

Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience

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Introduction

Perhaps one of the most misused words in American society today is the word liberty. Liberty is often erroneously defined as freedom to say, watch, or do anything one wants, no matter how filthy, perverted or debauched. Thus, the term liberty is applied to satanic garbage such as the homosexual rights movement, pornography, pedophilia and so on. In other words, liberty is equated with human autonomy in ethics. It is freedom from God, His laws and ordained authority structures. More often, liberty is equated with democracy or majority rule. It is defined as political freedom or freedom from dictatorial rule. While political liberty is good, it is a great mistake to equate liberty with raw democracy which is a dictatorship of the masses. Both the antinomian concepts of liberty and liberty as democracy have one thing in common. They both embrace human autonomy or freedom from God and His law-word. Both make man the measure of all things and both lead men directly into bondage to sin and slavery to others.

Biblical Liberty

The biblical idea of liberty is a liberty rooted in spiritual freedom. This freedom is purchased by Jesus Christ and has many aspects. Liberty consists of salvation from sin in the broadest sense which includes a deliverance from the dominion of sin and freedom from the ceremonial law. When speaking of a nation or a society, liberty is also rooted in submission to Christ and His word. This is truly *the rule of law* or rule by the Lord Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, today the phrase “the rule of law” means the rule of an arbitrary, changing, evolving humanistic law. In post Christian societies the law of God has been rejected for man-made, positivistic law. Thus, many things that were once condemned in the strongest terms (e.g., homosexuality, abortion, adultery, etc.) are now accepted and even praised. Once, however, laws become rules that can be changed at any time and for any reason by legislators or a court or a majority vote apart from or even contrary to what God has declared in His infallible word, true liberty will be lost. Such is the present course in the United States.

In our discussion of Christian liberty there are a number of important topics that need to be considered such as: the liberty that Christ has purchased for believers; liberty of conscience; liberty and the weaker brother, avoiding the abuse of liberty; and, liberty and society or how true freedom in a nation is rooted in biblical Christianity.

The Liberty that Christ Has Purchased For Believers

Any true study of liberty must begin with an examination of spiritual liberty or the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ. Salvation (biblically defined) or spiritual liberty is the foundation of individual, family and even political liberty (as we shall see in a moment). There are many things that Jesus purchased for believers.

(1) There is freedom from the guilt of sin. Theologians refer to this aspect of Jesus' work as expiation. Our Lord's sacrificial death removes the guilt of our sins. Christ suffered and died in the place of His people (vicarious sacrifice). All of the guilt and liability of punishment of the elect was imputed to Jesus on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24). This truth was taught typologically in the Old Testament sacrifices where the imputation of sin was represented by the priest placing his hand on the animal to be sacrificed (e.g., Lev. 1:3-4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24; 16:21). It is taught explicitly in the New Testament where many passages teach that our Lord died "in the place of" or "for the benefit of" His people (see Lk. 22:19, 22; 1 Pet. 3:18; Jn. 6:51; 15:13; Rom. 5:6-8; 8:32; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 21; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 5:2, 25; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 2:9). The New Testament repeatedly ascribes the saving power of Christ's redemptive work specifically to His death, or His blood or His cross (Rom. 3:25; 1 Cor. 10:16; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20; Heb. 9:12, 14; 1 Pet. 1:2, 19; 1 Jn. 1:7; Rev. 1:5). True liberty starts at the cross where Jesus paid in full the guilt and penalty accruing from sin. With guilt extinguished and the curse of violating the law satisfied, the sinner is set free from the curse of the law as an indictment and curse. With the imputation of our Lord's perfect righteousness to the believing sinner, the believing sinner is set free from the covenant of works or the obligation to achieve a perfect positive righteousness. The believing sinner is justified before God. "It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns?" (Rom. 8:33-34).

(2) There is freedom from slavery to sin as a dominating principle in our nature. In other words our Lord's substitutionary death and resurrection not only achieved the removal of the guilt and penalty of sin, but also secured definitive sanctification. Paul says that Christ's victorious past is our past, that because of what Jesus had done sin no longer has dominion over us. Paul writes,

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin (Rom. 6:1-7).

Believers have been united with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. They have died to the reign of sin and have risen to a new life of obedience. Real Christians will not continue in sin because union with Christ has broken the power of sin. "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again...Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:14-15, 17). Hodge writes,

This union is transforming. It imparts a new life. It effects a new creation. This expression indicates not only the greatness and radical nature of the change effected, but also its divine origin.... If we are united to him so as to be interested in the merits of his death, we must also be partakers of his life."¹ Jesus liberates us from the pollution, defilement or filth of sin. He sets

¹ Charles Hodge, *I & II Corinthians* (Carlisle PA: Banner of Truth, 1959 [1857, 59]), 516-517.

us free to follow His holy law. “This deliverance is commenced in regeneration, and is carried on and perfected in sanctification, as we saw under chapters x, and xii. A law still remains in their members warring against the law of their mind, and bringing them into captivity to the law of sin which is in their members (Rom. vii, 23); nevertheless the indwelling Holy Spirit works with them to will and to do of his good pleasure, and thus secures them, upon the whole, the victory.”²

Paul specifically applies Christ’s death to both justification and sanctification. Jesus “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed [justification] and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works [sanctification]” (Titus 2:14). Thomas Tyler writes,

Redemption and sanctification are inseparable companions; none is redeemed who is not purged. The blood of Christ has this double effect in whomever it is effectual to salvation; for he is made to us righteousness and sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). In the law we read of lavers as well as altars; in the gospel we read that water, as well as blood streamed out of the side of Christ....The blood signifies the perfect expiation of the sins of his church, and the water shows its daily washing and purging from the remainders of its corruption. Likewise the apostle joins these two together: ‘Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it,’ that is, his life and blood, ‘that he might sanctify it and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word’ (Eph. 5:25, 26); and, it is clear that the apostle John expresses both of these benefits, satisfaction for sin and sanctification from sin, when he says that Christ came both by water and by blood (1 John 5:6); and it is said that Christ gave himself to redeem and purge, and elsewhere (Eph. 5:27) in express terms to sanctify, his church.³

(3) The Bible also teaches that Christ redeemed us from bondage to Satan. Jesus told the unbelieving Jewish scribes and Pharisees that their father was the devil (cf. Jn. 8:44). Spiritually, morally and covenantally they were the children of Satan. Paul said that the unbelievers walk “according to the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). He told the Corinthians that “the god of this age has blinded” the minds of those who are perishing (2 Cor. 4:3). Paul told Timothy that the devil has taken men captive to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26). Pink writes, “The human race is now reaping what was sown at the beginning. Our first parents rejected God’s truth and believed the Devil’s lie, and ever since then man has been completely under the power of falsehood and error.”⁴ Unsaved man loves darkness rather than light (Jn. 3:19-20). Therefore, his heart is enslaved to the prince of darkness.

Christ by His sacrificial death has crushed the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Satan has been bound so that he can no longer deceive the nations (Rev. 20:1-3). Jesus has “disarmed principalities and powers” (Col. 2:15) and now sits exalted at the right hand of God ruling over them (Eph. 1:20-22). Therefore, “the gates of Hell shall not prevail against” the church (Mt. 16:18). Thus, our Lord said to Paul, “I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:17-18).

Old Testament Israel’s enslavement to Pharaoh and his armies served a type of our pre-Christian enslavement to Satan and his minions. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the

² A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1958 [1869]), 261.

³ Thomas Taylor, *Exposition of Titus* (Minneapolis, MN: Klack & Klack, 1980 [1619]), 375-376.

⁴ A. W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975 [1945]), 2:51.

drowning of Pharaoh and his armies in the Red Sea and the judgment against Egypt's false gods (cf. Ex. 12:12) all typified Christ's victory over the devil and all demonic forces. "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:14-15). Murray writes, "Although redemptive terms are not expressly used in connection with the destruction executed upon Satan, yet since they are used for deliverance from the bondage of alien powers and since Satan is the epitome of alien power, we are required to apply to the language of release (Heb. 2:15) redemptive import."⁵

Our deliverance from Satan and this present evil world is also intimately connected to our regeneration and definitive sanctification whereby the dominion of sin that once reigned in our hearts is broken. A. A. Hodge writes, "The power of the 'world' and the 'devil' depends upon the 'flesh,' or the corrupt state of the man's own heart. Christ 'was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.' Heb. iv. 15. The act of justification has consecrated the believer to God. The work sanctification breaks the power of temptation, God in every case either graciously enabling us to resist and come off conquerors, or providentially opening a way of escape for us. 1 Cor. x. 13. Thus Satan, too, is subject to his power; he helps us to resist Satan and put him to flight, and the excess of his malignant power he prevents and restrains."⁶

(4) One aspect of the liberty achieved for believers is the liberty we have in the new covenant era from the requirements of the ceremonial law. The ceremonial law typified Christ and His work of redemption. They were shadows which pointed to Jesus who is the reality, the substance and the perfect. Although these laws (the priesthood, the sacrificial rituals, ritual washings, incense, musical instrumentation) served a distinct purpose by strengthening the faith of the covenant people in the coming Messiah as well as teaching a religious, ethical and covenantal separation from heathenism (e.g., laws which forbade mixing: "seeds" [Dt. 22:9], "animals" [Dt. 22:10], "clothes" [Dt. 22:11]; also, the prohibitions on eating unclean animals [Lev. 11:1-47; 20:22-26; Dt. 14:1-21]) they were complicated and difficult to keep. Therefore, the New Testament presents our freedom from these burdensome requirements as a great blessing (cf. Gal. 2:4; 4:1, 3; 5:1; Ac. 15:10; Heb. 9:10). Now that our Lord has suspended and forever done away with the ceremonial law, Christian worship is simple, the wall of division between Jews and Gentiles is eliminated (cf. Ac. 10:15; Eph. 2:11-22), and sanctification is purely ethical and uncomplicated. We are to "stand fast...in the liberty by which Christ has made us free" (Gal. 5:1).

(5) Another aspect of liberty that is particular to the new covenant era is a "greater boldness of access to the throne of grace" [cf. Heb. 4:14; 10:19-22]⁷ as well as a "fuller communications of the free Spirit of God" [cf. Jn. 7:38; 2 Cor. 3:13].⁸ Believers after the coming of Christ do not need to approach God through the sacrificial system but now can boldly approach our loving Father directly through Jesus. Further after our Lord's redemptive work was completed he poured out the Holy Spirit on the church in a fuller manner. Thus Jesus could say it was expedient that He depart to the Father so that He could send His Spirit unto them (cf. Jn. 7:39; 14:15, 25-28; 15:26-27; 16:7-10, 13; Ac. 1:4-8; 2:1-4, 16-17, 33; etc.) Hodge writes, "The greater boldness now enjoyed evidently results from the clearer and fuller revelation now

⁵ John Murray, *The Atonement* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, n. d.), 11.

⁶ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, 262.

⁷ The Westminster Confession of Faith, 20:1.

