win, and to change politics. Without that, it's just a debate over issues and ideas.” Jim Wallis writes.

The Great Awakening was a period of intense religious revivalism which saw the revival of Christian religion and the awakening in the spiritual lives of the American society in the 18<sup>th</sup> century barring denomination, ethnicity, race and gender. Many scholars view it as the biggest event in British North America before the War of Independence. Religion became so important the period saw religious news taking the front pages of the colonial newspapers. It saw a new expression of religion where for some it was a blessing and for others just a mass enthusiasm. The Great Awakening was not for people who had never heard the word of God but it was mostly for people who had been church goers. A lot of the people were converting or rather getting born again with fifty to hundred at a time and the preaching lasted up to 4 hours and there was worship all thought the day. People who had been listening to sermons but given little attention finally began to take heed of the messages given during the sermons.

The revivalists, who are a group of evangelists, interpret the events as an extraordinary work of God where God dispensed His mercy in an unusual outpouring though He is always at work in redeeming mankind. This was a special event in that it was something like the one seen on the day of the Pentecost<sup>44</sup>. They claim that it was a revival like no

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<sup>44</sup> The coming of the Holy Spirit on the early followers of Jesus. Acts 2:2-3 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.<sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.<sup>3</sup> They saw what seemed to be

other because of the extraordinary scope of the event and also the uniformity of the work meaning the unity of the awakenings that occurred in diverse communities though separated by great distances. They claim to see the same Spirit at work with the rapid spread of the revival and the outburst of awakening that left the same effects on people.

This event altered the society and came back in intervals and brought important changes to the society. The Great Awakenings in generally referred to three Great Awakenings and some contest for a fourth Great awakening.

One of the understandings of Christianity regarding the way things work is that it always starts in the Spirit, in that what the eye sees is only a manifestation of what has already happened in the spirit. So, what is it that the Great Awakenings awaken in the American society? Did it end with an awakening of the individuals or did the personal awakening trickle down to social changes as well? The historians say that a revival is a spiritual activity that brings changes, not just within the person but also in the society. Therefore, how did the change within an individual lead to altering the society? Is faith coming back to bring progressive changes again in the American society in the present era marred with so many social injustices as the message of faith is personal but not private gets louder? America is going through serious social changes and these are not scripture based to say the least. There needs to be a renewal of the understanding of the self and the self that makes the decisions to bring social changes that are actually in line with the moral ethical values of America that has these great events of revivalism in their land. My main focus is on the arguments made by Jim Wallis who is an evangelist who delves into the political field and brings connection between religion and politics. In one of his books “The Great Awakening Reviving Faith and Politics in a Post Religious Right America” he has given his thoughts on how the Great Awakening ushered in some of the major social movements that America has witness and now how a revival such as those can again be the foundation for the much needed changes in the American society.

- The Rising Army Of Dry Bones

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tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues<sup>[a]</sup> as the Spirit enabled them

The religious landscape of the people was found to be in a deplorable state by the colonial revivalists. The faith of many appeared to have been reduced to intellectual acceptance of certain propositions rather than a life changing conversation experience. Most historians date the beginning of the Great Awakening from the North Hampton revival which began in the church of the Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards in 1733. It was a small ripple followed by a much greater one in 1740 with the ministry of George Whitefield. He called his church the church of dry bones.

In an article by R.C. Gordon he writes that there is a pattern in the social change and religious revivalism. He writes that “in times of social stress people became likely converts to 'enthusiastical' religions. Once converted, these enthusiasts then engaged in revolutionary activity.” Jim Wallis (2008) writes in his book that the “Great Awakenings” is one of those periods in history “when faith tangibly changed things.” He further writes that revivals are caused by politics which are broken in that the morals issues of the day have been failed to be addressed. This then leads to social movements that rise up to bring changes in politics and the best movements usually have spiritual foundations.

Jim Wallis in his book establishes how after each Awakening there was a follow up of social movement that brought historic changes in the American society. The First Great Awakening took place in the 1730s and 1740s. It had preachers such as Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennent, and George Whitefield, as its leaders. The Great Awakening has been credited to have laid down the foundation for the American Independence and a new nation which would imply that the uprising of faith also helped in creating of a political “awakening.” From the 1800 to the 1830s were the Second Great Awakening. It was led by revivalists such as Charles Finney and Jonathan Blanchard. Finney believed that a spiritual conversion ultimately has to lead to social reform. This period embraced the call for abolition of slavery that was before the Civil War. Historian Michael Kazin writes that, "From the Second Great Awakening in the 1820s to the 1920s, there was a period where social movements were infused with the evangelical spirit." The Third Great Awakening occurring in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, was an era that focused on poverty and led to social reforms such as

“child labor law improvements, the settlement house movement, the career of social work, and youth organizations such as the YMCA”. During the nineteenth century, the religious revivalism happening was said to have been linked with the abolition of slavery and other movements for social reform.

“Third Great awakening”<sup>45</sup>



(Fig: 3.2) “D.L. Moody begins a Bible study for street children in the 1850s. It grows to a substantial number whereby even President-elect Abraham Lincoln attends to see it for himself. Moody goes on to establish Moody Church and Bible Institute and continues to preach all around the country to more than 100,000 million people. Ira Sankey, a notable hymn writer, works closely with Moody.”

American evangelist like Charles Finney identified the gospel with the antislavery cause. He was a revivalist who was also an abolitionist. He considered the two connected and he linked revival to reform. He is said to have popularized the alter calling. It was his way of getting the converts to sign up for antislavery campaign whereby as the people give their lives to Christ they also commit to enlist for God’s purposes in the world. Likewise the revival of faith is always life changing but rather than it just being restricted to the personal issues and inner life it manifests into the world as a powerful force that bring social changes for social justice.

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.sharefaith.com/blog/2016/06/5-great-american-revivals/>

Apart from this Jim Wallis also considers the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s under the leadership of black church as another “great awakening”. This for him is another event where faith changed politics and had there been a lack of grounding in the black church, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the movement would not have succeeded. The personal faith of Martin Luther King and the spiritual power of the black church were very much central to the civil rights movement. The intensification of the freedom struggle made Martin Luther’s faith even more personal. After a particular incident of a death threat one night he discovers how religion becomes had become so real and was more than what he got handed down from his family. He had to make God his own and know Him for himself. Martin Luther spoke of how he bowed down and said a prayer amidst the fear and confusion of the cause he was leading but received a divine assurance sustained and shaped him in his political commitments and public leadership.

### **3.4 Faith is personal, not Private**

How is America doing today after the Great Awakening? Is the question of faith making a comeback to bring progressive change as it did in the past? Or do the new generation think that faith is the answer to the change that the society very much need? Over the years the role of faith has been discredited in the field of politics. And faith has always been kept at the private space. But this has been contested. Faith is not faith unless there is no work to manifest it. And faith may be personal but it is not private.

Today there are many social issues that we are dealing with like huge, unmovable mountains. There are disease pandemics that kill millions, massive inequality with people living in poverty, human sexual and economic trafficking, dangerous climatic changes and the global warming, genocide, violation of human rights and the changes in family and community systems. Jim Wallis writes,

“It may be that only a revival of faith can spark the necessary changes in public opinion and political will on the really big issues, and that a spiritual transformation is necessary for social change. It's about changing hearts and minds on many of the biggest moral issues of public life that fundamentally challenge who we are and what we believe. Revival is always about what God can

do through us, and is now doing afresh, especially when people are adrift and society is in danger.”

The reason for him stating that revival is the what America needs comes from the argument that revivals have in the past brought together people with different political boundaries to find solutions to social issues of that period. This he writes is because faith and spirituality can take political boundaries and divisions “deeper than politics can, with a moral commitment that allows us to transcend our usual ideological debates.” He states further that this can help find a common ground for moving towards a higher ground in the much needed transformation in both the personal and political which he says depend on each other.

One of Jim Wallis arguments is that the a new generation of evangelists and young people are taking up social agendas much broader and deeper than the Religious Right have done by restricting the language of moral issues to just abortion and gay marriage. They go to the issues of poverty, economic justice and global warming, ethics on war in Iraq.

He states that,

“Progressive politics is remembering its own religious history and recovering the language of faith. Democrats are learning to connect issues with values, engaging with the faith community, and running more candidates who have been emboldened to come out of the closet as believers. Many Republicans have also had it with the Religious Right. Both sides are asking how to connect a deeper understanding of faith and values with politics. People know now that God is neither a Republican nor a Democrat, and we are all learning that religion is not supposed to be in the pocket of any political party, but rather calls them all to moral accountability.”

Here he talks of a change in attitudes of the American society towards religion because for better or for worst Christianity is there to stay in the American society. Either they learn to find their way around it to come to a common ground or they will remain deeply divided. He writes further that ideological religion has divided the society but maybe the

solution would now be spirituality. This was what the Great Awakening was about. It transcended ideology and touched the society in a spiritual level forming a bridge to bring the needful changes.

