

Religious Liberty



The Principle of Liberty

1. Liberty Before Sin
2. Liberty After Sin
3. The Principle of Liberty

The principle for which the disciples stood so fearlessly when, in answer to the command not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, they declared, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye,” is the same that the adherents of the gospel struggled to maintain in the days of the Reformation. When in 1529 the German princes assembled at the Diet of Spires, there was presented the emperor’s decree restricting religious liberty, and prohibiting all further dissemination of the reformed doctrines. (*AA* 68.1)

It seemed that the hope of the world was about to be crushed out. Would the princes accept the decree? Should the light of the gospel be shut out from the multitudes still in darkness? Mighty issues for the world were at stake. Those who had accepted the reformed faith met together, and their unanimous decision was, "Let us reject this decree. In matters of conscience the majority has no power."—Merle d'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation*, b. 13, ch. 5. (*AA* 68.1)

America wasn't always a stronghold of religious freedom. More than half a century before the Pilgrims set sail in the Mayflower,

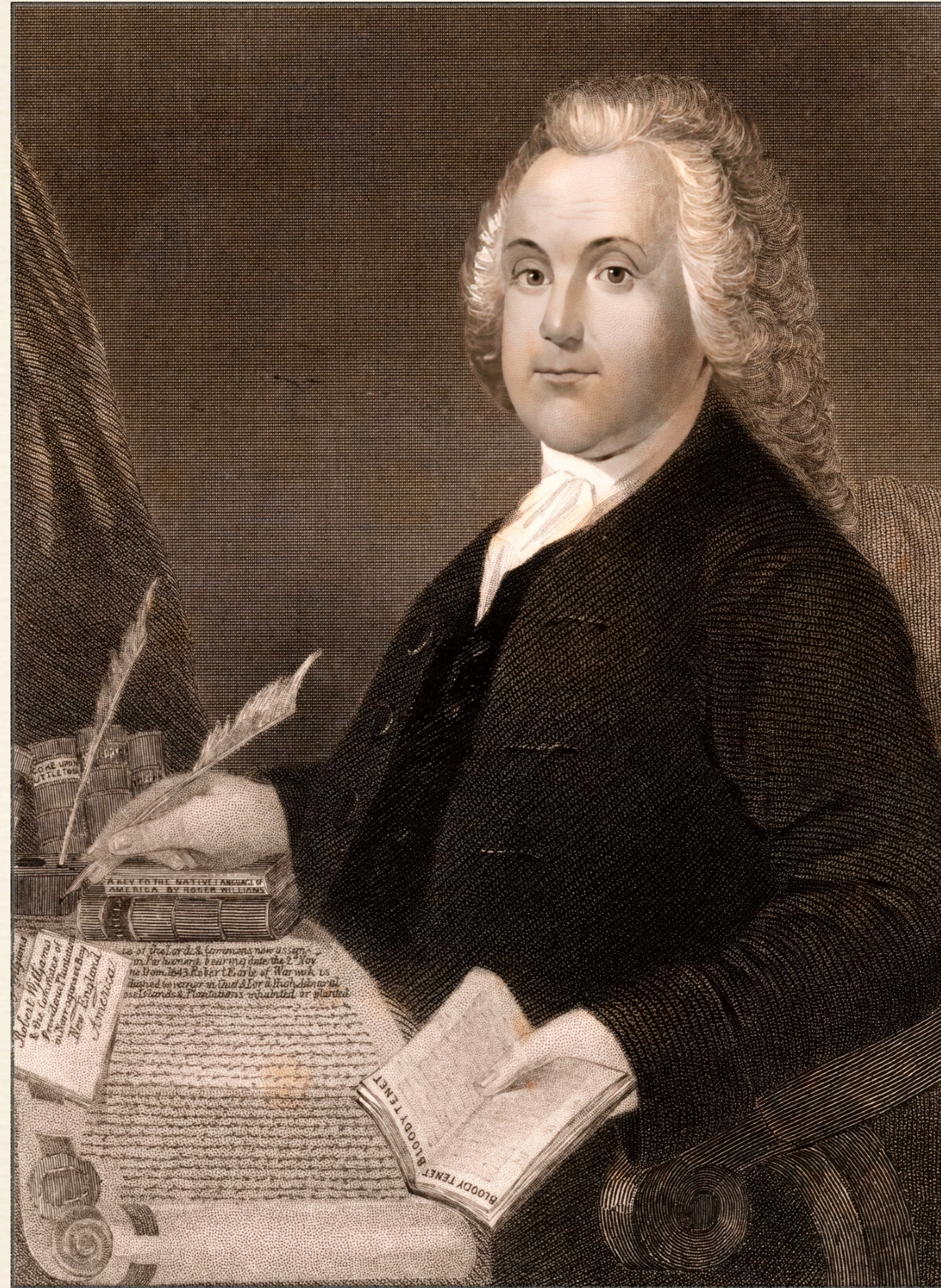
French Protestants (called Huguenots) established a colony at Fort Caroline near modern-day Jacksonville, Florida.