⁸ *Ibid.*

enjoyed of the method and completeness of redemption and the greater fullness in the communications of the Holy Ghost. This divine person, as we know, inspired the Old Testament prophets and sanctified the Old Testament saints; nevertheless the new dispensation is pre-eminently characterized by the cleanness with which the truth with respect to the office of the Holy Ghost is revealed and the fullness with which his influence is dispensed.”⁹

Liberty of Conscience

The phrase “liberty of conscience” is extremely important in defining what true liberty is. The Westminster Confession of Faith defines liberty of conscience as freedom “from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside it, in matters of faith, or worship” (20:2). This means that the church (e.g., ecclesiastical officers, councils, synods, general assemblies, presbyteries, bishops, sessions, pastors, congregations, etc.) does not have the right to impose on its members doctrines, commandments or ordinances which are contrary to, or cannot be proven from Scripture. This principle is simply a consistent application of the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura* (i.e., the Scripture alone). In other words, in areas which are not *adiaphora* (i.e., matters which do not directly involve ethics, church government, worship or discipline such as “should I wear grey pants or black pants”; which are common to human actions and societies; which are therefore only governed by the general principles of the word) the church must have *divine warrant* behind whatever it says, teaches, requires or does. Thus when the Confession says that God alone is Lord of the conscience, it means that men are free from arbitrary, autonomous, man-made, humanly devised doctrines, commandments or ordinances. It, however, does not mean that men are free to disregard or disobey what God says in His word. “God has authoritatively addressed the human conscience only in his law, the only perfect revelation of which in this world is the inspired Scriptures.”¹⁰ True freedom, then, is not antinomian or lawless. It is not freedom to live as a god and sin like a wild beast. It rather is a freedom under God’s loving law-word.

Given the fact that God has given us only one, perfect, sufficient rule for faith and life (the Bible) everyone has a responsibility to study it, reflect upon it, attempt to understand it and apply it to daily life. In other words the interpretation and application of the Scriptures are not something only for the clergy or experts. All believers are commanded to search God’s word (Jn. 5:39; Ac. 27:11; 2 Tim. 3:15-17). Christians are exhorted to “prove all things” (1 Th. 5:21). Brethren who compare Scripture with Scripture to test doctrines are commended by the Holy Spirit (Ac. 17:11; cf. Jn. 5:39; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Further, since God’s word is perspicuous (i.e., God’s Word [in those areas relating to doctrine and ethics that are necessary for salvation and sanctification] is clear or easy to understand), every Christian has the ability to test doctrines, ordinance and commandments by the truth of Scripture. They are not to *blindly* follow some church authority. If people were faithful in setting all doctrines, worship practices and ethics under the light of Scripture, then perhaps the corrupt, heretical, apostate, humanistic churches in America would not be so popular. Keep in mind that resistance to God-ordained ecclesiastical authorities is required when church rulers oppose the truth of Scripture and attempt to cause the faithful to sin or contradict God’s word (cf. Ac. 4:19-20). There are times when we must obey God rather than men (Ac. 5:29). It “is a great sin, involving at the same time sacrilege, and treason to the human race, for any man or set of men to arrogate the prerogative of God and to

⁹ A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, 263.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 265

attempt to bind the consciences of their fellow-men by any obligation not certainly imposed by God and revealed in his Word. At the same time it is a sin of disloyalty to God, and a violation of our own nature as moral and rational beings, to yield to any such imposition, and to accept as a matter truly binding the conscience anything not authoritatively taught and imposed in the Scriptures.”¹¹

Common Abuses of Christian Liberty

Ecclesiastical Abuses

Sadly, the biblical concept of liberty of conscience has often been misunderstood, neglected or simply cast aside throughout the history of the church. The pharisaical Jews in the days of Christ made up all sorts of rules and regulations that had no basis whatsoever in God’s word. Their arbitrary laws were silly and burdensome. “For example, they made rules as to what dishes should be washed in running water and what dishes should be washed in standing water.”¹² They made rules regarding how many steps could be taken on the Sabbath. They required all sorts of ritual washings of hands, pots and dishes. They made rules regarding where to wash pots that had meat and dishes that had had milk products. The Talmud contains many such regulations.

The Pharisaical perversion of ethics and worship with man-made regulations also corrupted their theology. They abandoned *sola Scriptura* (cf. Dt. 4:2; Pr. 30:5-6; Josh. 1:7-8) and developed the idea of an authoritative unwritten tradition that functioned as a coequal authority to written revelation. (They believed that when Moses received the written revelation on Mt. Sinai, he also received a very lengthy unwritten [oral] revelation. This oral revelation was then supposedly passed down to Joshua, the seventy elders, the prophets and the great rabbinic teachers generationally until it was committed to writing in the Talmud.) This supposed co-equal authority was used to interpret the written revelation and thus became more important to the Jews than the Bible itself. Their traditions overturned (i.e., made null and void) the teaching of Scripture and were used as a tool to manipulate and oppress the people. Therefore, Jesus said to the Pharisees, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?” (Mt. 15:3); and, “And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mt. 15:9).

Roman Catholic churchmen also deny people liberty by imposing all sorts of human innovations in worship as well as a multitude of man-made rules and regulations. The following Romanist doctrines and practices cannot be proven from the Bible: the sign of the cross; the sacrifice of the Mass; the celibacy of the priesthood; confession to a priest; the immaculate conception and *perpetual* virginity of Mary; prayer and adoration to Mary and the saints, special relics and places; fasting before Mass; pilgrimages; monks and monasteries; nuns and nunneries; the papacy; a hierarchy of Cardinals, archbishops and bishops; transubstantiation; justification by an *infused* righteousness; purgatory; indulgences; baptismal regeneration; the use of crucifixes, statues, pictures of Christ and other idols in worship; the supposed sacredness of blessed cathedrals; the priestly garments; the religious use of incense; the liturgical calendar; the religious use of choirs and musical instruments; the celebration of Christmas; holy water;

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹² Gordon Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?*, 190.

genuflecting before the crucifix; kneeling to receive the hosts; extreme unction; all the sacraments except baptism and the Lord's supper; the exorcism ritual; papal infallibility; canon law; the placing of the apocrypha in the canon of Scripture and many other such things.

Like the Pharisees before them, the Romanists justified their human traditions, their non-authorized additions to the Bible by positing a second source of authority along side of Scripture. The Council of Trent says: "Seeing clearly that this truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions" (4th Sess.; 1546; see also the Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, 8; 1962-1965; and *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* [New York: Doubleday, 1994], p. 31). In both Judaism and Romanism, human tradition as a source of authority has been used to render the teaching of Scripture null and void. Therefore, both religions are apostate, heretical, superstitious and demonic.

Anglicans and Lutherans also impose many human traditions upon congregants without biblical authorization. The reason for man-made worship practices in these churches is that both give clergy, through their creeds, autonomous authority to decree rites and ceremonies (e.g., see the 20th and 34th articles in the 39 articles of the church of England; also read Article 7, *Of the Church in the Augsburg Confession* and Article 10, *Of Ecclesiastical Ceremonies* in The Formula of Concord). Such an authority gives the leadership arbitrary power over other men and thus has led and will always lead to ecclesiastical tyranny. Further, when men participate in these invented, humanistic practices, they are not honoring God who never devised such things (Jn. 7:31; cf. Dt. 12:32) but rather are paying a religious homage to man. The Bible calls all such rituals will worship (Col. 2:23 AV) and vain worship (Mt. 15:9). Man-made rituals, popish and medieval superstitions and all such human devices, Paul says do not lead to sanctification (Col. 2:23; cf. Jn. 17:17).

This sinful lust for autonomous power in worship and arbitrary humanistic control over other men is not limited to ritualistic churches. Modern evangelicals also love to rob men of the liberty they have in Christ from man-made worship, rules and regulations. The whole modern church growth movement is predicated upon the idea that men can manipulate the ordinances and content of the worship service at will to please the unchurched. Thus, if plays, skits, comedians, Christmas pageants, rock videos, musical soloists and pop-psychology style sermons bring people in, then by all means biblical worship must be cast aside. The source of authority in such a scheme is not the Bible alone but rather the "Bible a little" or the "Scriptures sort of", plus autonomous ideas of sinful men. Such worship in principle is no different than the ritualism of Rome. *Both* give church officers an authority independent of Scripture. *Both* ultimately flow from a human philosophy of pragmatism (i.e., whatever *we think* will work, ought to be done). *Both* forms of worship are syncretistic. That is, they both are combinations of Christianity with paganism. Roman Catholicism was forged in the syncretistic atmosphere of the middle ages and thus is full of the mysticism and high church paraphernalia that impressed fourteenth century illiterate peasants. Modern evangelicalism was largely forged in the contemporary American culture where success, pragmatism, entertainment, bigness and crassness are king. Thus present-day evangelical worship often has more in common with the Johnny Carson show or a rock concert than the worship authorized by God in the Bible. *Both* are humanistic in that both pay homage to man (i.e., man's wisdom, man's inventions, man's devices, man's imagination) in worship rather than solely to God. *Both* lead to the corruption of biblical doctrine. Roman Catholicism's worship of man is intimately connected to their satanic scheme of salvation by faith plus human works or merit. The will worship of evangelicals is also intimately connected to their synergistic free will understanding of salvation.

The biblical and historical pattern is quite clear. Liturgical autonomy and chaos lead to or are connected with doctrinal and ethical chaos. If men think they can arbitrarily add to or detract from the worship that God has instituted in His word because they like their own inventions or want to please nominal Christians and unbelievers then why not change the doctrine also? This scenario has already happened to some degree in mainline, liberal Protestant denominations which adhere to a different doctrine every decade depending on what the latest secular philosopher says or the latest theological fad. Similar serious declension is also common among evangelicals where counseling, teaching and preaching are saturated with pop-psychology, self-esteem nonsense, business models of leadership, sociological theories of church growth, hedonistic Hollywood self-worship garbage and crass entertainment.

Reformed churches are also certainly not immune from violating Christian liberty. Many have been influenced by high church sacramentalist views of worship (e.g., David Chilton, James Jordon, Steve Wilkins) and have embraced the liturgical calendar, the idea of holy, special places of worship like cathedrals, the use of the sign of the cross, paedocommunion and so forth. Such people hate the regulative principle of worship because it severely limits their ability to impose their human inventions upon other believers. A number of professing Reformed believers have been led back to the apostate papal church and the Eastern Orthodox church by the writings of and influence of these dangerous heterodox teachers.

Other “Reformed” leaders and pastors (e.g., John Frame) have embraced Arminian-Charismatic so-called celebrative worship. Most men who advocate the new worship forms and content do not openly reject *sola Scriptura* in the sphere of worship, they merely redefine it in order to render it meaningless.

Unwarranted intrusions not only affect worship but also church government. Many evangelical pastors and even a number of Reformed pastors and elders govern the church as if they have an arbitrary authority that is independent of Scripture. Therefore, denominations set up all sorts of unauthorized bureaucratic organizations that have no connection with Scripture whatsoever: women’s presbyterials; youth groups and youth pastors; women’s missionary fellowships; Sunday school organizations; lay congregational leaders; mission boards and so forth. Often participation in such groups is either explicitly or implicitly mandatory. In other words, pressure is put on people to conform to things not taught or authorized by Scripture. Such organizations and the pressure to support them is clearly a violation of Christian liberty. People have even been persecuted for not placing their children in the so-called youth group even though youth groups are a very recent *innovation* in church history. Further, it is quite common today to see conservative Presbyterian sessions, presbyteries and synods base disciplinary decisions upon pragmatism instead of biblical justice. In other words, men will base their decision not directly on biblical principles but upon what they think will be best for the church. Thus, people are denied biblical justice in the name of peace or compassion or love or fairness or church growth or money.

Ethical Abuses

Another common denial of Christian liberty comes in the form of man-made ethical requirements. In the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, there were a number of Christian temperance movements; that is, movements whose purpose was to completely abolish the manufacture, sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages. (The word “temperance” in the names of these movements is deceptive in that they were really in favor of total abstinence.)