He asserts that there are two great hungers in today's world. These, he says, are the hunger for spirituality and the hunger for social justice. And what the world is waiting is the connection between the two. And it is the first hunger that will empower the second. Therefore the crux of the argument being that revival is necessary for reform. In his words "personal transformation is necessary for social movements, and social movements are necessary to transform politics." And whether or not they as in the young people like it or not they are drawn to religion because of the eagerness to make a difference and hungry to find that critical connection between spirituality and social justice. Would everyone agree that revival is needed for the reformation of the American society? They might but they are definitely not on the same grounds because the ideologies that have infiltrated the American society have separated many of the understanding of the self from the Christian understanding of the self. There would be differences in the opinions most definitely but it is important to note that religion is there to stay in America and there is a search among the younger generation for depth and spirituality. And because of the failure of both the parties to bring a viable solution to all the social injustices they are looking into new areas of faith where religion can transcend politics.

### **3.5 The self and Freedom of Choice**

William H. Halverson in *Freedom and the Self* confronts with the issue of freedom that many choose to divert from which is the ethical and theological domain of freedom. He states that "however diverse may be the ramifications of the problem of freedom, its true home is in the domain of theology and ethics". The problem of man's freedom- its possibility, its nature, its implications- is primarily an "ethico theological problem, and any fruitful attempt to define the peripheral issues or to find even partial solutions must begin from a clear formulation of the problem in its ethical and theological dimensions". He believes that any discussion apart from this will "inevitably flounder in a Babel of confusion". Basically, the discussion will lead to nothing and only confusion. The

understanding of freedom has its home and stronghold in the theological understanding of the biblical text. However, he argues that these theologians and the moralist have not succeeded to clearly explain the central issues concerning freedom. The main problem being that the moralist have kept themselves away from getting involved with theological dimension of freedom while the theologians have been “afraid of being dubbed "moralizers" by their post-Ritschlian colleagues<sup>46</sup>” and therefore have pretended to not be concerned with the ethical dimension of the issues concerning freedom. In his article *Freedom and the self*, he attempts to bring together for once the concerns of the moralist and the theologian and to try to see the “ethico-theological” problem of freedom in its entirety.

Halverson states that for the moralists, the purpose of freedom is in the moral responsibility of men. This he says is the ethical dimension of freedom; that the need for freedom is to justify the “ascription to man of moral responsibility.” Man, he writes, is a “moral agent” who accountable and answerable for his actions. In his words, a man is “liable to praise and blame, reward and punishment, on the basis of his actions.” Therefore, according to this argument, “if man is morally responsible, then he must be morally free; man is responsible; therefore he must be free” and this is the basic argument for the demand of moral freedom. Thus, he writes,

“My Freedom is implied by my Responsibility, and my Freedom and my Responsibility are implied by the freedom and the responsibility by virtue of which I am a moral agent; and that I am a moral agent is an ultimate and irreducible fact.”

The argument therefore, states that since a man is responsible he requires his freedom to fulfill this responsibility to be a “moral agent”. The responsibility of the man is assumed

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<sup>46</sup> Ritschlian: of or relating to the theology of Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89), who developed a liberal Christian theology and maintained that religious faith is based on value judgments. Of or relating to Ritschl or his theology; specifically characterized by a rejection of metaphysics in favour of practical moral or value judgements..



because of the ascription of moral judgment of a man<sup>47</sup>. Also, man as a “moral agent” is a given. It is a part of his being to be a “moral agent”.

Here, Halverson argues that just asserting the “responsible, therefore free” is not enough. His main concern is to “find a place for freedom within the context of responsible activity that preserves its reality while at the same time doing justice to the facts of the situation in which such activity is carried on.” “Responsible activity” here is the identity of man as the “moral agent” and his actions based to be based on it.

The theological dimension of the problem of freedom lays in maintaining a balance between the “man’s responsibility for evil” and his complete “dependence upon the grace of God for salvation.” A man then is both free and unfree in the theological context. He is responsible for his own fallen self to make right choices but at the same time he is incapable to that because man is in full dependence to the grace of God. Therefore, is not free.

The problem he argues is to conceive the freedom of man while at the same time not excusing him from his moral responsibility and his “sinfulness” and his “total dependence upon the saving grace of God.” Man by nature is sinful and “falls short of the glory of God.”<sup>48</sup> He also is fully in need of the grace and mercy of God because he cannot always be morally responsible because of his sinfulness.

The approach he takes to approach the problem of freedom is through an attempt to elucidate the notion of “selfhood”. Thus, he writes

“For the freedom whose nature we are trying to conceive is the freedom of man; and man is not another thing in a world of things; he is a self, and therefore morally responsible, and sinful, and the object of God's saving grace.”

He elaborates and adds on to Tillich's Systematic Theology of the description of human selfhood. Tillich describes the self in terms of many dimensions namely the “essential self”, “fallen self” and “empirical self” or the “surface self”. According to him the self is a finite being which is the “essential self”, the “fallen self” is the part of human that is estranged to the human self and the “surface self” is the actual being of the self. So then the main objective of Halverson is to be able to comprehend both the freedom and

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<sup>47</sup> H. Halverson, William, (1963) Freedom and the Self, The Journal of Religion Vol. 43, No. 2, The University of Chicago Press, p. 139-150

<sup>48</sup> Romans 2:10

“bondage” (because the man is a fallen self) in one single view. But the issue that comes up is that a man does not really appear to be free in actual sense because he has inherited a certain character by which he has to take decisions or choice based on the alternatives laid out before him. In a Halverson’s word, the man is “a victim of his heredity, his environment, and his situation.”

A man is not without desire. Desire is like an appetite and a man can find himself to be torn between the desire to do what he desires to do and the desire to do what he ought to do. And Halverson argues that desire that resides in the “surface self” is the natural tendency of the man’s character to react to the situation in front of him. The desire to do what he “ought to do” he states comes from the true character which is ultimately the “essential self”. So then, the self is divided between duty and desire. The question that Halverson asks is,

“But what makes the self-the self in its "depth," as you call it-decide one way or the other? The answer must be: Nothing but the self in its freedom.”

And he continues further,

“We claim for him a greater freedom, a freedom to transcend his character in the name of his essential self. This, to be sure, is not unlimited freedom; it is finite freedom, as befits man as a finite creature.”

This freedom he says makes sense of the freedom that ethics talk about and is what moral responsibility needs. At the same time it answers for the problem of theological freedom. He writes in agreement with Augustine that “grace does not destroy freedom but establishes it”<sup>49</sup>. He argues that grace enables a man to establish his “essential freedom”. In other words grace helps him to not cease to be the “essential self”.

### 3.6 Spirit, Soul and Body

Halverson has added much to the description of the self but it does not fully encompass the biblical understanding of the self. The research has focused on the self because it is the

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<sup>49</sup> Roger Haight has written more elaborately about the relation between the grace of God and freedom and autonomy of man in *The Experience and Language of Grace*

self that makes the choices. It is important to understand how choice is exercised by the self. Too often children are encouraged to use their freedom to choose but how to make decisions are not taught. The self is a very complex makeup of will, emotions, feelings, thoughts, desires, inner voice, and much more. We lose ourselves deciding which one to listen to while making the choices laid out in front of us. Do we listen to the head or the heart is the common way of saying it. But there's more to it. I want to add more to it by getting a step further into the biblical description of the self. It helps to understand the core of the self to understand how choice is made in freedom. Just like the three description of the different self my contributions also divide the self into three part being. However, I believe they are not one without the other. All the three parts make up the self. We are a three part being, having been created in the image of God. The Holy Bible says in Genesis 1:27, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

The Holy Bible speaks of this truth in many verses but the particular one that clearly states the different parts of a human being is here;

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 5:23 NASB).

Clearly, the three parts of the human beings are The Spirit, The Soul and The Body. Human beings are a beautiful composition of these three "elements", each very different from one another but complimenting perfectly. This Scripture verse explicitly identifies the three parts and implies that all are equally important.

One of the renowned speakers and teachers in the Charismatic Christian circle, Andrew Wommack puts it this way, "We are a spirit, we possess a soul and we live in a body."

Unlike popular belief, both in and outside the Christian circle; the God of the Holy Bible separates the soul from the spirit, in that, the spirit is the primary faculty that God would contact or speak to. Of course, God speaks through and uses all the faculties of a human being as well and even the nature but the spirit is where the intimacy is.

The doctrine that humans are a three part being is one of the core and fundamental beliefs of the Christians. This doctrine has sparked debates and confusion in the fact that the

Holy Bible (in the Old Testament) sometimes uses the words ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ in the same sense alternately.

But the scripture in the Holy Bible from which we can be sure that the spirit and soul are different is from the fourth chapter of the book of Hebrews in verse 12. It says “For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.”

Indeed they are very different from each other, intangibility being the only similarity. While the things of the spirit is all based on Faith, the soul is all about the feelings/senses (depends and base on the five senses of hearing, smell, touch, taste and sight).

One can live to the full potential of a Christian life having understood the differences of the soul and the spirit. People focused too much on the spirit that the other two faculties are left out. The spiritual realm is powerful and important but so are the “soulish” and physical realms. All the three parts are intricately interconnected and if one thing happens to one of the three areas, it will have a repercussion on the other as well. The Holy Bible gives equal importance to and God is interested in spirit, soul and body.