The Spanish, who were largely Catholic and occupied much of Florida at the time, slaughtered the Huguenots at Fort Caroline.

The Spanish commander wrote the king that he had hanged the settlers for "scattering the odious Lutheran doctrine in these Provinces."

(history.com editors, "Freedom of Religion," <https://www.history.com/topics/united-states-constitution/freedom-of-religion>)

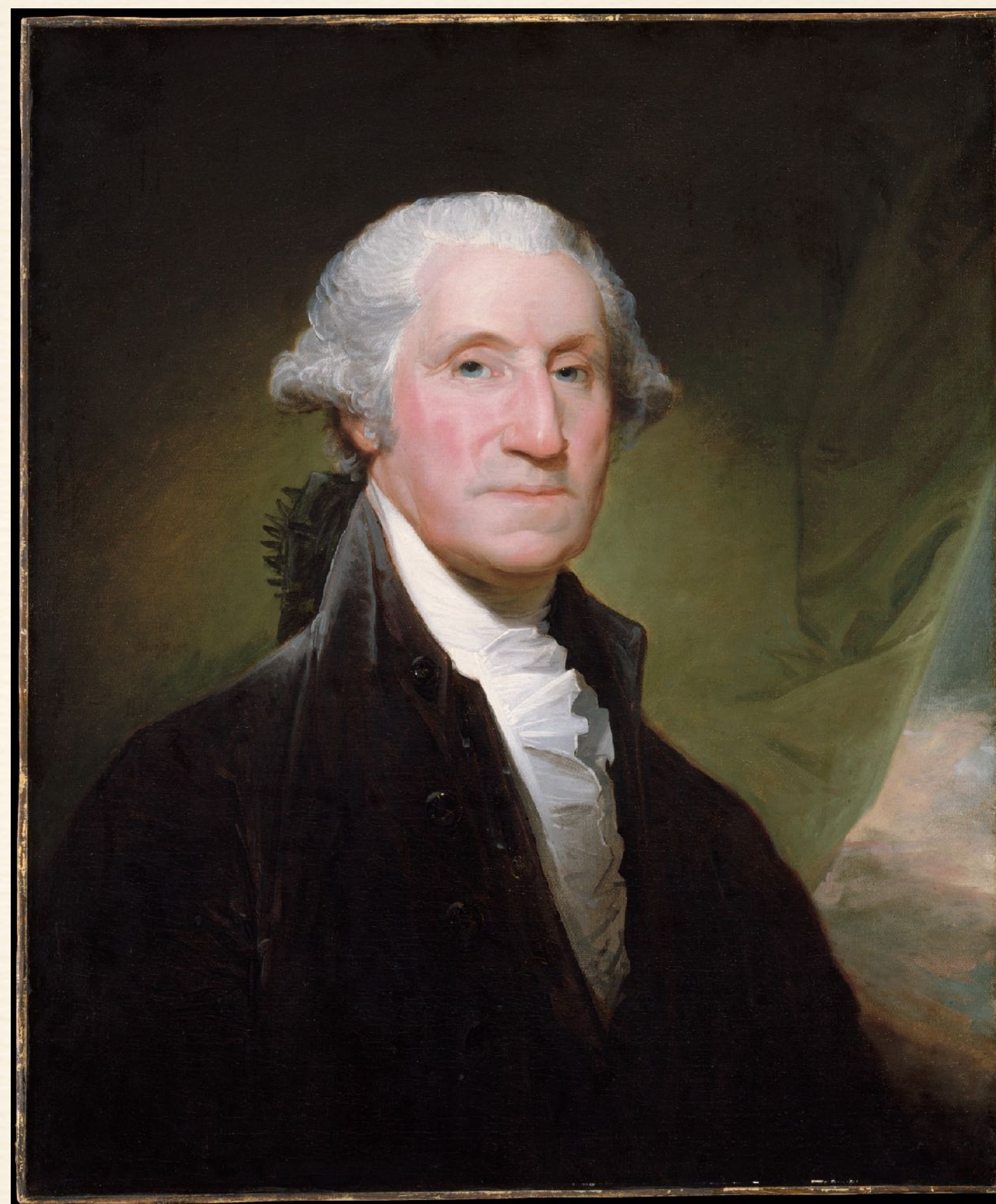
Roger Williams,
pioneer of religious
liberty, arrived in
Boston **1631** and
was banned from
Massachusetts in
1635.