Such movements were contrary to Scripture which teaches that although getting drunk is a sin, the moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages is lawful (Jn. 2:7-10; Mk. 14:23-25; Num. 28:7; Dt. 14:26; Ruth 3:7) and even a blessing (Dt. 14:26; Jn. 2:7-10; Ruth 3:7). There are people who forbid the use of all makeup, jewelry and earrings on women; who do not allow women to cut their hair at all; who do not even permit women to wear pants when working privately in the garden. There are people who do not allow any kind of television, movies or plays whatsoever *no matter what the ethical content*. There are people who condemn certain types of music apart from the content of the lyrics or skill of the melody. There are fundamentalists who condemn all dancing even with one's own wife; who forbid card playing, dominoes, colored shirts on men, beards, the moderate use of tobacco, coffee, the reading of science fiction and so on.

While these man-made prohibitions are often accompanied by convoluted arguments that are somehow supposedly based on Scripture, they at bottom are humanistic attempts to achieve holiness by being stricter than God. "These people are in general afraid of Christian liberty. They think it leads to sin."¹³ Such man-made legalistic efforts are very similar to the old Pharisaical notion that man-made additions to the law are needed to fence it. The idea is that an extra layer of super strict laws around the law will be a safeguard against breaking the law itself.

There are two serious problems with the addition of these pietistic, fundamentalist, pharisaical type additions. First, Christian liberty is taught in the Bible itself and thus it cannot lead to sin. God does not and cannot tempt any man to sin (Jas. 1:13). Second, Scripture explicitly teaches that man-made requirements are of absolutely no value in subduing the sinful flesh (see Col. 2:23). They are a type of self-flagellation. Being stricter than God or adding human rules and regulations *does not sanctify* (cf. Mt. 15:9ff; Col. 2:23). Only God speaking in the holy Scriptures has the ability to make us more holy. "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (Jn. 17:17; cf. 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:2; Ps. 119:9ff.).

While it is important to condemn the man-made rules and regulations that deny a believer's freedom in Christ, it also needs to be noted that Christian liberty must never be used as an excuse or conduit for sinful behavior. Some professing Christians give liberty a bad name when they brag about our freedom and then turn around and get drunk or watch a movie that is totally inappropriate. When legalistic believers see such hypocrisy, their reaction often is to condemn liberty itself. In other words, an antinomian abuse of liberty often reinforces legalism in the church. As a result the whole church must suffer under man-made rules because someone breaks God's law with liberty as an excuse. People with a proclivity towards pietistic legalism often also view the biblical concept of liberty as a springboard for believers to see what they can get away with; or, how far they can go without getting into trouble. Such a self-righteous, judgmental spirit can only be eliminated by a careful study of God's law word. Once we understand that only God can define sinful behavior and that discipline must be based squarely upon the Bible, we have a great freedom from legalistic sourpusses in the church.

Political Abuses

Another abuse of liberty of conscience is the very common American idea that this principle means that in a *Christian commonwealth* all religious faiths (e.g., Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Atheistic, Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.) must be allowed to openly conduct their worship and propagate their faiths. This definition of liberty completely ignores the fact that while men are free from all obligations to believe or obey the doctrine or commandments of men,

¹³ Ibid, 193.

they are not free in a Christian nation to commit sins that God says are crimes punishable by the civil magistrate. Biblical liberty of conscience does not mean that men are permitted to blaspheme God, set up idols and openly work to subvert a Christian law order. If the Bible taught such a liberty of conscience it would contradict itself. In a Christian nation people are free to believe anything they please. But, the moment they *publicly* subvert the laws of Christ by *openly* preaching or practicing idolatry, they have committed acts which the Bible defines as crimes punishable by the state. M’Crie writes, “To assert the right of men to think and act as they please, without respect to the moral law, and without being responsible to God, would be atheistical. And to suppose that men, who are subjected to divine law, natural or revealed, are exempted from blame in every thing which they do agreeably to the judgment and conscience,—would be to deny a fixed rule of good and evil superior to man; would make conscience the ultimate standard of their actions and render errors and crimes, in such cases, innocent.”¹⁴ Most Christians today are shocked and upset when murderers and rapists are set free by our courts to walk the streets. But, when people insult God and mock the Lord Jesus Christ it is considered merely an expression of liberty.

When the state by its law gives men the liberty to commit acts which are evil, which are defined as serious crimes by the infallible Word of God and which the Bible says must not go unpunished by the civil magistrate, then that state has rejected the authority of Jesus Christ. That state has set its own standard above God’s righteous law. That nation has by implication proclaimed a liberty to publicly offend God. That nation which permits its citizens to publicly teach that Christ was not God, or that He did not rise from the dead, or that He is no different than Buddha or Krishna, or that His death on the cross is a myth, etc. has not kissed the Son. It has not acknowledged and honored Christ as king. The nation that does not submit to Jesus Christ will receive blows of judgment from the Lord of glory (Ps. 2:9-12).

The common baptistic understanding of religious liberty that is virtually universal in the United States is an implicit acceptance of secular humanism, for it makes man the measure of all things not God speaking in His word (i.e., the Bible). It is saying that in the civil sphere judges and legislators cannot look to the Bible for truth or justice because to do so would be to favor one religion over another. In such a system the state theoretically treats biblical Christianity in the same manner as false satanic religions. Thus, legislators and judges have set themselves above God by rejecting Christ’s authority as king over all nations and by rejecting Jesus’ law word. Thus, these men are essentially a law unto themselves. They base their decisions not on the Bible, but on whatever they think is right. Thus, they constantly make decisions and laws that contradict Scripture and violate Christian liberty because no man has the authority to contradict Scripture and force men to commit sin. By accepting neutrality and religious toleration by the state of all faiths, Christians have handed the civil magistrate over to secular humanists who are dedicated enemies of Christianity. When dealing with laws and religions there cannot be neutrality. One must either submit to King Jesus or one must covenantally serve Satan. Modern American judges and politicians have (with few exceptions) chosen the latter.

¹⁴ Thomas M’Crie, *Statement of the Difference Between the Profession of the Reformed Church of Scotland, as Adopted by Seceders, and the Profession Contained in the New Testament and Other Acts, Lately Adopted by the General Association Synod, etc.* (Edinburgh: C. F. Lyon, 1871).

Dispensational Abuses

Another very common modern abuse of Christian liberty is the dispensational notion that in the new covenant era believers are free of the whole Old Testament law (including the moral law or Ten Commandments) as a rule of life or means of sanctification. This usually leads to two different views of ethics. One idea is that in the new covenant era Christians are now led mystically by the Holy Spirit apart from the word of God. Instead of carefully studying God's law for daily ethical guidance, many people look to an inward guidance or direct revelations from the Spirit. One often hears comments such as "God told me to do this" or "the Spirit led me to do that." This view is very common in Charismatic circles. Sadly, such a view has disastrous consequences for Christian ethics. Indeed, polls indicate that sexual immorality, divorce, dishonest business practices and so forth is almost exactly the same among American evangelicals as in the general heathen population.

Another popular notion is that believers are not under Old Testament law at all, which (according to their view) has been totally abrogated. In the New Covenant era Christians follow a totally new law, the law of Christ. According to this view the source of ethics must be limited to the New Testament alone.

There are a number of reasons why all the various dispensational definitions of liberty which disregard the Old Testament moral laws must be rejected.

(a) Jesus declared that He did not come to set aside, abolish, destroy or annul the moral law but to fulfill it (see Mt. 15:17ff.). The teaching of our Lord regarding the abiding validity of the old covenant moral law cannot be circumvented for the following reasons. First, the interpretation which says that Christ did not come to annul the law but instead to abrogate it, is absurd and illogical. It places a gross contradiction on our Lord's lips in the same sentence. Second, the idea that the Savior came to abrogate the whole law contradicts the immediate context. In Matthew 5:19 Jesus said that whoever teaches obedience to the whole moral law in the new covenant era would be called great in God's kingdom. If the whole law was set aside, such men would not be great, but instead would be greatly mistaken. They would be guilty of teaching false doctrine. Third, Christ in His own teaching ministry indicated a difference between ceremonial laws (which were positivistic and liable to abrogation) and moral laws which were based on God's character and permanent. When speaking of the ceremonial food laws, the Savior said that nothing that a man eats can make him defiled or unclean (Mk. 7:15; cf. Rom. 14:17). However, our Lord condemned setting aside the penalty for incorrigible rebellious teenagers (Mt. 15:4-5). In other words He upheld not only the Ten Commandments (which are a summary of the moral law) but also the moral case laws that flesh out the ten commandments by applying them to different situations.

(b) Dispensationalism and "New Covenant Theology" are based on a completely false understanding of the Pauline statement that we are not under the law but under grace (Rom. 6:14). What does the New Testament mean when it says that believers are not under law? Does it mean that the moral law has been annulled as a guide for personal, family or social ethics? No, not at all! What then does the Scripture mean when it says that Christians are not under the law? It can refer to a number of things.

First, the Bible teaches that believers are free from the law as a means of justification before God. "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe” (Rom. 3:19-22). The whole world is under law in the sense that everyone apart from Christ stands condemned because no one is able to keep the law. But, Jesus obeyed the law in exhaustive detail, fulfilling all righteousness (Mt. 3:15); obeying the covenant of works (Phil. 3:3-9); meriting a perfect positivistic righteousness for every believing sinner. Therefore, on the day of judgment, Christians stand before God clothed with the perfect righteousness of Christ.

Second, believers are not under the law as a condemning curse over them. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)” (Gal. 3:13). When a person believes in Jesus all of his sins (past, present and future) are imputed to Christ on the cross. The Savior thus endures the penalty of the law in our stead. His suffering is vicarious. He endured the suffering of hell in the place of His people—the elect.

Third, the phrase “under the law” can refer to the dominion of sin that a person was under before their conversion to Christ. This definition is what Paul has in mind in Romans 6:14. Throughout this chapter the apostle is discussing the relationship of our union with Christ to our deliverance from the power of sin. When our Lord died we died also. Note, the repeated reference to death to sin as it relates to our deliverance from its enslaving power over us. “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Rom. 6:2). “Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin” (Rom. 6:6-7). “Present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace” (Rom 6:13-14). Note that the repeated antithesis that occurs throughout Romans 6 into chapter 7 is *not* between the law as a guide for holy living verses no law or direct spiritual guidance; but the dominion, bondage or slavery to sin verses slavery to righteousness or service to Christ. “Sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness” (Rom. 5:16); “having been set free from sin, you become slaves of righteousness” (Rom. 6:18); “slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness...slaves of righteousness for holiness” (Rom. 6:19); “having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God” (Rom. 6:22).

Note also that in Paul’s continued discussion of sanctification in Romans 7 the phrases “dead to the law” and “delivered from the law” are defined by the apostle as “the sinful passions which were aroused by the law” (Rom. 7:5). Clearly then, Paul sometimes uses the term law in these chapters in a negative sense as the fleshly nature in bondage to sin. Sometimes the law is spoken of as a stimulant to sin. That is, the law as it is abused by sinful hearts. Further, in order to make sure that believers will *not* misinterpret his use of the term law as a rejection of the moral law itself, Paul says, “the law is holy, and the commandment holy, just and good” (Rom. 7:12). The apostle says that the problem is not with God’s law but with our own sinful hearts. “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14).

