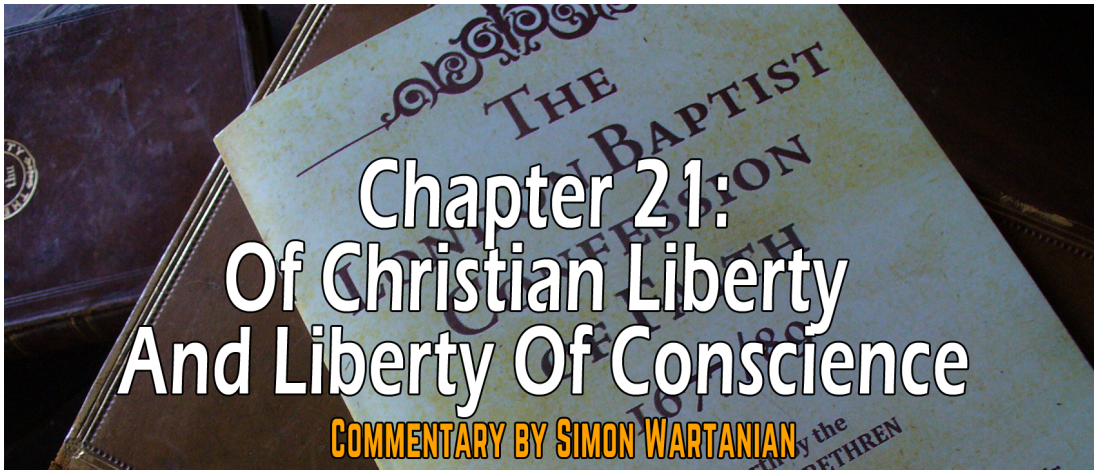
1689 Baptist Confession Chapter 21: Of Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience - Commentary

Published: Friday 6th of March 2015 19:19 by Simon Wartanian
URL:
https://www.thecalvinist.net/post/1689-Baptist-Confession-Chapter-21:-Of-Christian-Liberty-And-Liberty-Of-Conscience-Commentary



Chapter 21: Of Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience

Are Christians free? How are Christians free? What does this liberty consist of? Are we free to sin?

§1 The Liberty Which Christ Hath Purchased For Believers Under The Gospel

1. The **liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel,** consists in their **freedom from the guilt of sin**, the **condemning wrath of God**, the **rigour and curse of the law, 1** and in their **being delivered from this present evil world,** bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin, **2** from the evil of afflictions, the fear and sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation: **3** as also in their **free access to God,** and their yielding obedience unto Him, not out of slavish fear, but **a child-like love and willing mind. 4** All which were **common also to believers under the law** for the substance of them; **5** but under the New Testament the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their **freedom from the yoke of a ceremonial law,** to which the Jewish church was subjected, and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of. **6**
    1. John 3:36; Rom. 8:33; Gal. 3:13[1]
    2. Gal. 1:4; Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 1:13; Acts 26:18; Rom. 6:14-18; 8:3
    3. Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 15:54-57; 1 Thess. 1:10; Heb. 2:14-15
    4. Eph. 2:18; 3:12; Rom. 8:15; 1 John 4:18
    5. John 8:32; Ps. 19:7-9; 119:14, 24, 45, 47, 48, 72, 97; Rom. 4:5-11; Gal. 3:9; Heb. 11:27, 33-34
    6. John 1:17; Heb. 1:1-2a;7:19, 22; 8:6, 9:23, 11:40; Gal. 2:11f.; 4:1-3; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 10:19-21; John 7:38-39

The freedom and **liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel** consists in the freedom from the dominion of sin, the punishment for sin and the **free access** (Eph. 2:18; 3:12), which we received through Christ, **to God**. Furthermore, our obedience to God and His commandments is **not out of slavish fear** (1John 4:18), but **a child-like love and willing mind** (Rom. 8:14-15). We obey because we love our Father and not because we are afraid of how He might punish us. In our obedience there is reverence, but no fear of punishment or condemnation. All these things **were common also to believers under the law** although those living under the law were still under the **yoke of a ceremonial law** (e.g. Col. 2:16-17), which believers under the New Testament are not. With the doing away of the ceremonial law, we have a **greater boldness of access to the throne of grace** (Heb. 4:16) now that we know what Christ has accomplished and what it means for us. The **Spirit of God** is more fully communicated to us with His gifts and graces **than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of** (John 7:38-39). There are no believers without the Holy Spirit, but under the New Testament, there is a **fuller communication of the free Spirit of God**.