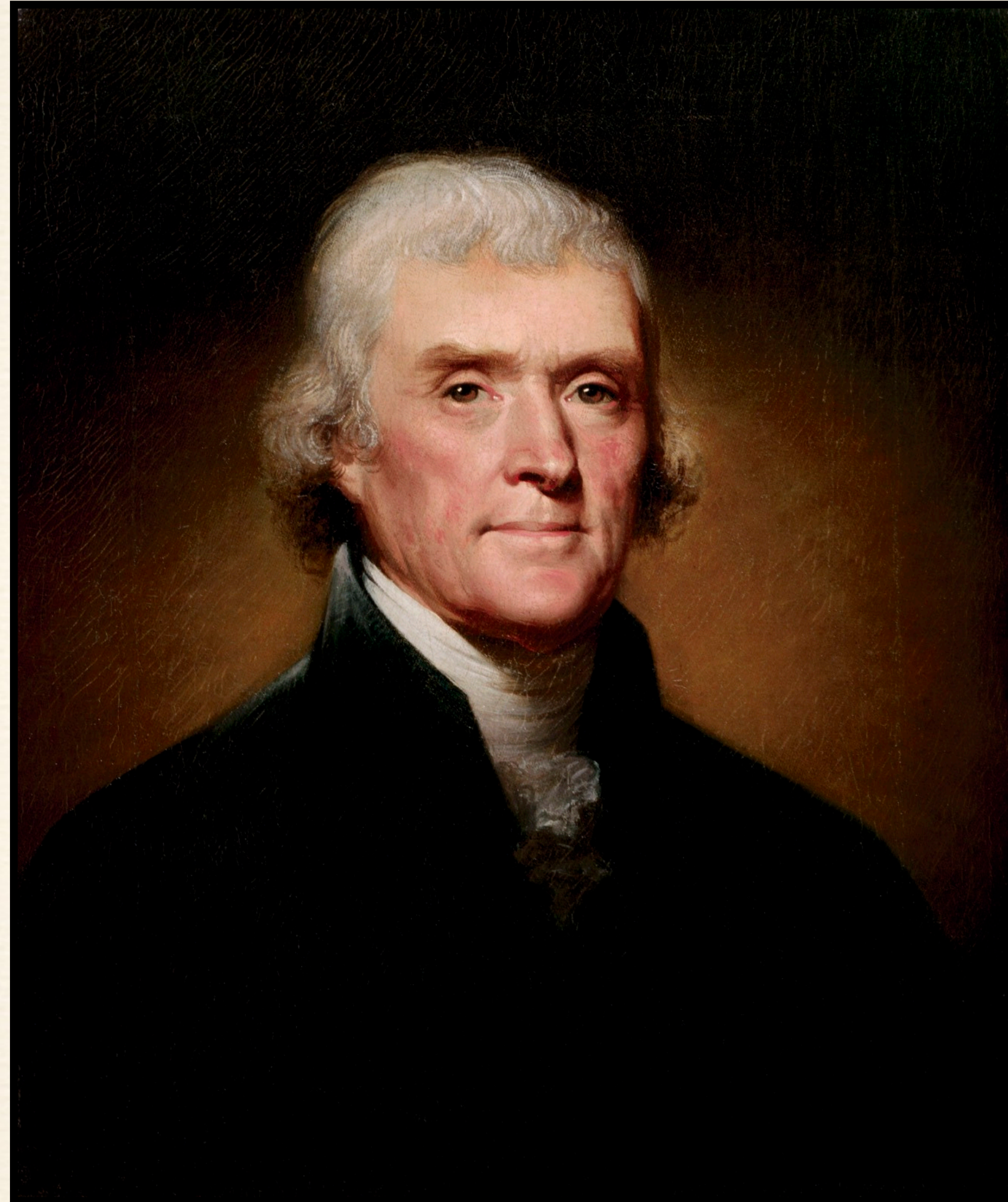
It was the desire for liberty of conscience that inspired the Pilgrims to brave the perils of the long journey across the sea, to endure the hardships and dangers of the wilderness, and with God's blessing to lay, on the shores of America, the foundation of a mighty nation. Yet honest and God-fearing as they were, the Pilgrims did not yet comprehend the great principle of religious toleration. The freedom which they sacrificed so much to secure for themselves, they were not equally ready to grant to others. (*GC88 292.2*)

- ❖ 1529 Diet of Spires
- ❖ 1620 Pilgrims arrived
- ❖ 1631 Roger Williams arrived
- ❖ 1779 Jefferson drafted religious freedom bill
- ❖ 1791 First Amendment
- ❖ 1868 Fourteenth Amendment
- ❖ 1886 First issue of *American Sentinel*
- ❖ 1888 Jones speaks at Senate Committee concerning Blair bill
- ❖ 1906 First issue *Liberty*

❖ George Washington—
Every man, conducting
himself as a good citizen,
and being accountable to
God alone for his religious
opinions, ought to be
protected in worshipping
the Deity according to the
dictates of his own
conscience. (Letter to the
United Baptist Churches
in Virginia, May 1789)



❖ Thomas Jefferson—Almighty God hath created the mind free. All attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burthens...are a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion...No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship or ministry or shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but all men shall be free to profess and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion. (Northeast Wall Jefferson Memorial)



In May 1991 a rental car that Gwendolyn Robbins' father was driving in upstate New York skidded, plunged down an embankment, and overturned. Both her parents were killed, and Robbins, 55, was severely injured. She was rushed to nearby Glens Fall Hospital, where her condition was so critical — chest injuries, a fractured right femur, a fractured ankle, and a fractured hip — that upon admission last rites were administered. The doctors stabilized her and prepared for surgery to reset displaced bones and ligaments. The surgery was important for her recovery and critical for any opportunity that she might have to walk again.