Further, the narrow and broad contexts of Romans 6:14 completely disprove the dispensational interpretation of this passage. Immediately after verse 14 comes the statement, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!” (v. 15). If Paul had just taught in verse 14 that the Old Testament law had been abrogated then verse 15 makes no sense at all. Why? Because the Bible defines sin as the transgression of the law (1 Jn 3:4 AV). The apostle is not saying that now that the criterion of righteousness is gone you better keep the law anyway. He, rather, is teaching the Roman believers that deliverance from sin

involves a positive counterpart. As subjects of God's deliverance from slavery to sin believers are now bound over to righteousness. "How can we understand righteousness as the positive opposite of sin unless we construe it as the opposite of what sin is? And if sin is the transgression of the law, righteousness must be conformity to the law. The law of God which Paul characterizes in this Epistle is Spiritual, that is to say divine in its origin and nature, and holy and just and good after the pattern of him who is its author (Romans 7:12, 14), must be regarded as the criterion of righteousness no less than it is the criterion of sin."¹⁵

In Romans chapter 7 Paul praises God's law. "I agree with the law that it is good.... For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.... So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God" (Rom. 7:16, 22, 25). Would God abolish that which is identified by the Holy Spirit as good, spiritual, holy and just? No, of course not! If the law was something bad, negative or abolished would Paul's regenerate nature delight in it? Would he serve it whole heartedly with his mind? This dedicated commitment to, delight in and service toward the law of God by Paul's heart and mind makes absolutely no sense at all if God's law has been set aside as inferior and defective.

Paul also points to the law's important function as the definer of sin. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet'" (Rom. 7:7). The apostle emphatically warns believers not to think of the law as something bad or negative. He goes on to explain how the law convicts our hearts of sin. The law is not bad, sin is. If Paul had just declared the law was abrogated in Romans 6:14 then why is he defending God's law in chapter 7? Once again the dispensational view makes no sense at all.

When Paul comes to the section of the epistle where he deals directly with proper Christian conduct he appeals directly to the Old Testament moral law as a guide for holy living. "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:8-10). If Paul had spoke about the abrogation of the Old Testament law in Romans 6:14, could he appeal to the very same law as a means of sanctification in Romans 13? No, of course not! Murray writes,

What is of particular interest to us at present is to note that Paul regards these precepts of the decalogue, four of which he quotes, as relevant to the behaviour which exemplifies the Christian vocation. The emphasis falls upon the fact that love fulfills them and that they are summed up, or summarized, in the word, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." But, if love fulfills them, we must still bear in mind that they are fulfilled; and if they are fulfilled they exist as precepts which call for fulfillment: and if they are summarized in one word, the summary does not obliterate or abrogate the expansion of which it is a summary. It is futile to try to escape the underlying assumption of Paul's thought, that the concrete precepts of the decalogue have relevance to the believer as the criteria of that behaviour which love dictates.¹⁶

¹⁵ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 191.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 192.

Paul (like Jesus before Him) under divine inspiration was a champion of the Old Testament moral law. Therefore, to argue that the whole Old Testament law has been done away or is replaced with a completely new law is a grievous error.

Fourth, Christians are not under the ceremonial law. The ceremonial law served a pedagogical purpose to the church under the old covenant administration. “But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Gal. 3:23-25). Is Paul asserting that once Christianity has come into existence the church is no longer under the whole Old Testament law including the moral law? No, certainly not.

The context makes it very clear that in this passage the apostle is focusing his attention on what is unique to the Mosaic administration. Paul rebukes people in the church who are returning to Jewish festival days which he identifies as the weak or beggarly elements (Gal. 4:9-11). “He strongly condemns circumcision (5:2-3) and the idea that Gentiles are obligated to keep the old covenant ceremonial laws. Paul contrasts the two covenantal administrations by comparing Hagar who is in bondage, who represents the earthly Jerusalem with the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal. 4:24-26). The Christian church is free from the limitations and bondage of the ceremonial law. Believers do not look to the shadows or the Levitical rituals of the temple in Jerusalem but to the reality, to Christ who sits at the right hand of God in the heavenly Jerusalem. The ceremonial laws which are identified in the New Testament as inferior (Gal. 4:9; Heb. 7:18; 9:11-15), shadow (Heb. 8:5; 10:1) and symbolic (Heb. 9:9) are superceded by the reality, the perfect—Jesus the Messiah. Whenever the inspired writers of the New Testament discuss setting aside the law they always refer to the ceremonial laws and never the moral law. Further, if Paul was arguing for the abrogation of the whole law including the moral precepts then he was explicitly contradicting his other epistles which teach the validity of the old covenant moral laws (e.g., Rom. 12:19-20; 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 5:1; 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18, etc.).

An example of Paul making a distinction between the ceremonial law and the moral law is 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” What does Paul mean when he says that when he witnesses to those under the law he acted as though he was under the law? The context makes the meaning very clear: to the Jews Paul became a Jew. When witnessing to *unconverted* Jews who believed that the ceremonial laws of the Mosaic economy were still binding, the apostle conformed himself to the ceremonial regulations. If he did not do so the Jews would have been offended and he would have lost an opportunity to preach the gospel. Before Paul took Timothy (who had a Jewish mother and Greek father) with him as a missionary he “circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region” (Ac. 16:3). Paul made himself like them by observing the Jewish food laws and so forth in their presence.

When Paul was evangelizing in Gentile communities he functioned “as without law.” This means that the old covenant ceremonial observance that served as a middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles that was an offense to many Gentiles, was not observed by Paul in

their presence. The apostle understood that the ceremonial laws were not binding and thus only followed them when it was necessary not to offend unconverted Jews.

In order to clarify his remark that he lived “without law” Paul makes a parenthetical statement saying that he is not without law toward God. The apostle does not want to be misunderstood as teaching some form of antinomianism so he says that he is bound to the law of God and of Christ. Paul recognized his obligation to obey the moral law of God in his service to Christ. Note that the apostle’s statement explicitly contradicts what is called “New Covenant Theology. Murray writes, “The intent of Paul’s terms is not to contrast the law of God and the law of Christ, as if he had said, ‘not under law to God, but rather under law to Christ’. The negative clause is not at all, ‘not under law to God’, but ‘not without law to God’. The implication is that he is under law to God and this ‘under law to God’ finds its validation and explanation in his being under law to Christ. Paul asserts most unequivocally, therefore, that he is bound by the law of Christ and of God.”¹⁷

Further, the idea that the Gentiles or Paul was not under the moral law is absurd and contradicts Scripture. During the Old Covenant era the moral law applied not just to Israel but to every nation. This assertion is proven by the following considerations. (1) The justness of Israel’s judicial laws (i.e., the application of the moral law to families and society) were to serve as an example to the surrounding heathen nations (Dt. 4:6-8). The law could not serve as an example if it was bad, for Israel only or at least in some sense did not apply to the Gentiles. If it applied to the Gentiles in the past during the old covenant then it still applies today. (2) During the old covenant era heathen nations were destroyed by God for violating prohibitions in the moral law (cf. Lev. 18:27-30; 20:23; Dt. 20:16-18; 7:1-2, 5; 12:1-2). Obviously, God would not hold the Gentiles to account for violating certain laws if these laws did not apply to them. (3) The Gentile sojourners who lived within the borders of Israel who were *not permitted* to follow the ceremonial Levitical laws were required to abide by the moral laws (including the moral applications of the ten commandments in the judicial law). “You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 24:22; cf. 18:26). Thus, the Old Testament itself makes a distinction between laws that are moral, universal (i.e., binding on both Jews and Gentiles) and perpetual and laws which are ceremonial, for the covenant people only and temporary. (4) Paul says that the Gentiles have the work of the law (i.e., God’s law) written on their hearts and thus are responsible even though they do not have written revelation (Rom. 2:14-15). The apostle is not describing some pagan, vague concept of natural law but is teaching that the moral law of God is part of our consciousness because we are created in God’s image and live in God’s created universe. All men (even in their corrupted state after the fall) have a consciousness of their guilt before God.

(c) Dispensationalism or “New Covenant Theology” must be rejected because the New Testament ethic is founded upon and presupposes the Old Testament moral law. Paul (as noted) repeatedly appealed to the old covenant moral laws when instructing new covenant believers. He appealed to the ethical principle behind a moral case law to prove that pastors ought to be paid for their labor (1 Cor. 9:9). He appealed to the Old Covenant prohibition against incest (1 Cor. 5:1) and repeatedly upheld laws against homosexuality (1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18). He even defines the law of love as obedience to the decalogue (Rom. 13:8-10). When the writers of the New Testament repeatedly condemn fornication (i.e., sexual immorality) they were defining the term according to the Old Testament moral law and not Greek or Roman heathenism. How does one know that this statement is true? Because sexual immorality cannot be biblically or

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 189-190.

comprehensively defined apart from the Old Testament moral case laws (e.g., Lev. 18:6ff.; 20:10-21; Dt. 24:1-4; etc.). If one limits the definition of sexual immorality to the New Testament then: (1) Bestiality is excluded because it is never condemned in the New Testament; and, (2) Several forms of incest are permitted because such laws are only discussed in detail in the Old Testament. When the apostle Paul instructed believers on how to get along with those outside God's family in Romans 12:17-21, he appealed directly to God's law (Dt. 32:35) and then quotes Solomon's application of this law in Proverbs (25:21-22). Clearly, the apostles did not regard the Old Testament moral law as defective or abrogated for they often appealed to it as an infallible ethical standard.

(d) Dispensationalism and "New Covenant Theology" must be rejected because the moral law is not positivistic or arbitrary but is based on God's nature or character. "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:15-16; Peter quotes the Old Testament law: Lev. 11:44). The moral laws in the Old Testament can no more be abrogated than can God's nature change. Therefore, the moral law is absolute, unchanging and eternal. The idea that the moral law in the Old Covenant can be abrogated is an implicit acceptance of positivistic law. Not only is such an idea irrational, destructive of ethics and humanistic, but it denies the biblical teaching that God has only one law not two (Ex. 20:1-17; Dt. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Mk. 12:30-31, etc.).

(e) God has created all men, not only the covenant people. Therefore, His moral law is binding on all people: Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. The Bible teaches that the moral law is engrained in the very fabric of our being; that even those without the written law have "the work of the law written in their hearts" (Rom. 2:15). Further, several moral laws are revealed in Scripture before the Sinaitic covenant existed, before the Jewish nation came into being. Obviously then, the moral law applies to the whole human race and not just the Jews. When our Lord lectured the Jews regarding the proper interpretation of the law He often appealed to creation ordinances (i.e., moral laws exhibited at creation) to correct their false interpretation of moral laws within the Mosaic law. He did this to refute Pharisaical perversions of Old Testament laws regarding divorce (Mt. 19:4-6) and their perversion of the Sabbath ordinance (cf. Mk. 2:27; Gen. 2:2-3; Ex. 20:11).

(f) The New Testament supports the abiding validity of the old covenant moral law when it explains the difference between "old law" and "new law." In 1 John 2:7 the apostle says that he writes *no new commandment* but simply repeats an *old command* (cf. 2 Jn. 5). Then he immediately turns around and gives believers a *new commandment* in verse 8. The new commandment refers to the need to love each other which is not really new, but is as old as mankind. John's new command comes directly from the Old Testament law which says that we must love our neighbor as ourself (Lev. 19:18).

Does John contradict himself when he says that he has no new law and then proceeds to set forth a new law? No, not at all! John does *not* mean that the Old Testament law has been set aside to be replaced with a totally new law. Such a meaning would both contradict His own statement in verse 7 that there is no new law and many sections of the New Testament. What the apostle means is that Old Covenant laws hold a new perspective for the New Covenant believer. This assertion can be established by a number of observations.