The Children Of God Are Freed From

Oh, brothers and sisters, how thankful should we be to our Lord for the many liberties which He has blessed us with as His children. The Confession mentions ten things which we have been freed from. As His children and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are slaves to no one, but God. Paradoxically, true freedom comes from slavery to none other than Christ. We belong to Him and we are called to walk in freedom (Gal. 5:1). We are under grace and are free, but our freedom does not consist in doing our own will, but the will of the Father and seeking His good pleasure. We were called out of the bondage of sin to walk in the freedom of God and the Gospel.

1. The guilt of sin

When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of **the guilt within**
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an **end of all my sin**
Because the sinless Savior died
My sinful soul is counted free
For God the Just is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me
To look on Him and pardon me

— Before The Throne of God Above, verse 2.

Christ, our precious Lord and Savior, makes an end of our sin and thereby also end of the *guilt* of sin. The guilt of sin does not only consist in the psychological terror of breaking God's Law, but also the moral culpability and responsibility for breaking His Law, for sin is the breaking and transgressing of His Law (1John 3:4 KJV). Christ, our High Priest, "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26) and thereby made also an end to the condemnation and punishment of sin for His people. Romans 8:1 declares that there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus". Why? Because of His sacrificial work on their behalf. He has satisfied the wrath of God on their behalf and has been punished according to the demand of the law in place of His elect (Rom. 3:25-26; Gal. 3:10-13).

According to Romans 8:32-34, the reason that no condemnation is possible for the children of God is because of:

1. the death of Christ on their behalf;
2. the resurrection of Christ on their behalf; and
3. the intercession of Christ on their behalf.

These threefold reasons do not depend upon them and are not things done by them. Rather, they are things done *for* them by Christ. **See here for more on Romans 8:34.**

2. The condemning wrath of God

Complete atonement You have made
And by Your death have fully paid
The debt Your people owed
No wrath remains for us to face
We're sheltered by Your saving grace

And sprinkled with Your blood

— Sovereign Grace Music - Now Why This Fear, verse 2.

This is closely connected to the first point above. We are free from the guilt of sin and likewise from the condemnation which comes *because of* sin. Christians will never know the wrath of God. They have been, prior to regeneration, under the wrath of God (John 3:36), but after regeneration, we will have no taste of His wrath. We may be under His discipline, but His discipline is not equivalent to His holy and righteous wrath. We are delivered both from the present wrath of God and the eschatological wrath of God in Hell. The apostle Paul writes:

> 1 Thess. 1:10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, **Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**

Christians are here described as those who (1) wait for the Son from heaven (Titus 2:13) and likewise those who are delivered *from* the wrath to come. The phrase "wrath to come" was first used by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7) and referred to the eschatological judgment of God. God's judgment is coming and it is righteous! But Christians, through Jesus, will escape from God's judgment. This does not mean that Christians will not be judged, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10), but that we will never be condemned by Christ. We may gain or lose rewards, but we will never be rejected and condemned by Him!

How is it that we may escape from the wrath to come? Because Christ bore the full wrath of God, which was due to our sins, upon Himself. He was punished in our place and in this way we escape from the terrifying wrath of God, which will be released upon all those who have not obeyed the Gospel of our Christ. For all those who are not found in Christ, they are at the present time already under the wrath of God (John 3:36), but once they repent and believe, they will no longer be "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), but will be called "sons of the Most High" (Rom. 9:26).

3. The rigor and curse of the law

We no longer obey the Law to gain righteousness by it, nor are we condemned and cursed because we do not perfectly obey it. The Mosaic Covenant demanded perfect obedience, but no mere man can render that. Therefore, any least transgression of the law brought the curse of the law (Gal. 3:10). But Christ, for His people, took the curse of the law upon Himself (Gal. 3:13-14) so that we would be justified by faith. The old Mosaic Covenant was a covenant of works (or a mixed covenant, but not a covenant of pure grace), which demanded obedience for blessings (although God always graciously blessed the people) and gave curses for disobedience. Christians, under the New Covenant, are free from both the strictness and curse of the law. That does not mean that we do not have to obey God or do not have to obey the Ten Commandments. But it means that when we disobey (because we are not perfect), we are not cursed and have a way of receiving forgiveness through Christ.

