

## 14. Christian freedom and liberty of conscience

### WCF chapter 20 *Modern Language version – 1993 – OPC*

1. The liberty which Christ purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, from the condemning wrath of God, and from the curse of the moral law. Furthermore, it consists in their being delivered from this present evil age, from bondage to Satan and the dominion of sin, from the evil of afflictions, from the sting of death, from the victory of the grave, and from everlasting damnation. It consists also in their free access to God and in yielding obedience to him, not out of slavish fear, but out of a childlike love and willing mind. All of these things were common to believers also under the law. Under the new testament, however, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged: they are free from the yoke of the ceremonial law to which the Jewish church was subjected; they have greater boldness of access to the throne of grace; and they experience in greater measure the gifts of God's free Spirit than believers under the law ordinarily partook of.

2. God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are—in anything—contrary to his Word, or which—in matters of faith or worship—are in addition to it. Therefore, anyone who believes such doctrines or obeys such commands out of conscience betrays true liberty of conscience. The requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, destroys both liberty of conscience and reason.

### **Understand your liberty!**

\*\* Christian liberty is purchased by Christ \*\*

Foundational freedoms: liberty from...

- guilt, God's wrath, the law's curse  
e.g. Titus 2:14, 1 Thess. 1:10, Gal. 3:3
- slavery to sin, world & the devil  
e.g. Gal. 1:4, Col. 1:13, Acts 26:18
- the "evil of afflictions": now ALL must work together for my good, Rom. 8:28
- death's sting and the grave's victory,  
1 Cor. 15:54-57, Romans 8:1

The privileges of adopted children...

- access to God, Eph. 2:18
- grace to love Him, Rom. 8:14-15

These were the freedoms of Old Testament believers too...

- e.g. Gal 3:9, "So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith"

... But we have more:

- freedom from the ceremonial law
- we know that we have a permanent priest and perfect sacrifice → Heb. 4:14-16
- & through the Spirit a clearer sight of God's glory, 2 Cor. 3:17-18

### **Liberty: do not obey men instead of God!**

- "God alone is Lord of the conscience":  
He is the only lawgiver & judge, James 4:12  
We must obey God not men, Acts 5:29
- vs. Human teaching that contradicts Bible
- vs. Human teaching that is an "addition" or supplement to the Bible in matters of doctrine of worship

Matt. 15:9, cf. Isa 29:13

False worship... worldly regulations...  
human gurus... over-prescriptive advice...  
manipulation  
e.g. Catholicism, cults

- God rules through his sufficient word: "to the law and the testimony"! Isa. 8:20

3. Those who, on the pretext of Christian liberty, practice any sin or cherish any evil desire destroy the purpose of Christian liberty. This purpose is that, having been delivered out of the hand of our enemies, we may serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

4. Because the powers which God has ordained and the liberty which Christ has purchased are not intended by God to destroy each other, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, those who, in the name of Christian liberty, oppose any lawful power or any lawful exercise of it, whether civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. Those who declare opinions or maintain practices contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning faith, worship, or manner of life), or the power of godliness; or who are guilty of such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive of the external peace and order which Christ has established in the church, may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against, by the censures of the church, [and by the power of the civil magistrate].

### **Freedom within Biblical bounds**

There ARE limits to Christian freedom...

- "I'm free... to sin?" No!
- Christian freedom is freedom *from* sin, John 8:34
- Christian freedom is joyful slavery *to* Christ, 1 Peter 2:16, Gal. 5:13
- *i.e.* Liberty & licence are NOT the same.

### **Christian liberty and the human authorities that God has ordained**

Christian freedom is not opposed to either "civil" or church power

- God intends them to complement each other... to uphold and preserve each other

No Christian should oppose "any lawful power or any lawful exercise of it"

- E.g, governments, 1 Peter 2:13-17
- \* godly authority is gift from God and for our good \*

Lawful authorities have a job to do: to "call to account"...

- Those who contradict common decency, e.g. incest in Corinth, 1 Cor. 5
- Those who hurt the peace and order of the church through false doctrine or false living, e.g. 2 John 10,22
- Church discipline: sin → the censures of the church
- The state: crime → civil punishment
- The church is to turn over to the courts any criminals in its midst...
- [But the state should not meddle with the affairs of the church.  
= 1788 American revision...]

**Personal response: for what should we give thanks... confess... pray?**

**Next week: Our worship of God and the sabbath day**