But Robbins refused the surgery. A devout Jehovah's Witness, she believed — based on the tenets of her faith — that she could undergo no blood transfusions, even if that refusal led to life-threatening progressive anemia. Fortunately, she did survive the immediate threat of infection and was transferred to a hospital in New York City. There she was placed in traction for several weeks, where she continued to refuse any treatment that required blood transfusions. Her orthopedic surgeon stated that without joint replacement surgery she would become wheelchair-bound or bedridden for the rest of her life. Robbins' decision to forgo surgery would thus greatly increase her need of medical services and home care.

The story might have ended there except that she then sued her insurance company, a suit that raised difficult moral and legal questions.

Though it was Robbins' First Amendment right to refuse surgery, should the insurance company have to pay for the ongoing disability suffered by Robbins directly because of that refusal?

The insurance company, Meritor Capital Resources, argued that Robbins had a duty to mitigate, or lessen, her injuries when she could reasonably do so. But because she refused an opportunity to reasonably lessen the damage from her injuries, the company argued that it should not have to pay for the results of that choice.

Meritor had good legal precedent. The law requires that a person injured by the acts of another take reasonable steps to mitigate, or prevent a worsening of, those injuries. If such steps are not taken, the person causing the injury can be held responsible only for the initial injury and not for any damage caused by the injured person's failure to act reasonably in a way that would prevent worsening of the situation. Often a jury is called on to decide whether an injured person has done all he or she reasonably should have done to treat his or her injuries.

But here's where the insurance company ran into a church-state problem. Because Robbins' decision had been based on her religious convictions, the jury would be asked to decide if Robbins religious convictions and beliefs were reasonable. Yet the trial judge was troubled by the idea of a jury passing judgment on the reasonableness of someone's religious beliefs. The Supreme Court had prohibited juries from passing judgment on the "plausibility of a religious claim."

The trial judge ruled that the insurance company could not argue against the reasonableness of Robbins' choice, because it was based on religion. The company would have to take Robbins and her belief system as it found them, those of a devout Jehovah's Witness. The court thus ordered that the insurance company would have to pay for all Robbins' damages, without regard to her refusal of surgery.

This decision showed a great deal of sensitivity to the protected status granted religious beliefs in the American constitutional system. The picture of a jury deciding the reasonableness or unreasonableness of anyone's religious convictions is, indeed, troubling. Under this scenario, the moderate Protestant and Catholic would do well, but the Hare Krishna, the Christian Scientist, or the Hindu would likely be denied justice - not an acceptable outcome in our society of equality under the law.

But did the judge, in arriving at the balance of rights and responsibilities, overlook a necessary corollary of personal freedom: the responsibility to live with the consequences of one's choices? This principle is also found in the American legal system under the name "assumption of the risk," which states that a person cannot recover from another when he or she knowingly "assumes the risk" that the other person may present to him or her. This principle prevents one from suing if you sprain or fracture your ankle while playing basketball, even if the injury is caused by the negligence of another player. Before entering the court, you knew that basketball was a lively game with a fair amount of incidental contact. By playing, you accepted the risk that you may sprain your ankle or worse. The logic is that as you voluntarily and knowingly placed yourself in the way of the possible negligence of others, you cannot sue even if they negligently injure you.

An application of this doctrine may have been appropriate in Robbins' case.

To decide if Robbins had assumed the risk of her choices, the jury would not have had to assess the reasonableness of her beliefs. Rather they would merely have had to decide if Robbins knew that forgoing surgery could lead to further suffering and disability, and that she knowingly and voluntarily chose to accept this possibility.

If they had seen the matter this way, they could have made Robbins accept the consequences of her religious choices rather than place those consequences on her insurance company. This approach would have satisfied the protections of the Free Exercise clause while avoiding the apparent unfairness of imposing the consequences of one person's religious choices on a third party.

All major Western religions teach that what a man sows, that shall he also reap. They teach personal accountability and responsibility, and that the moral choices that people make will impact both their earthly lives and their eternal destinies.

If those religious decisions have toxic results, the decision-maker will live with the consequences, at least partially in this life and fully in the next, according to the various beliefs. But meanwhile, in this life, the insurance company had to pay Robbins \$7,732,900, quite a handsome sum for the religious choices of another.