- Spirit

The spirit is the true being of a person, it is with what a person worships God. We are a spiritual being and that is what separates us from animals. The deepest and the innermost being of a person is the spirit. A very prominent teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ is the ‘second birth’ which is recorded in the book of John (chapter 3),

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” (John 3:3 NIV)

And the Christian faith is based on this truth that if one repents and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, he is born again and is a new creation and will live eternal life. The promise of eternal life is ensured when the Holy Spirit (the third person of the Godhead) comes and dwell in a person as a result of having believed in the Lord Jesus; the Holy Bible goes one step further and says this person has “become new”:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV)

Now, here is the thing, the new creation that the Holy Bible is talking about is the spirit. Though the body and soul remains the same, the spirit has become new. The Holy Bible goes on to even say in the letters by the apostle Paul that we are dead to the sin nature, that is, the old nature. (Romans 6:3). All this is because when God deals with us, He deals with the real us and that is our spirit.

All the promises of God that when we believe in the Lord Jesus we will have eternal life, the promise that we will be holy in God’s sight, blameless and without sin and that we will be made just like Him is fulfilled in the spirit. The promise of making the believers righteous, sanctified and redeemed from the curse of the law is fulfill in the spirit. It is when we see this truth by faith that we are made perfect in the spirit is when we will grow our intimacy with God and allow Him to love and bless us too. The things happening in the spirit will change and and affect the soul and the body.

The reason why we are spirit beings is that we were created in His image who is a Spirit Himself.

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”  
(John 4:24 NKJV)

It is the transformation from the spirit that will change the soul and the body.

- Soul

The soul is what is also called personality. The soul is made up of the Mind, Will, Emotion and Consciousness. This is the part of a person which the spiritual truths have to transpire through to the physical. Like mentioned above earlier, the born again experience is in the spirit only and has no effect on the soul and the body. The Holy Bible emphasizes on transforming the soul by the Word of God and bringing it under subjection of the spirit.

The soul is where the battle happens. If the soul is under the spirit then it will submit to the spiritual truth and will result in the life of victory. Herein lies the problem, that the

soul is too in tuned to the world that it tends to go against the spirit. That is because the soul is easily affected by senses unlike what the Holy Bible teaches, that is, to walk by faith. The New Testament is filled with teachings and encouragements to be not affected by what we see or feel but to overcome them with the spiritual truth; by faith.

Hebrews 11:6 “..for without faith it is impossible to please God.”

The soul is the critical part of a believer and the rest of the Christian life is the renewing of the mind.

The most powerful thing that God had given to mankind, the will is a part of the soul. God wants people to love Him and to be in a relationship with Him by choice. And that is why this faculty is a lifelong battle of choosing God over what one feels and thinks. People become and are judged by what or how the condition of the soul is. Soul is what makes a person who or how he is and even affect the physical appearance. Like it was mentioned earlier, the soul had a lot to do when it comes to releasing the spiritual truths to the natural or the physical. So by the same token, if the soul is dumb or not trained to tuned in to the spiritual truths, no matter how good and great a work God has done in our spirit, it will never be manifested to the natural. We can take the example of a physical healing. The Holy Bible says and it is the spiritual truth that believers are already healed.

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

(Isaiah 53:5 NKJV)

As great a news and blessing as this verse is, it will have no effect on the natural if the soul has no idea about it and how to activate it. You can die of cancer when all the while, you have the resurrection power of Christ in you. You can be angry and sad while you have all the fruits of the spirits inside, the fruit such and joy and peace. A believer becomes a mature Christian when he attends a renewed mind and it is an everyday renewal.

- Body

The body is the reason why we, spirit beings can be in this world legally. The spirit and the things pertaining to it cannot reach across to the natural/physical without a body. God

gives the body equal importance just as to the spirit and the soul. He wants to take back His rightful creation which has fallen when the first man committed the high treason. Sin came into the world because of the sin of His creation and He redeemed it by coming as one of His own creation in the greatest testimony of redemption and love through the One Jesus Christ. And it is with this body that the believers continue in the victory claiming what is rightfully God's from the lie of the curse of the law, that was given when Adam fell, through the preaching of the Gospel and loving like Jesus Himself did.

The body, soul and spirit make up the components of the self that exercise the freedom of choice. There is no doubt that the situations and context that a person is in influences the decision making process of an individual but it is the self that processes these situation through the body, soul and spirit. America's culture is changing and the reason that it has not been in line with the Christian narrative has been because many have for a while kept their faith in the private sphere and to stay politically correct. But can we say that the Church need to leave the building if these shifts are to be directed towards the path of the values that the Puritans, the founding Fathers, and the Great Awakenings laid down in the American soil? There is a crisis that is much deeper than the challenges we see that America is facing. Yes, many influential people are speaking out their faith openly in from the platforms they receive. But there is so much struggle to avoid getting into social network bashings. It's a risk often. One could be loved or hated for it. But having established that freedom of choice was very much laid down under the Christian influence let us look into the challenges that freedom of choice face in a nation that is becoming very pluralistic and the true essence of freedom of choice is getting diluted.

## CHAPTER IV

### FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

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Choice is a powerful thing. In the United States, freedom of choice has broadened its horizon over the years. Choice has become much more than just religious freedom. It covers identity, lifestyle, education, occupation, gender, faith, healthcare, marriage, and so much more. Freedom of choice provides a footing in all these areas. However, mixed with the nation's foundational values inspired by Christianity and the modern changing lifestyle the value of freedom of choice as an ideal has not been safe from being understood in different ways that are far from the original understanding. America having been a Christian nation and now with the growing mixture of different religions, a number of these areas have come under serious debates that continue to be challenges for the country today. They have become major political issues and many voters choose to give their votes to the candidates based on the stances the candidates take on issues like pro-choice-pro-life and LGBTQ rights.

At the rate that America is pursuing its freedom of choice, it has become a doorway to all freedoms and there is a reduced clear-cut mark to define where the boundaries end. There are loopholes through which the misuse of choice is becoming a question for debate on what freedom of choice really means. In the name of freedom of choice age-old institutions like marriage, for instance, is getting redefined to accommodate different lifestyles of one's choice. Like every other society American society also strives for greater wellbeing. It is generally believed that more freedom and autonomy leads to greater well-being and the more choice the greater freedom and autonomy. Therefore the logic would be that the more choice the greater the wellbeing. This assumption is however contested because having choices does not always mean people make the right choices and increase their wellbeing. But like the quote at the beginning by Madeleine L'Engle it is about the freedom to make bad choices as well for the American society.



But making the wrong choices and leaving a defeated life has no element of freedom in it. So is the freedom of choice leading American people to a path of greatness or will it lead to its downfall? There is a diminishing constraint on the choices that an individual makes as the individual is identified by the choices he or she makes. But before going further into the challenges that are at hand with freedom of choice taking a different turn in the present America, there is also a need to ask whether America is still a Christian nation.

#### **4.1 A Christian Nation, Still**

In the present decade, the United States is home to more Christians than any other country in the world, and a large majority of Americans identify with or affiliate themselves to some denominations of the Christian faith. According to a Pew research from 2015 Christians are the largest religious group in the world with 31% of the population identifying with the Christian faith<sup>50</sup>. Of the 2.3 billion Christians the United States is home to a majority compared to any other countries. An approximate seven in ten identify with a different denomination or otherwise of the Christian faith in the United States.<sup>51</sup> However, the reports have also claimed the decline in the number of the population who identify as Christians especially among the younger population of this generation in the recent years. The research reported a fall from 78.4% to 70.6 % from the year 2007-2014 of the Christian population<sup>52</sup>. Many surveys have come to a conclusion project that Christians are on a decline in America. For example, the Pew Survey of 2015 showed that the Christian share of the U.S. population is declining, and at the same time individuals not associating with any organized religion is growing. The survey also indicated that these changes were occurring among all age groups, across regions, and among groups. The trend also seemed to be among whites, blacks, and Latinos in both the sexes and regardless of educational qualifications. And apart from these reports, the US is dealing with many matters of rights like abortion rights and same-

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

<sup>52</sup> [http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/pf\\_15-05-05\\_rls2\\_1\\_310px/](http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/pf_15-05-05_rls2_1_310px/)

sex marital rights. These issues have divided the nation not just between Christians and Non-Christians but also among Christians. And it doesn't shed a very positive light on the religious landscape of America as it continues to be a prominent Christian nation. So it comes as no big of a surprise about question arising about the religious status of United States when we see the United States championing in rights like LGBT rights, abortion laws, divorces increasing, live-in partners are not unusual, sex outside marriage is almost a norm and one can go on counting the "sins" of America. But the question that most fail to ask and understand is whether Christianity is more than the sets of dos and don'ts. There's no doubt that Christianity comes with the sets of these rules because a Christian is in the true sense has to be a follower of Christ. But often the focus is given only on the religious aspect of Christianity rather than the personal relationship that an individual has with his/her Creator and the religious aspects come in. Christianity is not about a religious set of rules that one must keep to get to heaven and escape hell. Despite all these surveys and the declining trend what has been surprising is that Christianity continues to play a more important role than ever. Speculations that religion will begin to play less and less important roles in the lives of people have been proven wrong time and again. The religious institutions continue to remain vibrant, politicians make religious arguments in talking up policies, and the Christian values continue to be the basis in matters of controversies because their faith is very personal and is the basis of their identity. They identify as Christians before anything else.