The apostle Paul writes:

> Rom. 6:14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but **under grace**.

We are under grace, not under the law as a covenant of works, and therefore, the curses of the law as a covenant of works no longer apply to us. **For more on this see chapter 19:6.**

4-6. This present evil world, from Satan and from sin

These three things listed are interconnected and therefore, I will treat them under one heading. These are:

1. Freedom from the present evil world
2. Freedom from bondage to Satan
3. Freedom from the dominion of sin

To belong to this world means to be a slave of Satan and under the bondage of sin. To live in sin means to be under the bondage of Satan and to belong to his world and so on. These things are interconnected and they concern the power of sin from which believers are delivered. Therefore, when I speak of sin, I always have in mind these three things. Some of the things already said above touch upon these points.

We no longer belong to the dominion of sin and Satan (Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:13; Rom. 6:12-14; Acts 26:18), but belong and are slaves to Christ and righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18). Sin can no longer reign in us as it did prior to Christ and the indwelling of

the Spirit of Christ. Prior to regeneration, we were children of wrath who "once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), but now we are by grace seeking to walk in the good works prepared for us long ago (Eph. 2:10). We are set free from the dominion and power of sin to enjoy our freedom to *not* sin, but rather do that which is right! We are set free from this evil world so that we would be "transformed by the renewal of [our] mind, that by testing [we] may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

Liberty from the power of sin is a great and gracious gift to the children of God, but it is one which will fully be realized in the eternal state. As long as we live in this fallen world, we will have to struggle against sin and we will see that sin will try to regain its dominion over us, but we have to fight! **See more on the remaining corruptions in us**.

7. The evil afflictions

Afflictions will come to the people of God, they are not delivered from afflictions. Yet they are delivered from the *evil* of those afflictions. Those afflictions will do them no ultimate or eternal harm. Afflictions will come upon the Christians, but they will be used as a means of further sanctifying us and disciplining us by God, not as punishments. They are meant for our good, even if the enemies of the Gospel may mean them for evil. The promise of Romans 8:28 stands fast:

> And we know that for those who love God **all things work together for good**, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Robert Shaw writes:

> Christ does not grant to believers an entire exemption from the troubles that are common to men, but he frees them from all the penal evil of afflictions. The cup of their affliction may be large and deep, but there is not one drop of judicial wrath mingled in it. Their afflictions are designed for their profit; and, through the divine blessing, they are rented, in various aspects, highly beneficial to them. Hence the children of God have often acknowledged that it was good for them to have been afflicted (Ps. cxix. 71); and, though they may sometimes be at a loss to perceive how their trials are to be rendered profitable to them, yet they have the fullest assurance that all things shall work together for their good. - Rom. viii. 28. See also Heb. xii. 6-11; 2 Cor. iv. 17.[2]

This qualification is important: we are delivered not from afflictions, but from the *evil* of those afflictions.

8. The fear and sting of death

Another careful qualification is introduced here, we are delivered not from death, but from the *fear* and *sting* of death. The reason is that we have been delivered from the *power* of sin. The apostle Paul writes:

> 1 Cor. 15:55-57 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 56 The **sting of death is sin**, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we are delivered from the dominion and power of sin, we likewise are delivered from the fear and sting of death. But not only that, we are likewise delivered from the rigor and curse of the law. Therefore, Calvin notes on v. 56:

> *The sting of death is sin* In other words, "Death has no dart with which to wound us except *sin,* since *death* proceeds from the anger of God. Now it is only with our sins that God is angry. Take away sin, therefore, and death will no more be able to harm us." This agrees with what he said in Rom 6:23, that *the wages of sin is death.* Here, however, he makes use of another metaphor, for he compared sin to a *sting,* with which alone death is armed for inflicting upon us a deadly wound. Let *that* be taken away, and death is disarmed, so as to be no longer hurtful. Now with what view Paul says this will be explained by him ere long.
>
> *The strength of sin is the law* It is the law of God that imparts to that sting its deadly power, because it does not merely discover our guilt, but even increases it. A clearer exposition of this statement may be found in Rom 7:9, where Paul teaches us that we *are alive,* so long as we are *without the law,* because in our own opinion it is well with us, and we do not feel our own misery, until the law summons us to the judgment of God, and wounds our conscience with an apprehension of eternal death.[3]

John Gill likewise notes on v. 56:

> **and the strength of sin is the law**; not that the law of God is sinful, or encourages sin: it forbids it under the severest penalty; but was there no law there would be no sin, nor imputation of it; sin is a transgression of the law: moreover, the strength of sin, its evil nature, and all the dreadful aggravations of it, and sad consequences upon it, are discovered and made known by the law; and also the strength of it is drawn out by it, through the corruption of human nature; which is irritated and provoked the more to sin, through the law's prohibition of it; and this is not the fault of the law, but is owing to the vitiosity of nature; which the more it is forbidden anything, the more desirous it is of it; to which may be added, that sin is the more exceeding sinful, being committed against a known law, and that of the great lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy; whose legislative power and authority are slighted and trampled upon by it, which makes the transgression the more heinous; it is the law which binds sin upon a man's conscience, accuses him of it, pronounces him guilty, curses, condemns, and adjudges him to death for it.[4]

Death no longer holds power on us as it did prior to Christ (Heb. 2:14-15). It is not that we will not die, but that we will not be harmed by death. Death merely brings us to a greater life with God. Christians are described as those who have passed "from death to life" (John 5:24). Death has no dominion over us because we are no longer under the power of sin which makes death damnable and something to be feared. Neither are we under the law as a covenant of works, which gives sin its power.

9. Everlasting damnation

Having been freed from (1) the guilt of sin, from (2) condemnation and the wrath of God, from (3) the curse of the law, from (4-6) the power of sin, and freed from (8) the fear and sting of death, believers are likewise freed from eternal damnation. Because of Christ's work, Hell is not a place for the born again believer. All believers know that they deserve to be there, but they likewise know that through grace, God has saved them from Hell. Stu Johnston writes:

> Having been freed from "the guilt of sin, (and) the condemning wrath of God", the Christian has also been liberated from the ultimate expression of divine wrath, which is everlasting damnation.[5]

Rather than condemning the believers along with the unbelieving, Christ, on that day will be back "to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed" (2Thess. 2:10), in contrast to those who will "suffer the punishment of eternal destruction" (2Thess. 2:9).

10. Slavish fear and have freedom in access to God

We come to God as our Father and are no longer afraid of Him because we know that we're beloved in His Son. We come to God through our Mediator and in the power of the Holy Spirit. We *know* we will be accepted because we come in the name of the Lord Jesus. The apostle Paul says that in Christ "we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him" (Eph. 3:12), and "through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph. 2:18). We do not obey out of slavish fear, but we obey because we know that God is our loving Father and know that we will find grace in time of need.

The Peculiar Liberties Of The Christian Under The New Covenant

The previous ten points were common to the elect in all ages, but there are things which the children of God, after the coming of Christ, have greater liberties in.

1. Freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law

The ceremonial law was abrogated because it was fulfilled by Christ (**see 19:3** for our discussion), therefore, believers under the New Covenant are not obliged to follow the ceremonial laws. These were laws concerning ritual cleanness and uncleanness; animal sacrifices; dietary laws; feasts; ceremonial Sabbaths and so on. These things have been fulfilled in Christ thereby have been done away with. Therefore, anyone obligating the people of God to obey those laws is intruding upon the liberty which God has given His children from the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament and is therefore anti-Gospel. This was the law which the Judaizers wanted the Gentile Christians to follow and about which Paul said that it functioned as a dividing wall between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14-16). As Christians, we are freed from the rigor and curse of the law (point 3 above), we are freed from the ceremonial law, but we are *not* freed from the moral law. In fact, the moral law is enforced in **chapter 19** of the Confession. Therefore, we should not understand obedience to God's moral law to be something that is intruding on our liberty, but rather, something which we, having liberty, are called to walk in.

2. Greater boldness of access to the throne of grace

This point is similar to point 10 above. The Epistle to the Hebrews says:

> Heb. 4:16 Let us then **with confidence draw near to the throne of grace**, that we may **receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need**.

We have confidence in Christ Jesus to find grace from God. We no longer fear God as a judge who will condemn us, but we love and know Him as our caring and beloved Father who has saved us, although we hated Him. Calvin notes concerning this passage:

> *Let us therefore come boldly,* or, *with confidence, etc.* He draws this conclusion, — that an access to God is open to all who come to him relying on Christ the Mediator; nay, he exhorts the faithful to venture without any hesitation to present themselves before God. And the chief benefit of divine teaching is a sure confidence in calling on God, as, on the other hand, the whole of religion falls to the ground, and is lost when this certainty is taken away from consciences.[3]

We know and we are *confident* that if we go to God through Christ we will find Him sitting on the throne of *grace* from which He will pour His grace upon His needy children. We strive to love God and obey Him, not because we fear His punishment, but because He has displayed amazing grace and love to us and therefore, we strive to show our thankfulness and love for Him. We love Him as our Father, and as His children, we seek to do that which is pleasing in His sight.