First, New Testament believers have an advantage over old covenant believers because they live after the completion of the canon of Scripture. Old laws often have a greater exposition in the New Testament. For example our Lord clarified and reinforced the old covenant command to love one's neighbor in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37; cf. Mt. 5:43-44;

11:10). Also, in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) in contradiction to the Pharisaic perversion of God's law, Jesus expounded the true meaning of God's law, giving us a fuller understanding of the internal nature of God's requirements. Second, the new covenant believer has an advantage over the old covenant believer because he lives after the life, death and resurrection of the Messiah. Not only can one look back at the perfect example of love toward others (i.e., the Savior's perfect obedience to the law), one also has a greater measure or influence of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 14:16-19, 26, 28; 15:26; 16:7-8, 13-16; Ac. 2). Third, the word "new" (Greek, *palin*) that John uses does not mean brand new in the sense that the old law ceases to exist or is cast aside, but new in the sense of fresh or new in practice. When a person is converted and now walks in the example of Christ he puts in practice an old commandment and this makes it new. Once a person becomes born again in Christ, all things are made new. "The *palin* [new] introduces a new view: that which from one point of view was an old commandment, from another view a new one. It was old, but not obsolete, ancient, but not antiquated: it has been renewed in a fuller sense; it had received a fresh sanction."¹⁸ Fourth, in the new covenant era the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile has been broken down (Eph. 2:14ff.) and now in the body of Christ there is no longer Jew nor Gentile there is a new unity and love between former enemies; the new covenant church is transcultural, transnational and multiethnic. It embodies the law of love as no other organization can. Matthew Henry writes, "When the Hebrews were peculiarly incorporated, they must accordingly love each other, as being the privileged people, whose were the covenants and the adoption, and of whose race the Messiah and head of the church must spring; and the law of love must be conveyed with new obligations to the new Israel of God, to the gospel church, and so it is the *old commandment*, or the word which the children of the gospel Israel have heard from the beginning."¹⁹

Modern dispensationalism in all its forms has been a disaster for evangelicalism in America. It has led directly to a number of heresies and problems in churches. (a) It has led to the carnal Christian heresy or the idea that repentance or sanctification can be totally separated from justification. It teaches that believers can receive Jesus as savior (and thus be justified) but can receive Christ's lordship at a later time and thus continue to live in sin. In other words it places a radical separation between justification and sanctification. The biblical view which was taught by all the Protestant reformers and all the Reformed symbols is that a person justified by faith alone (i.e., apart from the works of the law). But, once a person is justified he begins a life-long process of sanctification whereby he is progressively made more holy. In other words Jesus saves His people from both the guilt and *power* of sin. While the sanctification of a believing sinner does not contribute one iota to his justification it nevertheless is necessary as a *fruit* of true saving faith. As James says: "faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2:17). That is, faith that does not result in works is not true faith at all, but a counterfeit faith.

(b) It has led to an antinomian, man-centered, hedonistic form of gospel preaching. The Bible teaches that God's law is used to convict us of sin in order to drive us to the foot of the cross. But if the law has been abrogated, then the preaching of the law as a method of convicting sinners is wrong. Thus, much modern preaching is rooted in getting something out of God to improve one's life as if God were a heavenly Santa Claus. The message of the gospel has degenerated to "God has a wonderful plan for your life," or "accept Jesus and all your problems will be solved," or "accept Christ so you can make the rapture and avoid the great tribulation." In

¹⁸ Alfred Plummer, *The Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 [1886]), 41.

¹⁹ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McClean, VA: McDonald, n. d.), 6:1067

a hedonistic consumer society the Savior becomes another commodity, a wonderful spiritual addition to make life more enjoyable and fulfilling.

Further, an unbiblical view of God's law has even perverted the doctrine of justification itself. If the law itself is considered bad, and is relegated to a former dispensation, then it seems rather unreasonable that Christ had to die to satisfy that same law. "Justification sustains the law of God: it does not nullify it or displace it. If the law were subject to change or replacement, then it was futile for Christ to die if the law given to Moses had no permanently binding character. Where the law is denied, justification is eventually denied, because an antinomian religion has no need of a judicial act of God to effect salvation....An antinomian religion will tend to by-pass or under-play the word *justify* in favor of *saved*, i.e., to look at the results rather than the only way to those results. Instead of answering, 'I know I am saved, because Christ died for my sins, and, apart from any good thing in me, or faith in me, by His sovereign grace pardoned my sins and redeemed me,' the Arminian or antinomian will say, 'I know I am saved, because I believe in Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior.' The *ground* of salvation is made the personal choice of an autonomous man who has appropriated another resource in order to achieve his happiness or final good."²⁰

(c) The dispensational elimination of the Old Testament moral law has led to legalism as man-made rules and regulations that have nothing to do with Scripture. When men detract from what God teaches they create a vacuum and then are pleased to fill that ethical vacuum with their own silly ideas. Gordon Clark describes the nonsense commonly found among dispensational fundamentalists. He writes,

There is a Bible school which insists that the girls put their hair up in buns, for a looser hair-do would be "worldly." Similarly, a very evangelistic denomination in America strongly opposes lip stick. Then too an acquaintance of mine, a seminary president, staying overnight in a Texas home, suggested that the family play a game of dominoes. They were shocked! Didn't he know that dominoes was a gambling game?

There are also Christian colleges which forbid their students to go to the movies. If the argument were that the students ought to spend twenty hours reading Tolstoi's *War and Peace*, instead of seeing it in three, the prohibition might have a certain literary justification. But I am afraid this regulation did not originate in any alert English department.

Of course, there is a lot of filth in the movies, and a lot of silly nonsense too. But there are also filthy books, yet the reading of books is not prohibited. Such is the inconsistency one falls into when one decides to improve on the Bible.²¹

When we contemplate the foolish religious requirements of sinful man whether popish, prelatical (e.g., high church Episcopal), Lutheran or fundamentalist, we can really appreciate the liberty that Christ has given us. Our devotion and service is directed to our precious Savior and not arrogant sinful men who think they can improve upon what God requires.

Liberty of Conscience and the Weaker Brother

No discussion of liberty of conscience would be complete without a consideration of the biblical method for dealing with a weaker brother. This subject is important because: (a) Some professing Christians abuse their liberty in certain situations. The abuse of liberty can cause a

²⁰ R.J. Rushdoony, *Salvation and Godly Rule* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1983), 272.

²¹ Gordon H. Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?*, 193.

weak brother to sin by doing something that he believes is unlawful. (b) The biblical teaching on dealing with a weaker brother has been used by legalists to impose man-made rules and regulations on the whole church. By applying a biblical understanding of how to deal with a weaker brother we can avoid these two common errors.

The sections of Scripture which deal with the weaker brother are found in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:23-33. Although these chapters deal with situations that were somewhat common to the first century yet which are virtually non-existent today, the principles they teach are still applicable. Before we examine these principles a brief overview of the different issues involved in each chapter is in order.

In Romans 14 Paul deals with Jewish believers (and Gentiles who were Jewish proselytes before their conversion to Christ) who were still following the Old Covenant holy days and the ceremonial food laws.²² These believers were not following these laws as a means or grounds of justification but as ethical principles for sanctification. That is, even though they believed in Jesus and were saved, they were so accustomed to the Old Covenant holy days and food laws that their consciences would not allow them to abandon these “weak and beggarly elements” (Gal. 4:9). These believers are called “weak” not because they were weak physically or even because they were compromised ethically, but because in these particular areas their faith was weak. Their faith in the inspired teachings of the apostles regarding the abrogation of the old covenant food laws and feast days was not strong enough to overcome their long habitual pattern of keeping these laws.

Before we proceed to a brief overview of 1 Corinthians 8, there are some important observations that need to be made regarding Romans 14. First, the days and food laws spoken of by Paul were commanded by God in the old economy. The apostle is not dealing with arbitrary man-made holy days or with heathen asceticism but with aspects of the Old Covenant law. This point is proved by the context as well as the fact that Paul condemned Greek ascetic or Gnostic concepts regarding diet in two other epistles (Col. 2:20-23; 1 Tim. 4:3).

Second, the apostle is dealing with unique historical circumstances. With the first generation of Christians prior to the destruction of the temple in A. D. 70, there was a unique overlap of two covenantal administrations. Even though Jesus had already died on the cross and had abrogated the ceremonial law, there were many devout Jews and God fearers in the Roman empire who were unaware of this fact. Also, the first generation of Christian Jews who had spent their whole lives keeping the food laws and festival days were not expected by God to immediately forsake these life-long ceremonial practices. This point is proven by the decision of the Jerusalem council which decreed how Jews and Gentile Christians would get along in this

²² “What is most instructive is that the ‘weak’s’ refusal to eat certain foods stems from OT prohibitions. This is clarified by the use of the words *κοινόν* (*koinon*, common) in verse 14 and *καθαρά* (*kathara*, clean) in verse 20, for we saw in the introduction to this section that these terms stem from Judaism, where the observance of food laws was crucial. Dunn (1988b: 818-19) says that the terms provide virtually “indisputable proof” for a Jewish background since the term *κωμόλ* is never used in Greco-Roman literature in terms of unclean foods, while it is common in Jewish circles (cf. 1 Macc. 1:47, 62; 4 Macc. 7:6; Josephus, *Ant.* 11.8.7 §346; Mark 7:2, 5; Acts 10:14, 15, 28; 11:8, 9). The precise nature of the debate remains uncertain (see Dunn 1988b: 826-27). Did the “weak” think certain foods were prohibited because they were “unclean” per the prohibitions in Lev. 11 and Deut. 14, because they were improperly slaughtered, because they were offered to idols, or a combination of these? It is likely that they considered foods to be unclean because they followed the prohibitions of the OT law that taught that some foods were ritually defiled (so Moo 1996: 830-31, 836-37). That Paul does not even mention idolatry here, in contrast to 1 Cor. 8-10, supports this view. In addition, the reference to food and the observance of certain days suggest that the “weak” believed that the OT ritual law (at least in terms of food and the observance of days) should be practiced.” (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 730).

unique situation. The decision was designed to safeguard weak Jewish and Gentile consciences (i.e., people accustomed to old covenant holy days and food laws in such a manner as not being able to completely forsake them with a clear conscience) while restraining strong Gentile believers (i.e., Gentile and even Jews who had no problem whatsoever forsaking ceremonial observances. In Romans and Corinthians Paul places himself among the strong.). Stott writes, “Having stated categorically that circumcision was not necessary for salvation (the central theological principle in the debate), the Council not only (tacitly) gave Jewish Christians the freedom to continue their distinctive cultural-ceremonial practices, but asked Gentile Christians in certain circumstances to abstain from practices which would offend sensitive Jewish Christian consciences (e.g., asking them to avoid *eidōlothyta* and non-kosher meat). The apostle Paul evidently followed these guidelines in his own ministry, combining no compromise on principle with concessions on policy.”²³ In Acts 21:26, we even encounter the apostle Paul going to the Temple “to announce the expiration of the days of purification.” Although God permitted Christian Jews to keep certain ceremonial customs during this unique period of history (during the forty-year covenantal overlap between the death of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem), once the temple was destroyed the kingdom was taken from the Jewish nation and the canon of Scripture was closed, these unique historical circumstances ceased.

These two points are brought up because they demonstrate that: (a) Romans 14 cannot be used as a proof text for the establishment of man-made holy days. Attempts to use this section of Scripture in such a manner not only ignore the fact that Old Covenant days and dietary laws are under discussion but that God explicitly forbids men from adding their own religious days to what is authorized by Scripture (e.g., see Dt. 12:32; Gen. 4:3-5; Ex. 20:4-5; Lev. 10:1-2; 1 Ch. 15:13-15; Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 1 Ki. 12:33; Mt. 15:1-3, 8-9; Jn. 4:19-24; Col. 2:5, 16, 20-23). (b) The apostolic allowance of Jewish festival days applied only to that period of history and cannot be used as a justification to revive ceremonial aspects of God’s law today. To do so at this point in church history would be an implicit denial of the sufficiency of Christ’s work and the superiority of the New Covenant.