The media world gives a projection of degrading moral values in Christian context in the American culture from the lifestyle of Hollywood celebrities to normal teenagers on social media. However, on the other side of the spectrum of social media American societies have made the most of it to send out the message of the gospel, and this is not just limited to doing it through the sermon but through music, merchandise, and others. And when you see this there's no doubt that the United States is not championing even in the social media as a Christian nation. But the other side of the story is that social media has made possible the reach of Christian message like never before.

From the beginning, there has always been the separation of Church from the State but even at that time, America has dominantly been a Christian nation. Over the years there have been debates about practicing one's faith in the public sphere and it has often been discouraged. But no other country has championed in having more religious freedom, particularly Christianity, than the United States of America. But this has not stopped certain people even Presidents from holding back their faith. And more than ever Christianity in America today I believe is more personal than ever and far from private.

There is clearly a distinction between the personal and private. A thing which is personal can be kept public or private as one chooses. Normal and common people who are not in the limelight don't usually have a problem with sharing their faith in the public sphere because the reach is not quite extensive. However, people with more fame and in the limelight have often times shied away from making what is personal to the public. These have included celebrities who practice Christianity. However, there is a rising trend of celebrities getting public with their personal faith and they have not shied away from talking about their faith.

America is founded on many Christian values like charity, liberty, equality and till today these values have been deeply embedded in the public as well as the private sphere. Christians overwhelmingly make up the Congress. Many research claims of a decline in percentage of American who associate themselves with Christianity but these values have become a part of their culture regardless of it.

When we talk about Christians in America it includes many denominations. There are the Protestants under which there are many more denominations. Then there are the Evangelicals, Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah witness and also Orthodox Christian. These differences among the Christians have occurred from the differences in the doctrinal interpretation of the bible as well as from the traditional differences within the denominations. Regardless of these differences what they have in common is Jesus Christ. A look at the religious landscape indicates that Protestants have been the largest group up till recently according to a Pew research. Many Americans associate themselves with the Protestants but do not cite specific denominations. The different denominations

follow different doctrine but ultimately it is Jesus they worship. The church traditions like lighting candles, taking baptism, partaking Holy Communion etc. may differ but the center of all these expressions have come out as ways of worshipping God.

In the world today America is still the nation that produces the best worship songs, publishes Christian books and hosts the most impactful preachers and Bible scholars. Social media has been a major tool used by American Christians to reach out with the gospel to people in their own country as well as around the world. There is still a very strong presence of Christianity in the lives of Americans. Christians worship songs are beginning to invade in the public sphere like never before. Famous singers who are in the country music genre or pop genre are writing songs that talk about their faith. Christianity doesn't work without faith and faith is never meant to be hidden. Faith is always about stepping out of the comfort zone and therefore keeping it private cannot work with Christianity.

The last Presidential election where Donald Trump was elected as the president of the United States in was also very much divided on religious lines. Many prominent church leaders were involved in social media debates on why Trump should be the President instead of Hillary. Even among the Christians the opinions were divided and this has always been the case. But the point here is that Church leaders have often shied away from commenting on political issues. But there appears to be more intense and deliberate effort to let the choices that are made to be inspired by the wisdom that comes from the Spirit. Allowing God to be the influencer in every area of life is a very Christian nature.

#### **4.2 “To Hate the Sin, To love the Sinner”**

Christian ethics does not go along the lines of abortions or same-sex marriage in the Biblical text. We see a greater tolerance in America than anywhere else. Christianity is not all about policing but rather about service to people. Many people who proclaim to be Christians support these rights which in strict Christian terms would be termed “sinful”. But more than anything Christianity is about love. “Hate the sin and not the

sinner” has been the most used mantra of many Christians to support these certain rights. It is often about supporting another individual for their choices and not so much about wanting or believing in the same things. Basically, agree to disagree and show tolerance and not discriminate. But the lines are thin and have been blurred.

Freedom of choice and freedom in Christ both have an end that has the well-being of the individual in mind. They both seek to set people free. The freedom of choice can be aligned to use it to enjoy the freedom in Christ or be used to go far from it. Freedom of choice is a good thing. However, freedom of choice was intended to be under the will of God in a society that whose values and principles were based in the religious text of Christianity. But when it becomes too much of the self is when the problem starts. A woman can choose to do anything with her body is what the pro-choice people in America claim for instance. There is always the free will to do absolutely anything. Is there a guarantee that exercising the freedom of choice by aborting the life inside will increase the well-being? What can freedom in Christ do differently? What it preaches is that it can set a person free of guilt and shame because there is the sufficient grace. As Paul writes in Corinthians “‘everything is permissible’ but not everything is beneficial.” America like every other nation undergo changes over the years. From gaining Independence to ending slavery to overcoming Depression America has seen a lot. And the story is far from complete. There are challenges daily and giving freedom of choice and along with the choices that people make there are challenges. Here I want to study the challenges concerning abortion rights and same-sex marriage further because they have been the main challenges that have shaken the core of America’s Christian narrative.

### **4.3 Redefining Marriage and Family**

A baker in Colorado refused to bake a wedding cake for a gay couple in July of 2012<sup>53</sup>. This was before same-sex marriage became legal. Jack Phillips, the baker, who owned a shop called Masterpiece Cakeshop refused to provide the cake on religious grounds of his

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<sup>53</sup> [https://www.scribd.com/document/380956489/Scotus-cake-ruling#fullscreen&from\\_embed](https://www.scribd.com/document/380956489/Scotus-cake-ruling#fullscreen&from_embed)

Christian faith. He is believed to be an “expert baker and a devout Christian”. He refused the wedding cake but was willing to provide them cakes for any other occasions like birthdays. The couple took the matter to the Colorado Civil Rights Commission (CCRC) whereby the Commission decided in favor of the couple. The case then went to the Supreme Court and finally gave its ruling on June 4 of 2018 that Jack Phillips’ First Amendment rights were violated. In a video that surfaced after the ruling, the bakery is seen to be in a celebratory mood with the family handing out free cookies to the supporters as well as to the protestors.

“Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission”



(Fig: 4.1) “Janae Stracke, left, and Annabelle Rutledge, both with Concerned Women for America, hold up signs in support of cake artist Jack Phillips outside of the Supreme Court which is hearing the 'Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission,' Tuesday, Dec. 5, 2017, in Washington” (Jacquelyn Martin, Associated Press)

In another case in 2013, there was a dispute over flower arrangements by a florist for a gay wedding. The florist also declined over her Christian beliefs. Supreme Court of Washington state ruled that Barronelle Stutzman, who is the owner of the flower shop, violated the anti-discrimination law of the state. The Alliance Defending Freedom is a

conservative Christian nonprofit that is defending both these cases<sup>54</sup>. And there is an expectation for the court's ruling for this case as well like it was for the baker.

These stories are part of the stories of the division of opinions that's happening in the United States. Religious freedom is getting blurred along the lines of anti-discrimination and tolerance. There is a threat of using freedom of choice at the cost of religious freedom when people are coerced into violating their beliefs as in the above cases.

The institution of marriage in the United States has been challenged over the past few years for the first time. There has been a need to redefine the meanings of "marriage" and "family". This basic unit of the society which is the family has been made up of a father, a mother and the children. This has been the "superior form of ordering human relationships"<sup>55</sup> which is likely to not be in a position to have that place in the American society as of the present situation. Municipal Court Judge Frank Caprio in a court hearing says that "Basic unit of the society is the family and unfortunately the sin of this country is the disintegration of the family unit."

A redefining of marriage also creates an institution for "missing parents" Ryan T. Anderson points out. Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones write that these institutions are under siege in the world and not just in America and thus, our civilization is in crisis. He believes that the crisis is rooted in a level which is deeper than cultural crisis. It is more of a spiritual crisis and therefore the solution that the world needs is a spiritual one.

The basic understanding and argument of marriage have been that it should remain exclusively heterosexual because that has always been the understanding of marriage i.e. between a man and a woman. This understanding is rooted in how things have always been forming the past and how things are. When the definition of marriage began to be challenged by the early 1970s the dictionary was cited for an understanding of marriage as a union between a man and a woman like in *Jones v. Hallahan*. This has been the legal definition until the issue was brought up. But besides these arguments the general

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<sup>54</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/other-gay-wedding-case-could-go-supreme-court-one-s-n879906>

<sup>55</sup>. Köstenberger, Andreas J and W. Jones, David (2004), *God, Marriage, and Family*, illinois: Crossway Book

public has deeply rooted understanding of marriage in tradition and religion particularly Christianity. Hillary Clinton in 2002 said, “Marriage has got historic, religious, and moral content that goes back to the beginning of time, and I think a marriage is as a marriage has always been: between a man and a woman.” A respond to her statements by Andrew Sullivan is that marriage has changed so much over the years and is not the same today. It was possible to marry a young bride child; a wife was like a property; interracial marriages<sup>56</sup> were punishable and so on. However, the rejection of same-sex marriage was one that remained for the longest<sup>57</sup>.