3. Fuller communications of the free Spirit of God

The work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers after the ascension of Christ is greater than His work prior to that event. John says that the Spirit "dwells with you [the disciples] and will be in you" (John 14:17). He is at the present with them and around them, but in the future, He will be *in* them. Furthermore,

> John 7:39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as **yet the Spirit had not been given,** because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Albert Barnes notes:

> *For the Holy Ghost was not yet given*. Was not given in such full and large measures as should be after Jesus had ascended to heaven. Certain measures of the influences of the Spirit had been always given in the conversion and sanctification of the ancient saints and prophets; but that abundant and full effusion which the apostles were permitted afterward to behold had not yet been given. See Acts 2:1-12; Acts 10:44; Acts 10:45.[6]

It was necessary for the Son to go back to Heaven for the Spirit to descend upon the disciples (John 16:7). The Lord Jesus says that we should be happy that He is going back to heaven, but He will not leave us alone. He will send His Holy Spirit. It is good for us that the Lord Jesus went back to heaven and sent His Holy Spirit. Sam Waldron writes:

> The language used of the new presence of the Spirit—baptism, outpouring, river—all speaks of increase. This seems logical, because really to know the increased truth of the New Covenant requires increased measures of the Spirit.[7]

Moreover, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are, unlike under the Old Testament, distributed according to God's will to *all believers* (1 Cor. 12-14; Rom. 12:3-8). This was not the case under the Old Testament. Back then *some* of God's people would have the gifts of the Spirit, but now all of them do. The Spirit came upon the 70 elders of Israel in the wilderness (Num. 11:25). He came upon the judges of Israel (Judg. 3:10, 6:34; 11:29; 14:6, 19; 15:14). He indwelt David (Ps. 51:11; 1 Sam. 16:13). The Holy Spirit could have come upon a person and then depart as in the case of King Saul (1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 11:6; 16:14). But In the New Covenant, not only all covenant members have the Spirit (under the OT all true believers *did* have the indwelling Spirit), but also all have some gift(s) of the Holy Spirit:

1 Cor. 12:7 **To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit** for the common good.

Oh, beloved brothers and sisters, how great are the liberties that God has blessed us with! Praise God from Whom all blessings and liberties flow!

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§2 Liberty Of Conscience

2. **God alone is Lord of the conscience,** **1** and hath **left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men** which are in any thing **contrary to his word, or not contained in it.** **2** So that to believe such doctrines, or obey such commands out of conscience, **3** is to **betray true liberty of conscience**; and the requiring of an implicit faith, an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also. **4**
    1. James 4:12; Rom. 14:4; Gal. 5:1
    2. Acts 4:19; 5:29; 1 Cor. 7:23; Matt. 15:9
    3. Col. 2:20, 22-23; Gal. 1:10; 2:3-5; 5:1
    4. Rom. 10:17; 14:23; Acts 17:11; John 4:22; 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 1:24

God alone is Lord of the conscience (Jas. 4:12; Rom. 14:4), which means that God alone can dictate to us what we ought or ought not to do or believe. Therefore, since He is **Lord of the conscience**, He has left the consciences of men **free from the doctrines and comments of men** which are **contrary to His word, or not contained in it** (Matt. 15:9; Acts 4:19; 5:29; 1 Cor. 7:23). God has not left the conscience free and that's it. He has left it free in a specific place, namely, when it comes to the **doctrines and comments of men** which are against **His word, or not contained in it**. Therefore, when a church or a person pushes upon others the following and obeying such commandments and doctrines, it is a betrayal to **true liberty of conscience** and it requires **an absolute and blind obedience** because that which is to be believed and followed does not come from God.