(Nicholas P. Miller, "The Price of Faith," *Liberty*, March/April 1997)

*Is not this the fast that I have
chosen? to loose the bands of
wickedness, to undo the heavy
burdens, and to let the oppressed
go free, and that ye break every
yoke? (Isaiah 58:6)*

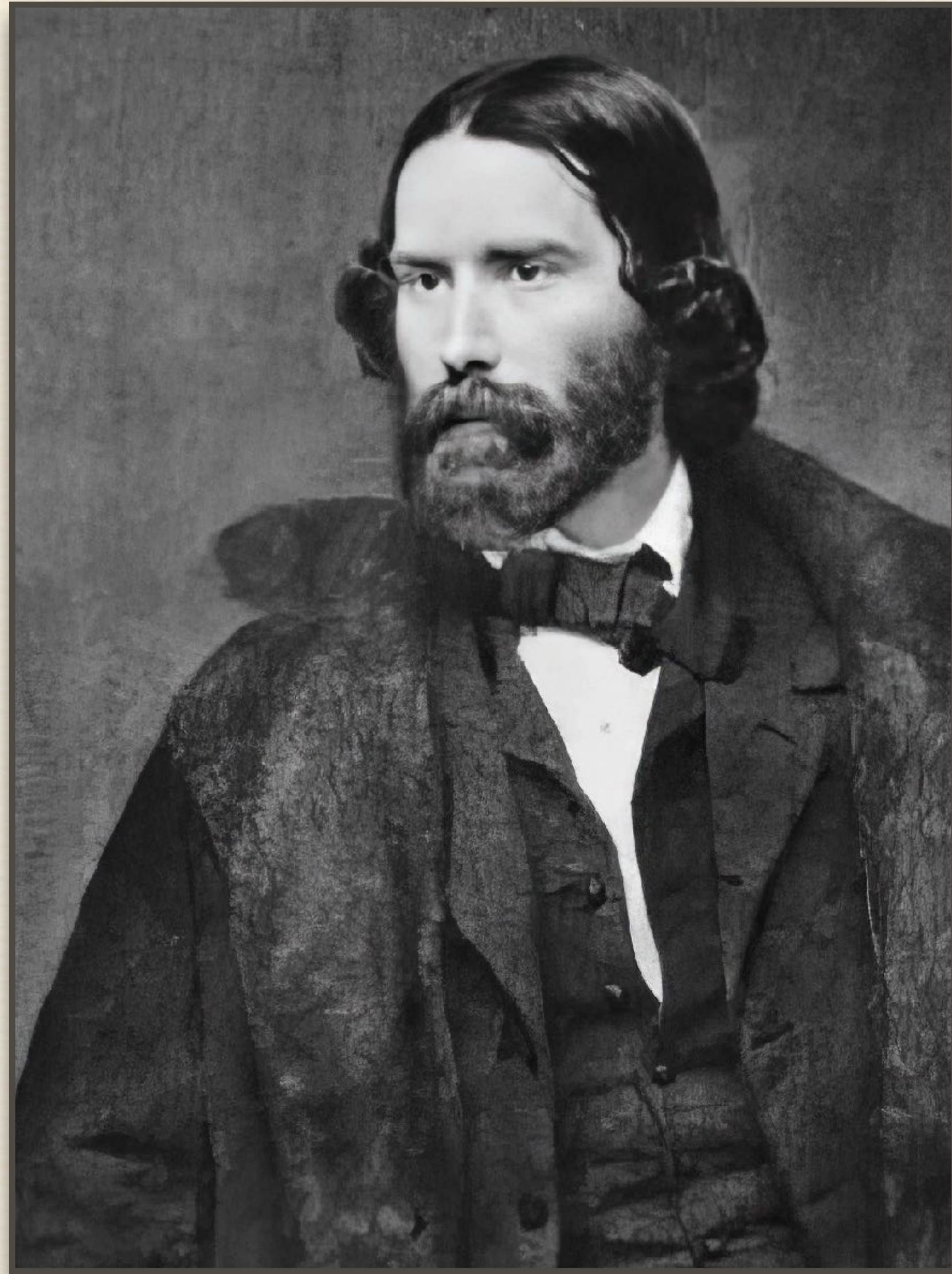
Then said Jesus to those Jews
which believed on him, If ye
continue in my word, *then* are
ye my disciples indeed; And ye
shall know the truth, and the
truth shall make you free.