- The beginning of the fight for same-sex marriage

What had seemed as impossible became very real to the United States when the tone of legal debates regarding same-sex marriage began to shift in the United States. In 1973, the American Psychological Association removed homosexuality as a psychological disease in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*<sup>58</sup>. This began to shift the tone of the understanding of homosexual relations in the United States. Some of these major events that followed were for instance when in 1986 when the United States Supreme Court overruled *Bowers v. Hardwick*<sup>59</sup>. And in 2003 sodomy laws of Texas were struck down by the Supreme Court in *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*<sup>60</sup>. It made same-sex marriage legal under the Massachusetts Constitution. These were big achievements for the LGBT community as well as their supporters since it was on a Constitutional level.

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<sup>56</sup> In *loving v. Virginia* in 1967 the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Virginia law banning interracial marriage. Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote for the majority: “The freedom to marry has long been recognized as one of the vital personal rights essential to the orderly pursuit of happiness by free men ... “ (Head, Tom. (2018, April 11). Civil Liberties: Is Marriage a Right? Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/is-marriage-a-civil-right-721256>)

<sup>57</sup> Gerstmann, Evan (2008), *Same-Sex Marriage and the Constitution Second Edition* , New York: Cambridge University Press

<sup>58</sup> Bromiley, Geoffrey(1980), *God and marriage*, United States of America: WM. B Eerdmans Publishing co.

<sup>59</sup> It had held that supposed millennia of civilized disapproval was a sufficient basis for criminal punishment of gays and lesbians for private sexual acts. In overruling that decision, the Court dramatically changed the tone of the legal debate.

<sup>60</sup> The first marriage licenses were issued to same-sex couples on May 17, 2004.



This was not to say that the rest of the society watched in silence as the events unfolded. There was a huge counter-reaction from the other side because these rulings challenged the core values and the ideals of the American Dream that the people have held for so long as a Christian Nation. On the federal level, there were some efforts like the Defense of Marriage Act. This Act aimed to block the recognition of same-sex marriage by federal or civil unions<sup>61</sup>. In another, effort for the Amendment to the Constitution of the United States for the prevention of same-sex marriage was taken up by President George W. Bush. There were huge turn-ups of voters to pass the amendments as well as other laws that would forbid the recognition of same-sex relations<sup>62</sup>. These are just a few instances. And amidst this, the shift has been towards the favor of same-sex marriage in the United States. There is a growing fair share of both political and social support for the fight for equal right for same-sex marriage couples. And it is legal today to have same-sex marriage in the United States today. Based on the equal protection clause of the Constitution the right for same-sex marriage has been fought for as a constitutional right. This core argument states that the Constitution holds to protect a fundamental right to marriage which protects everyone's marriage which also protects the right to a divorce<sup>63</sup>. Legal rights are meant to protect the rights of people regardless of the race, gender, ethnicity, religion but it gets more complex when these rights are regarding the gays and lesbians. But it is not a surprise why this is so. America cannot deny her roots which are deeply ingrained in the way of living as a Christian nation when the history of America began.

The 1970s saw the litigation of the issue of same-sex marriage. But it wasn't until 1993 when the Supreme Court of Hawaii ruled that the ban on same-sex marriage may be a violation of the equal protection under the state's constitution<sup>64</sup>. This ruling shook the nation resulting in bringing the same-sex marriage debate into the public and political and legal domain in a way like it had never done before.

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<sup>61</sup> the legal status that ensures to same-sex couples specified rights and responsibilities of married couples according to Merriam Webster

<sup>62</sup> Gerstmann, Evan (2008), *Same-Sex Marriage and the Constitution Second Edition* , New York: Cambridge University Press

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*

<sup>64</sup> In 1990 *Baehr v. Lewin* was the original lawsuit and it was later renamed as *Baehr v. Miike* in 1996.

Thus many events began to unfold. Institutions like “Civil Unions”<sup>65</sup> were created by Court of Vermont to Court that allowed both same-sex as well as opposite-sex couples to have a legal relationship that worked like a marriage barring the name and other than this there was the ruling of *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health* which legalized same-sex marriage for the first time in the United States. The *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health* after it became effective around 6000 same-sex couples got married<sup>66</sup>.

Evan Gerstmann (2008) writes that same-sex couples are deprived of many legal rights that the heterosexual married couples enjoy when they are prevented from marriage. Marriage he writes is a “consensual relationship” whereby the couples must be able to consent to the contract of marriage. Therefore, the right to marry has limitations only in that animals and furniture cannot get into a marriage because it or they are unable to give consent. And same-sex couples are deprived of over hundreds of basic right like inheritance rights, family health insurance benefits etc.

It is important to regard traditional understandings while keeping in mind that traditions can change and should change. But there is a danger in uprooting a whole structure and of the institution that has been the basis for the pillar of a society. The family, church and civil society of the United States are core structures and institutions that the society has valued as ideals for the nation to move towards. Family is not about “random collection of individuals [joined only] in the common pursuit of selfish ends and in the common rejection of structures and strictures of family, church, state and civil society” Friedrich Nietzsche states. In terms of gender rights marriage has changed drastically but the heterosexual aspect of marriage has been a long fight. The legality of same-sex marriage

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<sup>65</sup> According to the official website of the Vermont Judiciary “between July 1, 2000 and September 1, 2009, same-sex couples could join in civil union pursuant to Vermont's civil union law. That law extended almost all of the benefits and responsibilities of civil marriage to same-sex couples joined in civil union. These benefits included the ability to dissolve a civil union in court using the same procedures and laws as for divorce. When same-sex couples gained access to full civil marriage in 2009, couples could no longer join in civil union. However, existing civil unions remained in effect. Those civil unions continue to be recognized in Vermont, and couples joined in civil union have access to Vermont's family court in the event that they break up.”

<https://www.vermontjudiciary.org/family/divorce/civil-union-and-dissolution>

<sup>66</sup> Gerstmann, Evan (2008), *Same-Sex Marriage and the Constitution Second Edition* , New York: Cambridge University Press

is only the beginning yet. Years after *Roe v. Wade*, the debate of abortion rights has not ended. Same-sex marriage is likely to walk down the same road.

Gerstmann (2008) argues that religion cannot be the sole basis for the ban of same-sex marriage. He argues that not all religions are against same-sex marriage. Thousands of same-sex marriage are conducted in a year by different religious groups like Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches<sup>67</sup>. Besides this religious basis, he also argues that marriage based on the “reproductive type act” which distinguishes from a homosexual act that does not result in reproduction is an ill-supported assertion calling it a “hardly sound basis” for the policy of who can marry. America has become a very pluralistic nation which desires to be known for being tolerant and be able to have a peaceful coexistence. And America is in a transitioning period with the court redefining marriage as the public opinion of the human sexuality is also changing<sup>68</sup>. But in the process, the largest part of the nation are processing how to respond as America goes further from her Christian beginnings.

Homosexuality has been viewed to be morally wrong by the American majority but there is a growing support for unrestricting civil liberties despite their sexual orientation. With the shifting attitude towards homosexual lifestyle, there has been a growing support for the availability of equal civil liberties for couples of same sex. From the past half-century onwards in the international arena, there was a growing liberalism with greater support for women’s rights as well as gay rights movements<sup>69</sup>. The efforts have been to promote homosexual marriage into a status of honor in the society where it stands equal to a heterosexual marriage. This family structure which is non-traditional has put a threat on the traditional family structure of a man, woman and children that constituted the normative basic unit of a society<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/07/15247/>

<sup>69</sup> Brumbaugh, S. M., Sanchez, L. A., Nock, S. L. and Wright, J. D. (2008), Attitudes Toward Gay Marriage in States Undergoing Marriage Law Transformation. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70: 345-359. doi:[10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00486.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00486.x)

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

- Marriage: Designed in Heaven

God created sexuality as an integral part of humanity. He instituted marriage as an expression and fulfillment of the sexual relation between a man and a woman in the physical realm. In all its glory the marriage that God instituted has a spiritual depth which expresses the union between the Church as the bride betrothed to Christ (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:2, Revelations 21:9-11). Therefore, marriage has always been a sacred union. When God created Adam He saw that it was not good for Adam to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Thus, He created a woman out of the man (Genesis 2:22). Geoffrey W. Bromiley (1980) writes,

“The coming together of man and woman – their marriage- constitutes a unity...which carries with it the fullness of fellowship- companionship is emphasized here- and the perfecting of humanity itself...In marriage God has given us the basis and climax of all human fellowship from which all other forms derive and in which they find their primary model...Marriage can work only as it conforms to the purpose and work of him who created and established.”