As God is the Lawgiver, so likewise He is the only One who has the authority to bind or loose the consciences of His moral creatures (Isa. 33:22; Jas. 4:12). He is the One who gives the "you shall" and "you shall not's." Therefore, He alone has authority over our conscience concerning obedience and how we should conduct ourselves and what we should believe. This paragraph was written without a doubt with the Roman Catholic Church in mind, which binds the consciences of its members to a host of unbiblical doctrines concerning Mary, Purgatory, the Mass and so on. These doctrines are based upon the traditions of men and they have no basis in the Holy Scriptures, but spring forth either from misinterpretations of Scripture or plainly from outside the Bible. You can search all you want concerning prayer to the dead or a prayer addressed to anyone other than God, you will find nothing in Scripture. Yet the faithful Roman Catholic regularly prays to Mary and to other saints, not to mention they pray likewise *for* the dead. What about the doctrine of Purgatory which has no basis in Scripture, yet it is used to trouble the consciences of men and it could not be defended from the Holy Scriptures? What about the doctrine which claims that the Pope is the head of the Church and that the Roman Catholic church is the one true church and we could go on and on. See **Matt Slick, A list of false teachings in the Roman Catholic Church.**

All these doctrines have no divine warrant in the Holy Scriptures, are extra-biblical and some are even anti-biblical. Not only do they come from *outside* the Bible, but they contradict things *within* the Bible. Therefore, to require people believing these things is to bind their consciences by things which are not from God, Who is alone the Lord of the conscience and thereby destroying Christian liberty. Robert Shaw writes:

> No person on earth can have authority to dictate to conscience; for this would be to assume a prerogative which belongs to none but the supreme Lord and Legislator. "There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy."–James iv. 12. Such a power was prohibited by Jesus Christ among his followers: "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, but ye shall not be so."–Luke xxii. 25. It was disclaimed by the inspired apostles: "Not that we have dominion over your faith," said the Apostle of the Gentiles, "but are helpers of your joy."–2 Cor. i. 24.[2]

Basically, these doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church and any other denomination, institution or religion which is contrary to the Word of God and could not be found in it (whether explicitly or implicitly), are to be rejected or else we will destroy our Christian liberty. The Lord Jesus, quoting Isaiah 29:13, accuses the Pharisees, saying:

> Matt. 15:8-9 "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 9 in vain do they worship me, **teaching as doctrines the commandments of men**.'"

They teach the commandments of men as if they were the commandments of God. These included ritual washings, the corban rule, a multitude of Sabbath regulations and so on. Matthew Henry comments:

> This is an instance of their hypocrisy, that *they teach for doctrines the commandments of men.* The Jews then, as the papists since, paid the same respect to oral tradition that they did to the word of God, receiving it *pari pietatis affectu ac reverentiâ--with the same pious affection and reverence.* Conc. Trident. *Sess.* 4. *Decr.* 1. When men's inventions are tacked to God's institutions, and imposed accordingly, this is hypocrisy, a mere human religion. The commandments of men are properly conversant about the things of men, but God will have his own work done by his own rules, and accepts not that which he did not himself appoint. That only cones *to* him, that comes *from* him.[8]

When any denomination, institution, church or religion requires us to believe and accept something as true which we do not find in the Bible and is contrary to the Bible, we should reject and resist them, so that our Christian liberty, granted to us by Christ and to which we were called (Gal. 5:1), would not be destroyed.

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§3 False And True Christian Liberty

3. They who **upon pretense of Christian liberty do practice any sin,** or cherish any sinful lust, as they do thereby pervert the main design of the grace of the gospel to their own destruction, **1** so they wholly destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of all our enemies, **we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him,** all the days of our lives. **2**
    1. Rom. 6:1-2
    2. Luke 1:74-75; Rom. 14:9; Gal. 5:13; 2 Peter 2:18, 21

The **end of Christian liberty** is **that being delivered out of the hands of all our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness** (Luke 1:74-75; Gal. 5:1). In other words, Christian liberty is to lead us to liberty and freedom in obeying God free from man-made commandments and traditions. Therefore, they **who upon pretence of Christian liberty do practice any sin** destroy and **pervert the main design of the grace of the gospel to their own destruction** (Gal. 5:13). They who practice sin because of Christian liberty, know nothing of Christian liberty. There is no Christian liberty or freedom to sin. In fact, this liberty should all the more push us away from sin to obedience unto God that we **might serve the Lord…all the days of our lives**.

Now the Confession turns its attention to define what Christian liberty is *not* and what it actually *is*. We begin with what Christian liberty does *not* consist in. We are under the liberty of Christ, but that doesn't mean it's okay to sin; rather, it means that we should use our liberty for the cause of Christ and to do good, rather than evil because we have been set free from the dominion of sin.