(John 8:31–32)

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that **all men are created equal**, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.
(Declaration of Independence)

But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are **brethren**. (Matthew 23:8)
Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, **do ye even so to them**: for this is the law and the prophets. (Matthew 7:12)

Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy **neighbour** as thyself: I *am* the Lord. (Leviticus 19:18)

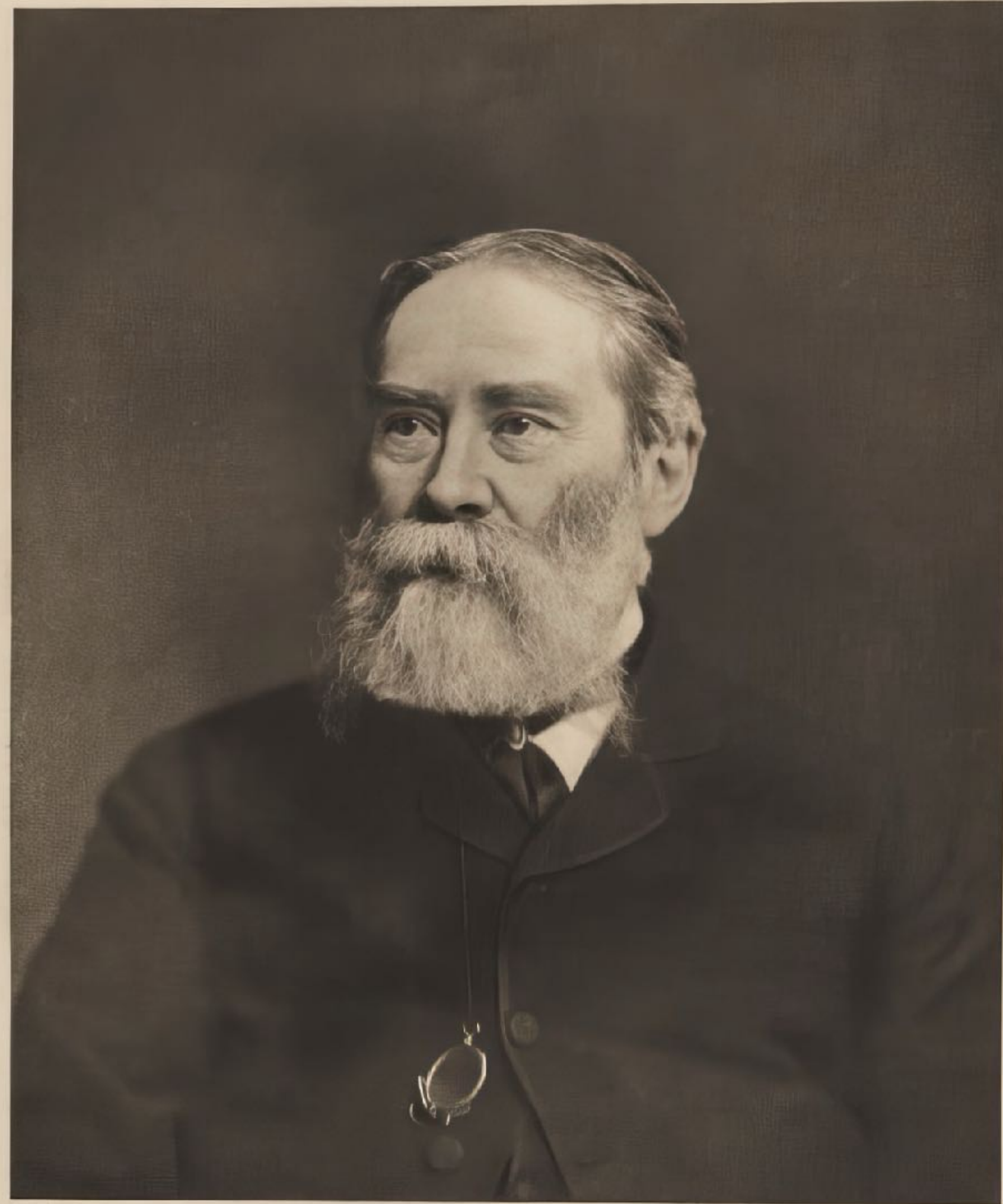


They are slaves who fear to speak
For the fallen and the weak;
They are slaves who will not choose
Hatred, scoffing, and abuse,
Rather than in silence shrink
From the truth they needs must think;
They are slaves who dare not be
In the right with two or three.
—“Stanzas on Freedom” (1843)

James Russell Lowell, 1819–1891



Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood,
For the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah,
Offering each the bloom or blight,
And the choice goes by forever
Twixt that darkness and that light.
Then to side with Truth is noble,
When we share her wretched crust,
Ere her cause bring fame and profit,
And 'tis prosperous to be just;
Then it is the brave man chooses
While the coward stands aside,
Till the multitude make virtue
Of the faith they had denied.



J. Lowell

By the light of burning martyrs,
Christ, Thy bleeding feet we track,
Toiling up new Calvaries ever
With the cross that turns not back;
New occasions teach new duties,
Time makes ancient good uncouth;
They must upward still and onward,
Who would keep abreast of Truth.
Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet 'tis Truth alone is strong;
Though her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong:
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow
Keeping watch above His own.
—Selected from “Present Crisis” (1845)

But whoso looketh into the **perfect law of liberty**, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (James 1:25)

So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the **law of liberty**.
(James 2:12)

If ye fulfil the **royal law** according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:
(James 2:8)

Blessed *are* they that do his
commandments, that they may have right
to the tree of life, and may enter in
through the gates into the city. (Revelation
22:14)

Great **peace** have they which love thy law:
And nothing shall offend them. (Psalm
119:165)

Therefore I love thy commandments
above gold; yea, above **fine gold**. (Psalm
119:127)

And I will **walk at liberty**: For I seek thy
precepts. (Psalm 119:45)

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.