In marriage, God created a fullness of fellowship that cannot be found in any other relationship. Bromiley argues that it is the ultimate climax of all human relationships. And he argues that marriage can work only when it is done the way that God instituted it. But this being said God gives a choice to choose His way or our way of doing things. There is always the option to choose otherwise because God did not create “automatons”. God created “beings with their own powers of thought and will” and he continues that “disobedience is not just possible but real”. The disobedience began in the garden when Adam and Eve ate the fruit they were forbidden to eat. It set off a whole spiral of broken relationship between God and men that separated God from men and the world became a fallen place. The world needed a Savior to bring back the Bride to her rightful place. There is a divine basis to marriage that makes the obedience to the will of God so important. There were a series of consequences that brought in shame and guilt in the relationship that they once shared with God in the garden. A distortion in the partnership was also created where the form of male supremacy began to take shape. What God created needed restoring and healing and needed to be brought back to its original intention. The whole process of undoing this began after Christ became the sacrificial

Lamb for the sake of mankind (John 1:29, Isaiah 53:7). This is the spiritual crisis that America faces today. The attacks on marriage in today's world are nothing new. The stories of the Bible are no different from the problems that the world in general and America in particular face today. They just happen to be modern problems. The new tensions in marriage today are simply old tensions in new forms.

The Bible is filled with real stories of adultery, broken relationships, and betrayals to say the least. Bromiley writes, "It does not invent unbelievably good people nor tell stories with necessarily happy endings. It does not omit even some of the more sordid details of human character and conduct." These stories were far from the ideal marital relationship that was meant to be as "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6: 16-17). The fall in the garden did not create a direct destruction of marriage but the overall relation between men and God began to disintegrate. It was a defiance of God's will and of acting, that man knew better than God. And rather than marriage being a promise, it has become a problem that needs to be saved and restored. Marriage is much more than a romantic dream of living a happily ever after.<sup>71</sup> Marriage is more than just the earthly marriage in a Biblical understanding. God has used it as a comparison to His relationship between Israel and to Christ's with the Church. Just as He made man in His own image marriage is an image of the marriage that is eternal with His people<sup>72</sup>. There is always a spiritual underlining that gets projected in the physical dimension. That is the way God works. Therefore marriage is supposed to be understood in terms of God's union with men. Marriage is the covenant that goes deeper than "I do" and has much deeper, sacred, and purer nature. It is a "divine institution."<sup>73</sup>

The sanctity of marriage in the United States is almost like a lost concept. The mainstream culture is far from the teaching of the Scriptures on the purity of a Holy Marriage. The heterosexual marriage has failed in so many ways. There are many broken homes, divorces and remarriages are like a norm, pre-marital sex is uncontrollable and

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<sup>71</sup> Bromiley, Geoffrey(1980), *God and marriage*, United States of America: WM. B Eerdmans Publishing co

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*

<sup>73</sup> Köstenberger, Andreas J and W. Jones, David (2004), *God, Marriage, and Family*, illinois: Crossway Book

marriage is not limited by gender. And every generation grow up watching this trend and take it forward because it's been the only one they knew growing up.

Andreas Kostenberger (2004) in his book states that America is going a deeper spiritual crisis besides the cultural crisis that needs spiritual solutions. The spiritual solution that he talks about is one that goes back to the biblical foundations of marriage and family. He argues that the Scriptures have instructions and remedies for the vital issues that the culture of the society is facing today. He argues that the Scriptures provide insights to make decisions regarding marriage, divorce, homosexuality, abortion, contraception etc. In his statement, “replacing the biblical-traditional model of marriage and the family with more “progressive” ones is detrimental even for those who do not view the Bible as authoritative.” There has been a huge influence of “libertarian ideology” that uplifts “human freedom and self-determination” in place of “Judeo-Christian heritage and foundation”. He discusses the different violations of the ideal marriage. Some of these are polygamy, divorce, adultery, homosexuality, and more. The punishment for homosexuality in the times of the bible was death. This was the severity of the conduct of homosexuality (Leviticus 20:13). Even as homosexuality has become a contemporary lifestyle it has always been a persistent problem from the times of ancient Israel to the New Testament times. And now with the secular culture embracing this alternative lifestyle churches also appear to be getting softer with their views and stance on homosexuality. Pastors and people with big influence in the church community are openly gay. There are continuing discussions on the moral legitimacy of homosexuality but there are leaders being appointed in the church leadership despite their sexual orientation while conservative evangelical groups are faced with issues regarding homosexuality. Some of these church groups have to even produce official statements to make their stance known.<sup>74</sup>

Andreas argues that same-sex marriage falls shorts on many measures compared to the biblical ideal that was instituted by God. Genesis 2:24 from the Bible states that, “A *man* shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his *wife*, and they shall become one

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<sup>74</sup> ibid

flesh.” In its very foundations, same-sex marriage falls short of meeting the criteria of the union between a man and a woman. Besides this, there is also the aspect of procreation in God’s design for marriage and family. God commanded Adam and Eve to be “fruitful”, “multiply” and “fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28) In the New Testament Paul addresses the Corinthians church for the tolerance of sexual immorality which included a reference to homosexuals as well. He did so in his letters to Romans and Timothy as well. Come to the reality of our world today and there is a lot of pressure on people as well as churches to openly denounce homosexuality as sin because of the fear of being accused as homophobic. The churches are under pressure to soften their stance and also tolerate those who practice it. However, Andreas (2004) argues that,

“Homosexuality is not the unpardonable sin, and forgiveness is always available (1 Cor. 6:11). But forgiveness implies repentance, and repentance implies admission of wrong. The church would fail in its scriptural mandate if it were exercising tolerance *apart from* repentance and acceptance *apart from* admission of wrong (cf. 1 Corinthians 5).”<sup>75</sup>

According to this argument, Andreas means that the only way the church can accept homosexuality is when it is willing to be stand corrected and be worked upon. He believes that homosexuality is a “sin that can be overcome”. I believe that the argument is complete with what JD Greear in a sermon says, that, “Truth without grace is fundamentalism, its judgementalism. Grace without truth is...sentimentalism.” And let me also quote what Frank Caprio said: “I don’t wear a badge under my robe. I wear a heart under my robe.” and I believe that is what we need to do; to see more with our heart.

- Made to Belong to Another

David Myers and Letha Scanzoni (2005) believe that gay marriage is a solution for saving marriage. They believe in marriage but they are Christians who are making a case for gay marriage. Their hearts are towards the strengthening of marriage but not the usual

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<sup>75</sup> ibid

“Christian way”. There have been reservations about opening the marriage institution for same-sex marriage because it could end up destroying the age-old institution of marriage. But they believe otherwise. As much as they take marriage seriously they also claim to take their Christian faith seriously. Same-sex marriage, they cite Granberg-Michaelsen, has been an issue that has brought so much division and conflict as well as mistrust in the church like no other issues. From giving it names like “the Armageddon of the culture war” it has been deemed to degrade marriage. The other side of the arguments has responded with responses that a war has not been waged on marriage but rather it is of embracing it by people who have longed for marriage<sup>76</sup>.

There are studies done on marriage that claims many benefits of marriage. There are studies that claim that married men live longer. There are other studies that also claim that people thrive around a healthy marriage. The human is always looking for a need to belong<sup>77</sup>. And as Aristotle puts it famously, “man by nature is a social animal...” we are always looking for a connection. There is a need to share companionship with another and commit and form attachments. And the case that David and Letha make is for strengthening marriage and elevating the institution of marriage through the support for gay marriage. This they believe is an extension for a section of the society that has been left out and therefore, they aim to bridge the divide. They argue that faith that is biblically rooted will enable the peaceful coexistence and the support of “gays and lesbians persons’ full participation in the culture and the church”. They affirm that “what you’ve heard is true: the closest relationship, marriage, is conducive to happiness, health, and freedom from poverty and to better educated, delinquency-free, thriving children.” Marriage is no doubt a relationship that’s like no other and definitely not a game. It determines the outcome of our lives in so many ways.

They cite the work of Martin Seligman who notes that there has been increased depression as “kinship connections have waned”. He believes that the “rise of individualism” and the “decline of commitment” have brought an “epidemic

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<sup>76</sup> *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert

<sup>77</sup> Myers, David and Scanzon, Letha(2005), *What God Has. Joined Together? A Christian Case for Gay Marriage*, New York:HarperCollins, p.4



hopelessness” among the younger generation of the West in particular. There is an added personal responsibility that comes with increased individualism and the focus on the self when problems arise and while facing rejection or failure. There is a decrease of support with the decrease of family connections leading to loneliness. And marriage in its true essence offers the intimacy, support, satisfaction, and security that every individual long for. And there are studies that have claimed to show that there are very similar levels of satisfaction experienced between couples of the same sex and the opposite sex. However, there are no conclusive evidence as of yet whether marriage and happiness correlation extends to the marriage of the same sex.

Here is another reference to an African word Ubuntu. I quote,

“Africans have a word for these human bonds that define us all. *Ubuntu* (oo-BOON-too), explains Desmond Tutu, expresses the fact that “my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.””