> Rom. 6:15-18 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God, that **you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart** to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been **set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness**."

Now that we're free from the curse and rigor of the Law, we should not be antinomians and disregard God's commandments. Rather, we should all the more and in freedom seek to do His commandments, because they are good, delightful and bring liberty (Ps. 119:45 HCSB). Already at the time of Paul and ever since, when people hear the doctrine of justification by faith alone, they think that we may do whatever we want now that we're saved. Paul writes:

> Rom. 3:8 And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. **Their condemnation is just.**

Some accused Paul that according to his doctrine it wouldn't matter what man does. We could do evil, if God could be glorified in that and we would be not condemned. Paul's reply is simply, "Their condemnation is just." A person who thinks in this way is on their way to perdition. That is not how the regenerate mind thinks. Even in the time of the Reformation, there were those who openly and shamelessly indulged in sin "upon pretense of Christian liberty", their condemnation is likewise just. **Christian liberty does not consist in the liberty to sin.** They who claim that Christian liberty gives them the freedom to sin "pervert the main design of the grace of the gospel to their own destruction". Christians are to use their liberty to do good, not evil. Paul writes:

> Gal. 5:13-14 For you were **called to freedom**, brothers. Only **do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh**, but **through love serve one another**. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The Confession beautifully uses the words of Luke 1:74-75 to define Christian liberty as:

> being delivered out of the hands of all our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our lives.

We have been delivered from all the things mentioned in paragraph 1 (**see above**) so that we would not go back to them, but to rightly and properly serve God. We have been delivered from sin, to seek the holiness of the Lord and to worship Him as His children. We have been delivered from the rigor and curse of the Law, to obey out of love and without fear as children of our Heavenly Father. Those things from which we were delivered were and are our enemies. Therefore, now these obstacles have been removed from our way to God. But we also know that they still exist because we are not yet sinless and we have to wage war against them.

Although we are free because we are not bound to the power of sin, yet we are not absolutely free. We are not autonomous and we are not our own god. We are subject to our God and Savior. Peter writes:

> 1 Pet. 2:16 Live as **people who are free**, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but **living as servants of God.**

The word "servants" is the Greek δοῦλοι (*douloi*, G1401) which basically means "slave." The crucial difference between a servant and a slave is that a servant *puts themselves* into service, while a slave is *owned*. Pastor John MacArthur writes, "servants are *hired*; slaves are *owned*"[9]. We are free, but what is the reason that we are free? We are free because we are slaves to the Lord Jesus. Our freedom comes through slavery to Christ. We are free and we are to live as slaves of God, obeying and pleasing Him. We are free, but we should not use our freedom for evil, but for doing the will of the Lord. Albert Barnes notes on 1 Peter 2:16—

> *But as the servants of God*. Not free from all restraint; not at liberty to indulge in all things, but bound to serve God in the faithful obedience of his laws. Thus bound to obey and serve him, they could not be at liberty to indulge in those things which would be in violation of his laws, and which would dishonour him. See this sentiment explained 1Cor 7:22; 1Cor 9:21.[6]

We conclude this chapter with a word from Dr. Waldron:

> Liberty is not the right to do as I please. Liberty is the right to do as God pleases without fear.[10]

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

(Galatians 5:13-14)

Footnotes

1. ^ *Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron's Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith which was apparently supplied by the Westminster Confession of Faith 1646.*
2. a, b *Robert Shaw. The Reformed Faith: An Exposition Of The Westminster Confession Of Faith. Chapter 20.*
3. a, b *John Calvin. Commentaries. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
4. ^ *John Gill. Exposition of the Entire Bible. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
5. ^ *Stu Johnston. The London Baptist Confession of Faith | Exposition of Chapter 21. Herald of Grace.*
6. a, b *Albert Barnes. Barnes' New Testament Notes. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
7. ^ *Sam E. Waldron. A Modern Exposition Of The 1689 Baptist Confession Of Faith. (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013). pp. 319-320.*
8. ^ *Matthew Henry. Commentary On The Whole Bible (Full). By default in The Word. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. In loc.*
9. ^ *John F. MacArthur. Slave: The Hidden Truth About Your Identity In Christ. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson. 2010). pp. 16-17. The PDF may be freely acquired from here http://www.nelsonfree.com/slave.*
10. ^ *Waldron, Exposition of the 1689. p. 323.*