(Romans 8:1–6)

The first step in reconciliation to God is the conviction of sin. “Sin is the transgression of the law.” “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” 1 John 3:4; Romans 3:20. In order to see his guilt, the sinner must test his character by God’s great standard of righteousness. It is a **mirror** which shows the perfection of a righteous character and enables him to discern the defects in his own. (*GC 467.3*)

The law reveals to man his sins, but it provides no remedy. While it promises life to the obedient, it declares that death is the portion of the transgressor. The gospel of Christ alone can free him from the condemnation or the defilement of sin. He must exercise **repentance** toward God, whose law has been transgressed; and **faith** in Christ, his atoning sacrifice. Thus he obtains “remission of sins that are past” and becomes a partaker of the divine nature. He is a child of God, having received the spirit of adoption, whereby he cries: “Abba, Father!” (*GC* 467.4)

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” Psalm 19:7. Without the law, men have no **just conception** of the purity and holiness of God or of their own guilt and uncleanness. They have no true conviction of sin and feel no need of repentance. Not seeing their lost condition as violators of God’s law, they do not realize their need of the atoning blood of Christ. The hope of salvation is accepted without a radical change of heart or reformation of life. Thus superficial conversions abound, and multitudes are joined to the church who have never been united to Christ. (*GC* 468.2)

This work can be accomplished only through **faith** in Christ, by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God. Paul admonishes believers: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12, 13. The Christian will feel the promptings of sin, but he will maintain a constant warfare against it. Here is where Christ’s help is needed. Human weakness becomes united to divine strength, and faith exclaims: “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 15:57. (*GC 469.3*)

- ❖ God's law is the perfect law of liberty, and part of that law is the seventh-day Sabbath.
- ❖ What would be the result of worshipping false gods and keeping a false sabbath?

When in 1529 the German princes assembled at the Diet of Spires, there was presented the emperor's decree restricting religious liberty, and prohibiting all further dissemination of the reformed doctrines. It seemed that the hope of the world was about to be crushed out. Would the princes accept the decree? Should the light of the gospel be shut out from the multitudes still in darkness? **Mighty issues for the world were at stake.**

Those who had accepted the reformed faith met together, and their **unanimous** decision was, "Let us reject this decree. **In matters of conscience the majority has no power.**"—Merle d'Aubigné, *History of the Reformation*, b. 13, ch. 5. (AA 68.1; 1911)

This principle we in our day are firmly to maintain. The banner of truth and religious liberty held aloft by the founders of the gospel church and by God's witnesses during the centuries that have passed since then, has, in this last conflict, been committed to our hands. The responsibility for this great gift rests with those whom God has blessed with a knowledge of His word. We are to receive this word as supreme authority. We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God's word must be recognized as above all human legislation. A "Thus saith the Lord" is not to be set aside for a "Thus saith the church" or a "Thus saith the state." The crown of Christ is to be lifted above the diadems of earthly potentates. (*AA 68.2*)

The pope claims to be the vicar of Christ; but how does his character bear comparison with that of our Saviour? Was Christ ever known to consign men to the prison or the rack because they did not pay him homage as the King of Heaven? Was his voice heard condemning to death those who did not accept him? When he was slighted by the people of a Samaritan village, the apostle John was filled with indignation, and inquired, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" Jesus looked with pity upon his disciple, and rebuked his harsh spirit, saying, "The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." [Luke 9:54, 56.] How different from the spirit manifested by Christ is that of his professed vicar. (*GC88* 570.2)

The Romish Church now presents a fair front to the world, covering with apologies her record of horrible cruelties. She has clothed herself in Christ-like garments; but she is unchanged. **Every principle of popery that existed in past ages exists today. The doctrines devised in the darkest ages are still held. Let none deceive themselves. The popery that Protestants are now so ready to honor is the same that ruled the world in the days of the Reformation, when men of God stood up, at the peril of their lives, to expose her iniquity.** She possesses the same pride and arrogant assumption that lorded it over kings and princes, and claimed the prerogatives of God. Her spirit is no less cruel and despotic now than when she crushed out human liberty, and slew the saints of the Most High. (*GC88 570.3*)

Popery is just what prophecy declared that she would be, the apostasy of the latter times.

[2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4.] It is a part of her policy to assume the character which will best accomplish her purpose; but beneath the variable appearance of the chameleon, she conceals the invariable venom of the serpent.