Humans were made to belong to each other. We were not meant to be alone. But the experiences have been otherwise. Not everyone has experienced what they were promised. People get into a commitment to another and their experience of the marriage fall short of what they were promised. There are many broken relationships and divorces. The sad fact is that many people have become skeptical of marriage and the will to commit to another. Same-sex marriage is not the problem at hand. It is I believe an outcome of the failure of the institution of marriage that was the ideal. Marriage has been abused so badly that there is a growing number of lifestyles that imitates a marriage but doesn't lead to one. There is an increase of divorce rates, cohabitation lifestyle<sup>78</sup> that does not lead to marriage and the rate of unmarried people have also increased. People are looking for a way to get out anytime things do not go right for them because they have seen repetitions of failed marriages.

But there needs to be a better understanding of why this is so rather than start preaching on how to live life. It is not just about the freedom of choice that people are going out on a rampage choosing whatever and however. Past experiences cannot be ignored to study a

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<sup>78</sup> Divorcees are a large number of the cohabiters.

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/06/number-of-u-s-adults-cohabiting-with-a-partner-continues-to-rise-especially-among-those-50-and-older/>

person's behavior. An individual's choice of lifestyle, sexual orientation, responses, and behavior has a deeper underlining of past experiences and relationships<sup>79</sup>.

There are two sides of arguments when it comes to sexual orientation. The question is where it is a choice or a "given disposition". While one side of the argument argues that homosexuality is a choice others disagree. And the debate continues. If sexual orientation is a given disposition then my arguments would end there. But if it is a choice that one makes then I believe that choice has been abused. The protestant intent of choice would have helped a person living a homosexual lifestyle to get out of it by choosing the will of God. There are many criticisms for the efforts to change the sexual orientation of individual who is attracted to the same sex. They do not believe in the reparative therapy that aims to change the sexual orientation because they do not believe homosexuality to be an illness. And among the others, the Christians who are gay have suffered immensely because they have had to carry a sense of guilt and shame because the Christian religion is hands down against it. But the struggle is real and it's not something that can step out of with the snap of a finger. There are stories of such people who have gotten out of it and identify no longer as a gay or lesbian but it is a journey and a process that takes a real fight. And, fixing the marriage institution problem "by supporting same-sex marriage will be like putting a band-aid over a wound that is 10 inches long."

#### **4.4 "Pro-choice and Pro-life"**

Another big challenge that has torn the entire nation into two is the issue of abortion rights and anti-abortion movements. The arguments on the pro-choice have taken to highlighting "choice" and "reproductive freedom" for women that include the right to abortion and have access to have a safe abortion. They believe that "choice" is paramount to achieve equality with men. They also challenge the narrow understanding of pro-choice as just pro-abortion. But more than this the position of pro-choice was to have a

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<sup>79</sup> Freud refers to the influence of the environment that a child grew up in. He assessed the influence on sexual orientation by studying the parental relationship, sexual experience as a child, relationship with the peer and so on.

right to choose to terminate a pregnancy<sup>80</sup>. They believe in the capability of women to make moral decisions that include decisions regarding her reproductive health. It is the contention of the ones on the side of pro-choice that abortion is a woman's right to "the integrity of her own body as well as her personal liberty and happiness."<sup>81</sup>

**"pro-woman and pro-life"**



(Fig: 4.2)( Internet source: CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn)

There are different sides to any story and abortion stories are no different. There are no black and white conclusions. It can't be put as wrong and right. The context always gives a different picture. Abortion like same-sex marriage is not the problem. But what led to it, what failed to live out needs also to be looked into. But there is another side to the story. Freedom of choice does not only play a role in the choice to have rights to abort and reproductive freedom. Freedom of choice has been used to normalize premarital sex which is in full contrast to the "sanctity of the marriage bed" that Christianity preaches. There is bound to be consequences for any lifestyle that one chooses to live. The problem arises when the women become the only one to have to deal with it alone most times because the focus has been more on saving the unborn than saving the woman. Both the

<sup>80</sup> Deeb-Sossa, Natalia, Kane, Heather(2009), " Not Avoiding a "Sensitive Topic": Strategies to Teach about Women's Reproductive Rights", NWSA Journal, The Johns Hopkins University Press Vol. 21, No. 1 pp. 151-177

<sup>81</sup> Ibid p. 152

Christian women who go to church and the non-Christian women get an abortion done in the United States. And there is a need to dismiss the assumptions that abortion is an easy decision and that believers do not get an abortion done. There is no simple approach to come to this issue at hand. It's easy to get "politically correct" or make logical conclusions. And women's choice cannot simply be reduced to "Christians" and "abortionists".<sup>82</sup> But if we really look into the problem the whole society and the society's system and its failure of raising generations both male and female have resulted in the outcome of the challenges that America faces today.

Women's struggle for equality has come a long way from fighting for rights against sexual harassment to equal pay to accessible low-cost health care and now we come to the fight for "procreative choice". This choice entitles that women should be able to choose when to bear a child and that every child should be a child that is wanted. And to ensure these rights there is a need for availability and access to contraceptives as well as safe and legal abortion.

Anne Aggebroten's (1994) arguments in her book are based on the "free will" and "grace" of God. She argues that if our faith and the theology of the bible are to be taken seriously we would give woman her free will to make choices concerning her life and the life within her and also help young women to keep the baby or abort with the support of the reassurance of God's unfailing love that can never be separated from them despite their choice. Her arguments are based on the fact that the world is a fallen place with temptations abounding and thus, women need to have a "recourse to safe legal, abortion" because they are the ones to bear the consequences. But the word of God says in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 (MSG) that,

"Looking at it one way, you could say, "Anything goes. Because of God's immense generosity and grace, we don't have to dissect and scrutinize every action to see if it will pass muster." But the point is not to just get by. We want to live well, but our foremost efforts should be to help *others* live well."

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<sup>82</sup> Bunnie Riedel is the founding director, religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, Southern California Foreword for Abortion my choice God's grace

The freedom that the bible talks about is the freedom that is found in Christ. The free will that was given was to have the option to choose God and His way of doing life. And it's true that God is forgiving. We fall short and make mistakes and God's love remains constant. But that no excuse to continue the old ways. It would mean that they did not encounter the grace of God in the first place. God's love transforms. That's why when people encounter the love of God they get their lives transformed and we hear testimonies of how their lives completely change. That's what the grace of God does; it changes lives. It does not give a license to continue sinning.

She has recounted the story of the woman from John chapter 8 in the Bible who was caught in the act of adultery. The story was a picture of how Jesus showed grace to the woman in question by not condemning her. Her account stops short at the power of grace that forgives and looks past mistake. But grace is more than forgiveness. The full story was about Jesus showing grace and as a result of it setting her free, not to continue with her adulterous lifestyle but a freedom from that life that hold her down.

<sup>11</sup>She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

<sup>12</sup>Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (John 8:11-12, NKJV)

The way of darkness here is a reference to walking a life without the truth of the freedom that Christ came to give. Grace is more than forgiveness. It's an everyday need. Grace is power; the power to life empowered life to get out of darkness, a life that does not go in line with the will of God. The grace of God is the power of God what we are unable to do by our own strength. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:9 Paul writes,

"Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.'" (NLT)

The grace of God is the power that helps a person to break out of the "sinful lifestyle" or when the person is in their weakest to work through it and to get out of it. It is a

dangerous thing to justify one's action by misquoting the scriptures without getting the context of the scriptures that were written.

#### **4.5 Old Faith, New People**

Ryan T Anderson in one of his lecture from his book "Truth overall the future of marriage and religious freedom" argues that gays and lesbians are not the problems but the main problem is the inability to live out the truth about marriage (heterosexual) by the society. The ideological ideology of sex and marriage that was brought in with this ideology normalized premarital sex, nonmarital childbearing, no-fault divorce law among others.

Anderson says that there are lessons that we can draw from the pro-life movement after the *Roe v. Wade* for the journey of same-sex marriage. 40 years ago the Supreme Court settled that the coming generation would be more pro-choice than ever. But this was not to be so. The pro-life and pro-choice debate has not settled. There are many younger generations that are still hugely in support of the pro-life movement. The marriage debate is far from getting settled, he states. The new definition of marriage is doubtful to become quickly favored by the young people. *Roe v. Wade* did not become the last word after the settlement by the court. It continued to be rejected and challenged. So will same-sex marriage be.

The redefinition of family is a huge deal. The rights of the unborn or the adopted children need to be taken into consideration. A role of a father cannot be made up by two mothers neither can the role of a mother be fulfilled by two fathers. Mothers and fathers have their unique essence to give in bringing up a child. Every child needs a role model from both the genders. There are different characters and nature of man and woman and these are picked up children. A child has a right to a father and a mother.

The oppositions in United States have been the strongest because the larger majority is Christians. And the attacks on the identity of America are very real. Even as America is going down on a spiral of societal degradation there is also an increase of the spiritual

deepening. The churches are getting more active and involved. The leaders of the churches are willing to get involved in the political sphere by voicing out their opinions. In the past, the efforts have always been to keep away from the public sphere but this is not the case anymore. There is a sense of urgency amongst the leaders to not stay private. With everything happening around their nation they do not stay silent. The same faith that helped build the nation still exists in the hearts of many Americans. They still stand up for the United States with the same faith and the same vision. To live a fulfilled and flourishing life one ought to walk in freedom; freedom that is found in Christ.