The Corinthian passages (8:1-13 and 10:23-33) that deal with the weaker brother revolve around the lawfulness of eating meat sacrificed to idols. In the Gentile world in the apostolic era the majority of meats offered for sale in the marketplace had been sacrificed to appease some heathen deity. Some Gentiles who had been converted from rank idolatry could not eat such meats with a clear conscience because they apparently believed the Greco-Roman pantheon of gods had some form of true existence. These are the believers that Paul identifies as weak. The apostle defines strong Christians in this passage as people who understood that the heathen gods did not really exist at all and thus could eat meat from the marketplace with a clean conscience. Paul identifies himself with the strong (1 Cor. 8:6) and emphatically declares that there is only one true God (1 Cor. 8:4-6). Although the situation that Paul describes in Corinth is virtually nonexistent today (except perhaps in an unusual missionary situation), there are important principles set forth that apply to modern believers.

Important Principles Relating to the Exercise of Christian Liberty

(1) Both passages emphasize that true knowledge and liberty in behavior are to be directed by Christian love. This point is placed in the forefront of 1 Corinthians 8 where Paul

²³ John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 356-357.

says that “knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (v. 1). In Romans Paul says that those who use their liberty in a manner that grieves the weaker brother “are no long walking in love” (14:15). The apostle’s discussion of how the “weak” and “strong” are to get along in the Christian community are a prime example of how love is to affect our whole outlook and behavior.

Given Paul’s emphasis on the primacy of love, can one conclude that knowledge and doctrine are somehow unimportant? No. It is a grievous error to say that knowledge is unimportant; or, that the study of doctrine is not necessary; that all we need is love. The apostle’s point is *not* that knowledge is opposed to love or that knowledge automatically causes ego problems. His point is that if one’s knowledge is not used to edify and help each other, then the gaining of knowledge is useless. If one gains knowledge so that he can show off, beat up his brothers doctrinally, or join in some type intellectual elite then he misses the biblical reasons for study. In Romans 14 it is clear from the apostle’s instructions that some believers were abusing their knowledge, while others were abusing their lack of knowledge. The central issue is not “love verses knowledge” but “knowledge tempered by love.” After all, is not love defined by knowledge? Love without biblical definition is not love but sentiment and even license. Knowledge without love is useless, harmful and arrogant.

Therefore, as one examines these sections of Scripture one must keep in mind that the different exhortations to both parties exemplify what it means to love each other biblically with respect to their differences over the stated issues.

(2) Paul’s first injunction is directed to the strong believers. They are commanded to “receive one who is weak in the faith” (Rom. 14:1). The Greek word translated “receive or accept” (*proslambanō*) refers to a deep and sincere acceptance. The strong are not merely to accept the weak formally into church membership but to accept them with warm tender love as brothers, close personal friends, or people within an inner circle.

A very important principle for love and fellowship in the church is that new believers, immature Christians and even people with odd views on nonessential, peripheral matters are to be treated in the same manner as mature believers. There are to be no special factions in the church. Everyone has been saved and received into God’s family by Christ. Therefore, everyone is to be treated with the same brotherly love. The command for acceptance goes against our sinful human natures that are drawn to factions, divisions, quarrels and infighting. However, the command is a beautiful reflection of what it means to be a Christian. God takes people from every race, culture, social status, age, temperament and intellectual caliber; saves them; places them in the body of Christ and commands them all to love one another in a selfless, sacrificial manner.

The command to receive the weaker brother is qualified by the phrase “not to disputes over doubtful things.” The Greek word (*dialogismoi*), translated as “doubtful disputations” (KJV), “disputable matters” (NIV), “opinions” (NASB, RSV), “doubtful points” (NEB), in context indicates that the strong believer is not to welcome the weak believer in order to argue or criticize his viewpoint. Paul understands that the strong believers at Rome would be tempted to berate the weak regarding their opinions. A heartfelt welcome is inconsistent with harassing argumentation or contention.

There are a number of important things that can be learned from Paul’s injunction in verse one.

a) This passage indicates that there are secondary beliefs that do not effect the gospel, that do not involve endangering crucial doctrinal matters (Keep in mind that the Jews who were retaining festival days and food laws were not doing so as a matter of salvation.) and that

Christians can agree to disagree in a peaceable way for the sake of the harmony in the local church. Even though Paul identifies himself with the strong and explicitly teaches that the weak are wrong in their interpretation (Rom. 14:14; 1 Cor. 8:4, 8), he restrains the strong from berating the weak. For Paul there are situations in which the truth can be used in a wrong, unloving manner. There are situations when it is wise and proper for the strong to hold their peace. As believers who love and care about doctrine we must always remember that the edification and protection of a brother takes precedence over winning arguments or looking good in a debate. Some believers are weak in the faith and adhere to silly and even stupid opinions on unimportant issues. Such Christians must be handled with gentleness, care and wisdom. Berating a fellow brother as an idiot only hurts feelings or causes tempers to flare; it rarely if ever leads to peace and edification.

Paul, who would defend crucial doctrinal issues like the gospel or the resurrection with every fiber of his being; who was the most dogmatic of Christian theologians regarding the faith allowed a certain diversity in the church over peripheral doctrinal matters *under strict conditions* (i.e., The weak brethren who hold wrong opinions had to keep their behavior private and could not judge others. The strong could not argue with or berate the weak for being wrong and weak, etc.). Paul was not like a modern ecumenical mushy theologian or a pastor who didn't want to offend anyone or take a position, who held that mutually exclusive ideas were both simultaneously valid. No. The apostle's acceptance of certain diversity under *strict conditions* was on a doctrinal matter that was *almost* completely indifferent (see section b below).

The great difficulty in applying this principle to today's situation is: What are the areas of doctrine and behavior that are secondary enough to allow diversity over in the church even under the apostle's strict conditions. An area that may be unimportant to one person may be a crucial issue in the mind of another person. Hopefully, this difficult question will be answered as the passages under examination come into sharper focus.

b) The issues discussed at Rome and Corinth were not *purely* things indifferent or *adiaphora*. A matter that is truly *adiaphora* has no *direct* religious significance whatsoever (e.g., Should I wear gray pants or black pants to church today: or, should I plant cherry tomatoes or grape tomatoes in my garden?). Activities that are *adiaphora* are matters that are truly circumstantial or incidental to worship ordinances or ceremonies. Doctrinally and ethically they are ideas or behaviors that do not need direct proof from Scripture. In other words there are some beliefs, ideas and behaviors that are to be conducted according to the *general rules* of the Bible to the glory of God. A Christian who writes a symphony or designs a car does not need proof texts for what he does. He engages in his activities according to general biblical principles in order to glorify God.

In Romans, however, Paul is discussing a believer's use of ceremonial ordinances (i.e., specific Old Covenant revelations) that had been set aside by the work of Christ. Therefore, according to the strict definition of the term, these ordinances are not *adiaphora*. But, because they have been abrogated by Christ and because of the unique historical circumstances (i.e., the overlap of two covenantal administrations) Paul treats them as matters of *adiaphora*. For example, in the matter of Jewish holy days the weak brothers are permitted to celebrate these days unto the Lord privately in their homes. They are not permitted to impose such days upon other Christians or the church as a whole. The days are excluded from public worship. Those who keep the days are not permitted to judge the strong who do not keep the days. Obviously, if these days were still binding, then Paul would compel all believers to participate in these days.

But, he does the opposite. He keeps them out of public worship and allows the weak to keep them privately unto the Lord.

Further, in the matter of clean and unclean foods, Paul says “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). In the New Covenant of the Messianic kingdom the ceremonial dietary rules are irrelevant. They are no longer binding. Therefore, kingdom conduct now consists in a Spirit-led joyful obedience to the moral law. What was not *adiaphora* in the old covenant era is now a matter of indifference. However, those Christians who do not fully comprehend this change and thus cannot eat with a clear conscience (because they consider certain foods as still unclean) must refrain (Rom. 14:14). They cannot eat from faith (Rom. 14:23). If a person believes that a certain activity is sinful (even though Scripture allows such behavior), that person must refrain from that activity. For him it is no longer *adiaphora*.

While Paul treats these matters as *adiaphora*, one must keep in mind that with regard to the ceremonial ordinances they are not completely indifferent. The ceremonial observances were a part of the middle wall of separation between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14). Jesus broke down this wall in order “to create in Himself one new man from the two” (Eph. 2:15). Therefore, the keeping of Jewish days and food laws is not the biblical ideal. That is one reason why these non-binding ceremonial ordinances cannot be used by the weak to judge other believers. However, as the unique overlap of these two covenantal administrations came to an end in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem and as the church matured, the unique situation Paul had to deal with no longer existed.

c) Note that Paul does not take a position of intellectual neutrality on the matter under discussion. He doesn't pretend that both sides are right. He doesn't ask the strong not to hold an opinion or pretend there are no differences at all. Indeed, in both the Roman and Corinthian sections dealing with the proper use of liberty, the apostle sets forth the position of the strong as the correct interpretation. Paul is not teaching that the church as a court cannot take a doctrinal position on more peripheral matters; for he, writing by the Holy Spirit, defends the position of the strong as the correct interpretation. However, he does ask the strong to avoid arguing with or berating the weak over such issues. When there are peripheral areas that simply cannot be agreed upon, argumentation does not achieve anything useful. It does not edify. It can even destroy the peace of the church.

However, (once again) note that the church session can hold a position. Paul does not expect the pastor who must deal with the text of Scripture to skip sections of the Bible, or change his opinions, or refuse to deal with controversial topics. The pastor should carefully, tactfully, lovingly correct false opinions on such matters from the pulpit. There are many people who are now strong who were at one time weak, who through the teaching of the church grew in faith and knowledge. One must not make the mistake of taking Paul's teaching on the weak brethren as an excuse for believers to be stagnant in their walk or to remain babies in their knowledge of doctrine. Christians need to and ought to grow. But, they must be protected during their journey of sanctification.

Also, one must be very careful not to use these sections on the abuse of Christian liberty as justifications for the acceptance of sloppy theology or the treatment of false opinions as acceptable to the faith. Once again, Paul openly identifies what is right and what is wrong. The apostle is writing to protect weak consciences, not false opinions. He is writing to preserve the peace, unity and love of the brethren in the midst of disagreements over minor doctrinal matters.

This point has been brought up because many commentators and preachers use this section of Scripture as a springboard for the acceptance of all sorts of divergent views in the church (e.g., non-cessation of miraculous gifts, heretical views of early chapters of Genesis, non-Sabbatarianism, women in church office, etc.) that should not be tolerated by Reformed churches at all.

d) Paul recognizes that progressive sanctification involves doctrinal development over time. He does not expect or demand the immediate doctrinal perfection of believers. Because Christians are finite and still have sinful natures, there are believers in every church who entertain defective conceptions of Christian truth. There is no such thing as an infallible theologian this side of heaven. This point, however, does not mean that every Christian should not strive for precision in doctrine. Neither, does it mean that doctrinal accuracy is unimportant. The more accurate one's doctrine, the better. No one can be saved or sanctified apart from a true understanding of the fundamentals of the faith. Further, Paul identifies heresy as a sin of the flesh (Gal. 5:20). Being wrong on doctrine or misrepresenting the teaching of Scripture can never be considered a light thing. That reality is one reason why believers ought to stand on the theological attainments of previous generations, study their Bibles and good Christian books in order to learn the truth and avoid error. This point ought to be obvious. However, in the present day most professing Christians couldn't care less about theology.