“We are not bound to keep faith and promises to heretics,” she declares. Shall this power, whose record for a thousand years is written in the blood of the saints, be now acknowledged as a part of the church of Christ? (*GC88* 571.1)

It is not without reason that the claim has been put forth in Protestant countries, that Catholicism differs less widely from Protestantism than in former times. There has been a change; but the change is not in the papacy. Catholicism indeed resembles much of the Protestantism that now exists, because Protestantism has so greatly degenerated since the days of the reformers. (*GC88* 571.2)

In the movements now in progress in the United States to secure for the institutions and usages of the church the support of the State, Protestants are following in the steps of papists. Nay, more, they are opening the door for popery to regain in Protestant America the supremacy which she has lost in the Old World. And that which gives greater significance to this movement is the fact that the principal object contemplated is the enforcement of Sunday observance,—a custom which originated with Rome, and which she claims as the sign of her authority. It is the spirit of the papacy,—the spirit of conformity to worldly customs, the veneration for human traditions above the commandments of God,—that is permeating the Protestant churches, and leading them on to do the same work of Sunday exaltation which the papacy has done before them. (*GC88* 573.1)





By the decree enforcing the institution of the papacy in violation of the law of God, our nation will disconnect herself fully from righteousness. When Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall reach over the abyss to clasp hands with spiritualism, when, under the influence of this threefold union, **our country shall repudiate every principle of its Constitution** as a Protestant and republican government, and shall make provision for the propagation of papal falsehoods and delusions, then we may know that the time has come for the marvelous working of Satan and that the end is near. (*5T* 451.1)

As the approach of the Roman armies was a sign to the disciples of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, so may this apostasy be a sign to us that the limit of God's forbearance is reached, that the measure of our nation's iniquity is full, and that the angel of mercy is about to take her flight, never to return. The people of God will then be plunged into those scenes of affliction and distress which prophets have described as the time of Jacob's trouble. The cries of the faithful, persecuted ones ascend to heaven. And as the blood of Abel cried from the ground, there are voices also crying to God from martyrs' graves, from the sepulchers of the sea, from mountain caverns, from convent vaults: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

(5T 451.2)

God has revealed what is to take place in the last days, that His people may be prepared to stand against the tempest of opposition and wrath.

Those who have been warned of the events before them are not to sit in calm expectation of the coming storm, comforting themselves that the Lord will shelter His faithful ones in the day of trouble. We are to be as men waiting for their Lord, not in idle expectancy, but in earnest work, with unwavering faith. It is no time now to allow our minds to be engrossed with things of minor importance. While men are sleeping, Satan is actively arranging matters so that the Lord's people may not have mercy or justice. The Sunday movement is now making its way in darkness. (*5T* 452.1)

The leaders are concealing the true issue, and many who unite in the movement do not themselves see whither the undercurrent is tending. Its professions are mild and apparently Christian, but when it shall speak it will reveal the spirit of the dragon. It is our duty to do all in our power to avert the threatened danger. We should endeavor to disarm prejudice by placing ourselves in a proper light before the people. We should bring before them the real question at issue, thus interposing the most effectual protest against measures to restrict liberty of conscience. We should search the Scriptures and be able to give the reason for our faith. Says the prophet: "The wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand." (5T 452.1)

Those who have access to God through Christ have important work before them. Now is the time to lay hold of the arm of our strength. The prayer of David should be the prayer of pastors and laymen: “It is time for Thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void Thy law.” Let the servants of the Lord weep between the porch and the altar, crying: “Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach.” God has always wrought for His people in their greatest extremity, when there seemed the least hope that ruin could be averted. The designs of wicked men, the enemies of the church, are subject to His power and overruling providence.

(5T 452.2)

He can move upon the hearts of statesmen; the wrath of the turbulent and disaffected, the haters of God, His truth, and His people can be turned aside, even as the rivers of water are turned, if He orders it thus. Prayer moves the arm of Omnipotence. He who marshals the stars in order in the heavens, whose word controls the waves of the great deep, the same infinite Creator will work in behalf of His people if they call upon Him in faith. He will restrain the forces of darkness until the warning is given to the world and all who will heed it are prepared for the conflict.

(5T 452.2)

The people whom God has made the depositaries of His law are not to permit their light to be hidden. The truth must be proclaimed in the dark places of the earth. Obstacles must be met and surmounted. A great work is to be done, and this work has been entrusted to those who know the truth. They should make mighty intercession with God for help now. The love of Christ must be diffused in their own hearts. The Spirit of Christ must be poured out upon them, and they must be making ready to stand in the judgment. (*5T* 454.1)

While they are consecrating themselves to God, a convincing power will attend their efforts to present the truth to others, and its light will find access to many hearts. We must sleep no longer on Satan's enchanted ground, but call into requisition all our resources and avail ourselves of every facility with which Providence has furnished us. The last warning is to be proclaimed "before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings;" and the promise is given, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (5*T* 454.1)