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## Chapter V

### Bringing the fallen apple back to the tree

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There is a saying that goes that an apple doesn't fall far from the tree. This research has been an attempt to bring back freedom of choice to the original protestant intent. Freedom of choice has fallen from the original intent that was inspired by Christianity. Freedom of choice that was birth in the Garden of Eden opens that way for humans to live a life that is fulfilling and abundant by living under the will of God. The purpose of the choice was to choose God willingly because God is a God who takes delight in His creation choosing to walk His ways in their own choice rather than by force. Freedom of choice has been abused so badly and the true essence of it is in the threat of getting replaced by a different understanding of what the freedom of choice was supposed to be.

Freedom to choose influences every area of the American life. It was God's intention to be this way. God gave the free will because Humans were not created as robots programmed to fulfill His needs for praise from humans. Free will was a gift given to mankind to freely partner with God and be His fellow worker. The protestant intent is basically inspired by the intention of God. Freedom of choice as America defines it now can nothing be further from the truth of God. It is a counterfeit to the one that was inspired by the scriptures for a community that was God-fearing. The freedom that was supposed to set people free from the ungodly ways has become a tool to make them live the very life. America is today in a spiritual war where the nation is fighting to save the nation from losing its identity as the people of God; as the city on the hill.

The freedom to choose has always been a way of living for the American society. Their history of getting their freedom, birth a desire to live freely without constraints over their lives, in particular, their religious freedom. In the very beginning, there just was a desire to just be free to worship God the way they liked. The forefathers had to come to the New World where they dreamt of a community that worshipped God freely without persecutions. They did not just come, they had to flee England. But they were willing to



go to the extent of uprooting their whole life because of their faith and what they believed was the true way of worshipping God. They believed in the Supremacy of God and were against the Catholic Church and the rituals that were part of the way of worshiping God. The Church of England which was a breakaway from the Catholic church was still not enough for the Protestants, who later came to be termed as puritans. These Puritans were a big influence on the Christian narrative of the American society. They were definitely not the only ones to make America what America is today. But they were responsible for laying down the initial foundations that have taken deep roots in today's society. The history of the Puritans was not without some irony as well. They sought religious freedom but they were not willing to extend the same to the others. They were influenced by the teaching of Calvinism. And they were unwilling to do the same with other denominations like towards the Quakers when they began to first come to America. They were also big on trying to convert the Indians that were native to America. Their intention could have been pure but their means were not always right. they were unwilling to extend the same freedom they sought after. But that's another story. The main point to draw from this history was their passion to create a community that was God-fearing. This eventually was trickled down to the United States of America as we know it today. I believe this was when the seed for the freedom of choice was sown in the hearts of the Americans. It decided their way of life personally as well and politically and economically. Along with this, the values of hard work and merit and reward were also instilled. And freedom of choice opened the way for it.

The Chapter on the Protestant intent also talks about the waves of The Great Awakenings that very much influenced major social movements in the United States. Christianity has always been in the background of bringing progressive change through social movements for the changes that the society needs in the United States. An awakening that was brought in the spiritual level has always projected changes on the social aspect because there has been a renewed mindset on the way of thinking. Spiritual changes on the inside tend to influence a transformed life individually first and followed by societal change. The Great Awakenings were termed "Great" for a reason. They were impactful on various levels. Christian revivals in the United States have been so influential in the

United States like no other. It is fair that to call America a Christian nation because of its long history from the beginning till today. Despite the influence of many other cultures with their thoughts and ideologies, America is very much a very Christian nation that continues to influence the world with its Christian gospel music, religious funds, theologians, preachers, evangelists and much more. The social media has also been a very effective tool to expand its influence around the world.

Here, the research also attempts to bridge the divide between the moralists and the theologians. The works on freedom have always separated itself from these two major schools. However, freedom can't be talked about without putting the two together. The very nature of freedom comes from a Christian understanding of freedom and the morality of a free man is also found in the theological understanding. To bridge the gap there is a detailed study on the difference between soul, body, and spirit. They make up the being but they all work differently to help the human function to make choices. According to the Christian understanding, the spirit of God comes to live with man in the spirit of man to become one. This happens when decides to accept Christ as his Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit is the one that inspires the man to walk righteously. The will in the mind, which is the soul of the being. When the will of man does not come under the subjection of the will of God the ways of man becomes his own way. Therefore, the argument is that America is under a spiritual crisis which has resulted in the cultural crisis at large. The mind of man can be influenced by thoughts, ideologies, and ideas. There has been a huge on the mindsets of Americans which new ideologies, ideas that have moved far away from the old conventions. Change always starts from within. What America needs is an awakening on a spiritual level if it is to make progressive changes. America has good values and the society seeks to be inclusive, tolerant and show kindness. These are all good values but these very things are aiding in the break down of the society. There is so much brokenness and need for forgiveness in the nation to heal and recover from.

America today is far away from the ideologies of the Puritans who believed in the supremacy of God and also believed in the pre-destined nature of the human life and also

took the word of God as the only source of the voice of God. We come now to an America that that seeks spirituality like never before. The further it appears to move away from the moral ethical values of Christianity the stronger its roots also appears to get. That's why America cannot be just viewed from one side. There are so many sides to it. The challenges it faces today are because the American knows the truth of the God they believe in. They know that freedom of choice thrives only in the will of God. And it can get confusing to understand how when one is free when he or she is under God. But that's the logic of God. It confounds the "wise" men of the world. The world is a fallen place. But men were saved and the relation between men and God was restored. God renewed the spirit of man when he believed and became born again. The body and the soul were the same. That's why the scripture talked about the renewal of the mind(soul) every day. The freedom of choice was to choose the ways of God every day rather than give into the nature of the fallen world. And it's not easy to get things right at all times. But there's the grace of God not only to forgive but also to empower to get out of it. People stop short at forgiveness and get stuck there many times. Grace is not a license for a lifestyle that the gospel does not preach. It is the power to get out of it. Love is not just toleration. Of course, it is forbearance with one another. But love is also transformational. Love transforms more than tolerates. Love empowers people to change. The love of a parent towards a child makes a child want to do better. The affection of a lover has the power to make the other get better. The culture of "minding one's own business" is actually a lack of care and concern.

The challenges that the United States with the issues of same-sex marriage and abortion are growing but these are not the main problem. They are only the projection of the problems that is actually underneath. There is a huge problem of the cultural breakdown that has lost touched with the core values that America was built upon. In fact, the core values continue to be there but just not understood the same way anymore. The values that they used to live by in the past became ideals and now new unconventional lifestyles are growing. And freedom of choice has become an excuse for such lifestyles. The logic should be that America should be thriving with the wellbeing of the entire nation. But is it? Maybe politically and economically as a nation, the other countries look up to the

United States. But as a society, America's image is shifting. And it's not all positive. There is the rise of single parents, divorces, cohabitation, premarital sex, children born out of wedlock etc. these are slowly becoming the norms of the society. For the supporters of the LGBTQ America is making huge advancement. But many in the United States itself do not support it. But their religious freedom is threatened. There is a danger to their freedom of expression of their faith. There are so many incidents that have taken Christians, practicing their faith, to court. Ministers who refuse to solemnise gay wedding, a pastor who refused the funeral of a deceased who was married to the same-sex, a baker who refused to make a wedding cake for a same-sex marriage, a florist who refused to arrange flowers for a same-sex wedding ceremony, a pro-life activist who was thrown out of a cafeteria and many more. At the same time, the ones on the side of the same-sex and pro-choice have also faced many discriminations. The spiral doesn't end. And if the fight is only pro-choice versus pro-life and same-sex marriage versus heterosexual marriage, we'll only be fighting on the surface level. There is a deeper spiritual crisis that needs a revival. The fourth Great Awakening that many believe is happening could be a reason for the intensity of the growing challenges. America has become the epicenter where both sides of the team are standing firm. It's all unfolding in the "land of the free" because where else could it have happened.

There is a spiritual hunger, a desire for deeper connection, among the younger generation that is so big. There is a desire to explore more things to find that connection. They desire to belong to something or someone. That is one of the reasons the culture of the United States is so diverse. On the spiritual level people are willing to go to any extent just to belong and connect. To experience one has to explore. The older traditions that were ideals for the society failed to live out their true nature and fulfill its purpose in many ways. The lack of faith in the old ways of living life have led to taking different paths. This was made easier because of the availability of freedom of choice. In the process the freedom of choice that was meant to bring wellbeing and a better life has only led to more desperation and a need for satisfaction.

Freedom of choice has been unable to serve its full purpose because freedom was always about choosing the ways of God that are moral. But the definition of morality has become far from the theological understanding of morality. The Christian is not the only way in America anymore. But freedom of choice has not been uprooted yet so there is always the option to come back to the values that are defined by Christian ethics. But this is possible only with a spiritual revival from within the country. And America has done it in the past. She has been able to correct her ways from slavery and racism. It can do it again. It is a nation under God.

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