The relation of theology to progressive sanctification also points one to the need of being careful and patient with believers who have imperfect conceptions of theology in *non-fundamental areas*. Every Christian starts out as a little baby who only has a rudimentary understanding of the Christian system of doctrine. Denominations that are quick to excommunicate or condemn people over minor doctrinal disagreements are clearly not following Paul's example of forbearance. People who are wrong on areas of doctrine that cannot damn the soul can be told by a church court to refrain from discussing their views with others. However, they need to be treated as Christians who are mistaken--as genuine believers who need teaching and guidance. William S. Plumer writes,

It is not wise equally to press upon young converts and newly formed churches all the truths of Scripture. There is an order in divine instruction; milk for babes, strong meat for men. Let that order be observed. At all events, let us keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The inspired rule is, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." Phil. 3:15, 16. Luther spoke a sad truth, when he said: "Every man naturally has a pope in him." Scott: "We are all prone to make our views the standard of truth, to deem things *certain*, which to other appear *doubtful*; to expect eager disputation, to bring men to see with our eyes; to perplex new converts with topics which they cannot yet understand; and to expect them at once to acquiesce in all those truths, which we have been learning for years."²⁴

(3) After ordering the strong to receive the weak, Paul instructs the weak not to judge the strong. The strong often have a tendency to look down upon the weak. Knowledge disconnected from love leads to arrogance. Thus, the strong sometimes can view themselves as the elites in the church. The weak on the other hand often have a problem with being judgmental of others. Because the weak believe that a certain behavior is wrong and sinful (that the strong engages in because they understand that such behavior is lawful) weak believers often condemn strong

²⁴ William S. Plumer, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971), 607-608.

believers as sinful libertines. There are a number of important things to learn from Paul's injunction to the weak.

a) Note that the apostle's command presupposes that the weak are aware the strong are not following the Jewish food laws. This observation means that in the normal course of daily affairs the strong were not radically altering their behavior to appease the weak. The weak are fully aware that the strong eat anything they want. If they were not aware of this fact, then they would not be tempted to condemn the strong as sinners. What this means is that while the strong are not to tempt the weak believers by offering them unclean food or taking them to a non-kosher restaurant, they do not have to completely give up what is lawful for the sake of the weak.

This point is important because in the past and present the weak have manipulated Paul's teaching regarding the weak in order to force churches to adopt the weak's position in a tyrannical manner. For example, a fairly common position among fundamentalist Baptists is that even if drinking alcoholic beverages is permissible, it must be completely disallowed for the sake of those who think it is sinful. This type of argument is refuted by Paul's treatment of the same issue. While the strong must fully receive the weak (many commentators believe that the strong were in the majority in Rome), the weak cannot condemn the strong *because the strong are not doing anything sinful*.

b) Note that while the apostle allows people with mistaken views to be members in good standing in the church with full rights of fellowship, his teaching is still rooted in the truth. In other words, the weak are not permitted to judge the strong because the weak are mistaken in their interpretation. Paul is not forbidding all judging or church discipline in the Christian community but only judgments based on autonomous ethics or man-made principles. Human opinions that are not founded squarely upon the Scriptures carry no weight with Paul whatsoever.

There is nothing wrong with making judgments based on the teaching of Scripture. What Paul forbids is judgments based on false, non-biblical measures or standards. When Jesus condemned the legalism of the Pharisees He said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (Jn. 7:24). If men are permitted to judge others based on their own ideas apart from biblical truth, morality will be replaced with self-righteous legalism. Further, the peace of the church will be constantly torn asunder as contrary autonomous human opinions confuse discipline in the church. This type of infighting can be observed in fundamentalist circles where people make issues out of trivial, non-moral offences. It can also be observed among modernists where the battles are over which secular humanistic philosophy or ethic to follow.

c) Paul supports his injunction to the weak with two arguments. First, the weak are not permitted to judge the strong because God has received them (v. 3). In other words if God has accepted believers who eat these meats then who are you to reject these people? This point is a stinging rebuke to all legalists. The apostle is pointing to the arrogance and absurdity of legalism, where sinful finite men assume an ethical position that is supposedly higher or stricter than God. Obviously, it is sinful for Christians to condemn that which God approves. The very essence of sin is to assume to oneself the right to determine what is good and what is evil. This type of thinking was behind Eve's rejection of God's imperative in the garden. While human autonomy often expresses itself in the justification of gross acts of immorality it can also be displayed by a very pious sounding legalism. Further, "The objects of discipline are the reformation of offenders and the purification of the church; but neither of these objects requires the condemnation of those brethren whom God has received."²⁵ We learn from Paul's command to

²⁵ Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1835] 1972), 419.

the weak that full, loving acceptance of the weak by the strong does not entail the church's acceptance of legalism or judgmental spirit.

Second, Paul points to the impropriety of autonomous judgment by reminding the weak that Jesus is the sole judge of mankind. Only the resurrected Messiah has the authority to acquit or condemn. This point is true because as God Jesus is the supreme law-giver. The second person of the trinity wrote the Ten Commandments in stone with His own finger. Also, as the divine-human mediator all authority has been placed in His pierced hands. The Father has committed all judgment to the Son (Jn. 5:22). "Since the 'strong' are God's servants, they are answerable to him for their actions and beliefs, not to the 'weak.' For the 'weak' to arrogate the role of judgment to themselves is incompatible with the lordship of Christ and God, and with their own role as servants. Indeed, by passing judgment they are taking upon themselves the role of final judge."²⁶

(4) The apostle teaches that everything a Christian does in life no matter how mundane, small or unimportant must be done unto the Lord. Even though there was a disagreement at Rome over Jewish days and food laws both parties were behaving in a manner that they believed glorified Christ. Those who observed the day observed it to please the Lord. Those who didn't observe the day abstained to please the Lord. The same was true of clean and unclean meats. "[W]e *must* remember that Paul is here discussing persons who, while differing, take their faith very seriously. Those who observed days and diets, do it because of their desire to be faithful to the Lord, and those who refuse to observe days and fasting likewise do so out of a holy concern. Paul is thus discussing people who are very devout Christians. These are not people who follow one position or another out of social pressure and compliance. Paul is not concerned with these, but with earnest believers whose actions are God-centered."²⁷

Believers, to the very best of their ability, ought to make the word of God their rule of conduct and the glory of Christ their chief concern in everything they say, think, or do. As Paul says in another epistle in a very similar context: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:32). Christians are *not* to live self-centered lives but lives that are Christ-centered. The kingdom of God is not to be relegated to a few hours on Sunday but must be the focus of believers throughout each and every day. It is from passages such as Romans 14:6ff and 1 Corinthians 10:31 that the early Presbyterians taught that even in areas that are relatively indifferent, the general principles of the word apply. All things in life whether by direct command or by implication are under the authority of Christ's law word. Some questions that ought to constantly come to mind as we seek to please Christ are: "Can I thank God for this? Does this act, thought, or word glorify Him? Can I do this unto Christ? Does it help me further His interests or His kingdom?"

Paul's discussion of the need to do everything unto Christ and the fact that both parties are abstaining or partaking unto the Lord is meant to support the imperatives in verses 1 to 3. The apostle is reminding both parties that each is rooting their behavior in their love and service of Christ. Thus, they ought not to assume a self-centered spirit or ulterior motives on the part of those who disagree.

After explaining the fact that both parties are seeking to glorify God in their behavior, Paul gives reasons why Christians must serve and glorify Jesus in all that they do. Believers do not live or die to themselves but to Christ because they belong to Him (vs. 7-8). Christians are the Lord's by virtue of their creation at His hands but especially because they were purchased

²⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 718.

²⁷ Rousas John Rushdoony, *Romans and Galatians* (Vallecita, CA: Ross House Books, 1977), 265.

with His precious blood. “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20). In this context the ownership of believers and their consequent duty of devotion and obedience are not founded upon creation, but on redemption. We are not our own. Jesus saved us from bondage to death, the devil and from sin. He redeemed us to live a life of grateful service in His kingdom. Having died to sin we now live and serve the King.

Paul explains this ownership and the service it entails by pointing to the exaltation and dominion of Christ which is the reward of His redemptive obedience (Rom. 14:9 cf. Phil. 2:8, 9; Mt. 28:18ff; Rom. 1:4; Ac. 2:31-36). “By his death he purchased them for his own, and by his resurrection he attained to that exalted station which he now occupies as Lord over all, and received those gifts which enable Him to exercise as Mediator this universal dominion.”²⁸ The apostle often sets forth imperatives and then supports them with detailed theological arguments.

(5) Paul sets forth a very important principle that “whatsoever is not from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Believers must be fully convinced in their own minds that their behavior is in accord with Scripture (Rom. 14:5). If a Christian does something that he thinks is wrong, it is a sin for him to engage in that behavior, even if that act is not condemned by God’s word. For example, if a believer thinks that drinking alcoholic beverages in any amount is a sin, then he must not violate his own conscience. The apostle brings this point up because the weak brethren refused to engage in behavior that was lawful because of their faulty understanding of certain matters. The faith principle is brought into the discussion because the apostle wants the strong to understand why they must not put a stumbling block before the weak.

The apostle’s point raises an important question. If the eating of meats and other behaviors like drinking alcoholic beverages in moderate amounts is not defined as a sin by Scripture, then how can Paul say that such activities are a sin to people who simply believe they are wrong? The reason is that such behavior is rooted in contempt of divine authority. It flows from ungodly motives and a rebellious spirit. In a similar vein, Solomon says, “the plowing of the wicked is sin” (Prov. 21:4). Why is an activity that is considered good by most people defined as sinful by Solomon? Because it was not done from faith. It was not done to glorify God.

Does the fact that “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” mean that the opposite is true--that whatever someone thinks is right is right? No, absolutely not! Many people today think that the most important aspect of behavior is sincerity; that even the most stupid actions are somehow made noble because someone really believes in a cause. People, however, can be very sincere and yet be wrong and evil. One must keep in mind that the Jews who persecuted Christians in the first century believed they were doing so in obedience to God. Although they were sincere, their actions were contrary to Scripture and consequently were evil. There is such a thing as sinful zeal where men do great evil in the name of God and religion (e.g., Al Queda and other Muslim satanists come to mind).

(6) Paul warns strong believers not to put a stumbling block before weak Christians. “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way” (Rom. 14:13). In First Corinthians the apostle uses an almost identical warning, “But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak” (8:9). In Romans 14:21 Paul adds, “It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.”

The apostle follows these warnings with very strong language regarding the gravity of causing a weak brother to sin. Paul wants the strong believers to understand the spiritual damage

²⁸ Charles Hodge, *Romans*, 431.

that the careless, unloving use of liberty can do to the weak. The wrong use of liberty can “grieve” (Rom. 14:15), “destroy” (Rom. 14:15), “cause to stumble” (Rom. 14:13, 21; 1 Cor. 8:13), “destroy the work of God” (Rom. 14:20), disrupt the peace of the church (Rom. 14:19), wound weak consciences (1 Cor. 8:12), embolden the weak to violate their own conscience (1 Cor. 8:10) and cause the weak to perish (1 Cor. 8:11). The apostle is so concerned with protecting the weak from damage that he says that he would rather never eat meat again than cause a brother to stumble (1 Cor. 8:13). Paul says that putting a stumbling block before a brother or causing a brother to fall is a sin against the brethren and a sin against Christ (1 Cor. 8:12).

The apostle wants strong believers to understand how serious a sin putting a stumbling block before a weaker brother is. To do so violates the law of love which under girds the whole law (Rom. 13:8ff). It brings reproach on the gospel by giving the heathen an occasion for slanderous talk because it is not an expression of biblical love and because it reveals disunity and quarrels within the body to outsiders (Rom. 14:16, 19). Further, it treats weak brothers in a manner which (were it not for God’s irresistible grace) would destroy them.

In this section we need to ask two important questions. First, why is behavior that is actually lawful described as leading weak believers to destruction? Second, what exactly does Paul mean when he says “not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way” (Rom. 14:13)?

a) When the strong put a stumbling block before the weak causing the weak to engage in behavior they deem inappropriate or sinful, the strong are leading the weak into behavior that is contrary to their faith and conscience. The weak are “grieved” (v. 15) because they are convinced they are violating Scripture. Thus in their own eyes and according to Paul they are leading a backslidden, hypocritical lifestyle. Because the weak are not living by faith, because they are following a habitual pattern of rebellion by violating their own conscience, Paul brings in dire warnings that are associated with apostasy. Even though the weak are not directly violating God’s law they are sinning by violating the faith principle (“whatsoever is not of faith is sin” v. 23). Thus Paul uses strong language against this sin, as he would any sin that leads to apostasy and destruction. The apostle wants the strong to understand that even though the behavior in question is not intrinsically sinful, nevertheless, it is sinful and deadly to the weak. Thus the strong must be careful and loving in their use of liberty. It is likely that Paul goes to great lengths to emphasize the possible consequences of leading a weak brother into sin because the strong didn’t think that it was a big deal. Their thinking may have been that since such behavior is not really a sin, one should not be concerned about flaunting such behavior before the weak. The apostle goes out of his way to refute such thinking.

b) Paul’s primary exhortation to the strong is not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall before a brother (Rom. 14:13). (It is in the application of this verse that many believers go astray in the direction of legalism. Therefore, it is important to accurately determine the apostle’s meaning.) The terms stumbling block (*proskomma*) and occasion to fall, trap or obstacle (*skandalon*) convey the same idea, meaning something that causes a brother to commit a sin. A stumbling block in a non-metaphorical usage refers to an obstacle on the ground such as a rock which causes a person to stumble and fall over. The word translated “occasion of falling” refers to the stick in a trap for small animals. When the animal bumps the stick it becomes stuck in the trap. Such a trap is similar to rabbit traps used in the west where a stick is used to hold up a basket or cage-like structure. When the rabbit enters the cage to eat the bait, a string is pulled which removes the stick trapping the rabbit.

There are a number of things to note regarding this injunction.

(1) Paul's teaching applies to every conceivable situation. "It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak" (Rom. 14:21). Although the apostle is dealing with specific problems in Rome (i.e., Old Covenant food laws and festival days), and Corinth (i.e., the eating of meats sacrificed to idols), he makes it very clear that the principle involved is broad and can be applied to a wide variety of similar cases. In modern America meat is not sacrificed to idols and believers (with perhaps extremely rare exceptions) do not regard the Jewish food laws as binding today. However, there are many professing Christians who mistakenly believe that consuming alcoholic beverages in any form or amount is intrinsically sinful. Given Paul's principle, such people should not be served wine with dinner and beer should not be readily available at a picnic to which such people have been invited. Further, if a brother believes that television or movies are intrinsically evil no matter what the content, then one should not invite him over to watch *Gods and Generals*. What one person may consider an edifying evening of family entertainment, another person may consider a grievous sin.

(2) The metaphors that Paul uses (obstacle, cause to fall, stumbling block) indicate that strong believers are not to do things in the *presence* of weak Christians that would tempt them to commit sin. Note the following examples:

First, the apostle is teaching that strong believers should never offer, set before, or make available something to a weak Christian that he thinks is a sin. This sin is the grossest violation of Paul's principle because it involves direct temptation. It is akin to taking a brother who believes that abstinence from alcoholic beverages is required to a bar and buying him a beer and placing it in front of him. The strong is placing a snare directly in the weak person's path.

Second, Paul does not want the strong to flaunt their behavior before the weak. The apostle says, "Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves" (Rom. 14:22). To paraphrase: Do you have the faith to engage in these behaviors that the weak believe is a sin? That's fine. However, keep it to yourself. Do it before God. "[H]e means that they are free to eat and drink whatever they wish in the privacy of their homes with other strong believers....They should abstain from food and drink that 'grieve' the weak at public meals."²⁹ Hodge writes, "*Have it to thyself, (kata seauton eche)* keep it to yourself. There are two ideas included in this phrase. The first is, keep it privately, i.e., do not parade it, or make it a point to show that you are above the weak scruples of your brethren; and the second is, that this faith or firm conviction is not to be renounced, but retained, for it is founded on the truth. *Before God*, i.e., in the sight of God. As God sees and recognizes it, it need not be exhibited before men. It is to be cherished in our hearts, and used in a manner acceptable to God. Being right in itself, it is to be piously, and not ostentatiously or injuriously paraded and employed."³⁰

Third, strong believers should even avoid certain behavior in public places when they can be *easily observed* by weak Christians. Paul writes, "But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never

²⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 732.

³⁰ Charles Hodge, *Romans*, 427.

again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Cor. 8:9-13). If a strong brother reclines at a feast in a temple of an idol (which in both Greek and Roman societies were in prominent public places) and was observed by a weak believer, the weak person may be emboldened to violate his own conscience on this matter. “Heathen temples had large halls or platforms and kitchens for such feasts; those feasts were sometimes celebrated in the open air.”³¹ The apostle is not necessarily describing a case that actually occurred for he explicitly condemns eating meat sacrificed to idols *within heathen temples* in chapter 10. Buying meat at the local market which may have been offered to idols and eating it at home is one thing but actually participating in a pagan feast is obviously not an indifferent matter.

Some commentaries regard the fact that the weak observe the strong engaging in such behavior as evidence that Paul is not describing a coincidental observation of the strong in such a feast but rather that the strong have invited the weak to a feast itself. If this interpretation is correct then this passage is condemning the direct temptation mentioned earlier. It is not a coincidental occurrence. This interpretation resolves the difficulty of deciphering why the accidental discovery of the strong at such feasts would tempt weak believers to go out and buy meat offered to idols and then prepare and eat it. Anyone familiar with weak and legalistic Christians knows that the natural reaction in such cases is not for the weak to imitate the strong but rather to condemn them as sinners. In other words, if the weak were not directly pressured in some manner by the strong, why would they go out of their way to do something they believe is wrong? Clark writes, “Would he not instead regard the strong Christian as really weak and worldly, expostulate with him, and be strengthened in his weakness? Unfortunately, weak Christians and all others, at times, are not fully rational and are, as a matter of fact, induced by bad logic to violate their consciences. Thus, by one man’s knowledge, the ignorant brother is destroyed.”³²

If one adheres to the traditional interpretation of this passage, how should believers apply Paul’s teaching to our modern situation? Does it mean that a believer cannot have a glass of wine with dinner because a weak brother might see him at a restaurant and be tempted? No, not necessarily. Even if one adopts the majority interpretation it must be kept in mind that Paul is speaking of behavior in a very public arena. It would be akin to open behavior in the public square of a small farming community in the Midwest. Paul wants Christians to consider their own actions, not just as they affect themselves but others as well. He is not teaching that the strong must go about wearing a straightjacket, with the constant fear that a weak believer may be offended by some innocent behavior. He simply wants them to consider the weak person in public settings. The strong is not to flaunt his behavior in a public place where it is very likely that weak believers are present.

A modern application would be a Christian picnic. Strong believers ought not to smoke cigars and drink Guinness until they are by themselves. It would not be loving, nor wise to offend people who were brought up in churches where such behavior was condemned. While the weak are not to judge the strong or impose their unbiblical views upon the church, the strong are not to make fun of or place a stumbling block before the weak.

There are other important things to note regarding Paul’s injunction regarding not being a stumbling block to the weak. First, the passages regarding the stumbling block should not be used to impose universal policies in the church regarding the *lawful private behavior* of the strong. To do so clearly violates the teaching of Paul. The apostle is not regulating behavior in

³¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *I and II Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg [1937] 1963), 346.

³² Gordon Clark, *First Corinthians*, 136.

the home or in settings not attended by the weak. He is dealing with situations of direct temptation of the weak. If a denomination forbids the lawful moderate use of tobacco or alcoholic beverages at all times and occasions then it has imposed man-made ordinances upon the body like the Pharisees. Such rules are unbiblical and legalistic. Paul's main point is that liberty must never be used as an excuse to cause a weak brother to fall.

Further, (as noted above) Paul makes it very clear that the strong hold the correct interpretation and that the weak are not permitted to judge the strong for engaging in these lawful behaviors. These comments by Paul presuppose that the weak know that the strong are eating non-kosher foods or meat sacrificed to idols in the privacy of their own homes or with other strong believers. Given this knowledge on the part of the weak, one cannot use these portions of Scripture to impose any restrictions on the strong in situations where the weak could not be directly tempted.

If one holds to the interpretation that Paul is teaching that the strong must forego anything which a weak believer might find objectionable, then Christian ethics immediately descend to a human autonomous level. If such a view is adopted then there really is no Christian liberty. Why is this statement true? Because at the present time one can find professing Christians who believe that all sorts of innocent behaviors are sinful. If believers had to mold their lives according to what every professing brother had to say no matter how absurd, then the church would descend into a paralyzing legalism.

Second, these passages do not mean that the church must treat every absurd and insane idea in the same manner that the ideas of the weak in Rome and Corinth were treated. The weak in Rome and Corinth were wrong but they were not irrational or crazy. If a professing Christian comes to public worship and declares that it is sinful to wear shoes and socks in the assembly, the believers in that body are not required by Paul to go about barefoot for fear of offending the new brother. The opinions of the weak in both Romans and Corinthians were due to unique circumstances that made certain lawful changes very difficult to accept on the part of some believers. These believers were not arbitrarily declaring strange ideas out of nowhere. They had to deal with centuries-old established customs. The ceremonial laws for example had been part of the covenant people's life for fifteen centuries. Therefore, one's application of these passages to modern situations needs to be tempered by the fact that the weak were weak but not irrational. The church is not to be held hostage to everyone who has a wild idea regarding ethics.

Conclusion

The only true source of liberty on planet earth is the liberty bestowed by Jesus Christ. It is a liberty rooted in His redemptive work. There is freedom from the guilt and penalty of sin as well as from sin's power. There is the liberty under Christ's law word from the doctrines and commandments of sinful men. And there is freedom from the Old Covenant ceremonial observances.

It is important for believers to understand that the liberty that we have in Jesus must never be used in a manner which hurts a brother in Christ. Liberty must be tempered by love for the peace and edification of the body. There are a number of peripheral doctrinal matters over which under strict conditions both the strong and the weak must not quarrel over or disturb the peace of the church. The strong must fully accept the weak as brothers and the weak must not judge the strong. Both parties must work together to advance Christ's for God' glory. Paul brilliantly rejects human autonomy in ethics while recognizing and dealing with the fact that

sanctification is progressive; that it is inevitable that minor doctrinal disagreements will occur. May God give modern Reformed churches the wisdom and ability to fight for the fundamental doctrines of the faith while they love, nurture and protect the weak in the flock of Christ.

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