

Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience

If ever there has been a basis for a ‘cop-out’ theology it is this issue of *Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience*. It is one of those subjects the woolly and the lily-livered choose to use so that they can justify changing their minds and not being dogmatic in anything!

Yes, there are indeed matters upon which we *must* stand firm because the Bible is clear about them ... but, - to treat this subject fairly, - we must also recognise there truly are some subjects dependent upon liberty of conscience. During times of conflict some Christians can genuinely not fight as combatant soldiers because they believed “thou shalt not kill” was a clear command for them to not be put into the situation where they might have to kill. As ‘conscientious objectors’ their principles were upheld and they were allowed to serve in other operations, such as medical field offices.

So what is the Biblical doctrine of *Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience*? This is a vast subject and we need to treat it with respect for each other ... and, - more importantly, - within the confines of what the Bible actually teaches concerning it. First of all, ...

BIBLICAL LIBERTY

- * Biblical liberty is the foundation upon which our subject is based. This is not liberty as defined by society dictates; neither is it the ‘do whatever you like, for so you are free to do’ type of liberty.
- * It is a liberty that has clear lines of demarcation set out in the Scriptures, - this freedom and this liberty that belongs to the Christian has been purchased and accomplished for us by Jesus Christ. He is its Source.
- * We have been made free from the power of sin and we have been freed from the burden of the Law of the Old Testament. It means now that, - from the New Testament onwards, - in Christ our faith is rooted in submission to Him and to the Word of God. ... It is liberty because we have Christ as our Master and it is within that context.
- * “Ah, but hold on a minute, you are immediately putting restrictions on liberty; you’re talking in terms of having a Master, - that’s slave language; Christ came to do away with all that kind of thing, - He abolished the Law that it would have no more hold over us”.
- * No, be careful! Christ did not come to do away with the Law, - He came to fulfil the Law so that His people would be enabled to live in obedience to God’s Law and that is what Paul meant, [Gal. 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.](#)

- * This liberty is in Christ, - we are 'free' in Him, *and this freedom in Christ means He is our Master and Lord*; He has freed us in order to live as He would want us to live.
- * When you accept Christ as Saviour, you also accept Him as Lord! Your liberty and freedom is in Him ... and your conscience is directed by obedience to His Word.
- * It is very important we don't go too fast here ...
- * The believer has freedom from the guilt of sin; the sacrifice of the death of Christ on the altar of Calvary removes the guilt of sin (expiation). Christ offered His life on the altar as the only vicarious/substitutionary sacrifice in order to redeem His own people.
- * All of the guilt and the burden of our eternal punishment was 'imputed' to Him, [II Cor. 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.](#) [I Pet.2:24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.](#)
- * Salvation doesn't come through the miracles Jesus worked or the sermons He preached; salvation comes through the saving power of Christ's redemptive work alone because of the shedding of His precious blood, His death on the cross, and His resurrection from the tomb.
- * ... And true liberty therefore begins at the cross because that was where Jesus paid the price our slavery to sin demanded; He paid the penalty for our disobedience. Then, with the price paid in full the guilt was extinguished and the curse of violating the Law of God was satisfied ... and we were set free ... at liberty.
- * Christ's perfect righteousness was *imputed* to the believing sinner ... and [Jn. 8:36 If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.](#)
- * This liberty in Christ frees us from the penalty and grip of sin, and it also releases us from the dominance of sin, [Rom. 6:1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? 2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? ... 3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ... 6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. 7 For he that is dead is freed from sin.](#)
- * In other words, Christ freed us for the particular purpose of becoming like Him (i.e. sanctification). Christ didn't 'free' us from the grip of Satan to tell us to go our own merry way and make a life for ourselves; no, He freed us to be slaves to Him, - you have the choice, believer, to either serve God or mammon ... either one or the other, *but not both!*

- * Am I free to commit adultery? No, I'm not, because the Word of God says I'm not free, - as a Christian child of God, - to commit adultery.
- * Am I free to accept the principles of the world, even though they are in contradiction of God's Word? No, I'm not free to make up my Christianity as I go along *but I have* a freedom based upon my faith in Christ and it works in my heart and I don't want to commit adultery, or I don't want to accept the fallen principles of an unbelieving world.
- * I have a freedom, - a liberty, - in Christ that has been gifted to me by what He did on the cross; ... freedom is never free, - He died to purchase my freedom ... *my freedom cost Jesus His life!*
- * Liberty in Christ is something we as believers are privileged with because of what our Saviour did for us and we enjoy this liberty in Christ because He has set us free from sin. ... **Biblical Liberty.**

LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

- * Our *Confession of Faith* defines liberty of conscience as freedom "from all obligation to receive or obey any such doctrines or demands of men as are in any respect in opposition to His Word or not contained in it".
- * In other words, if the government passes a law that contradicts the Word of God we are bound to uphold the Word of God. We are not at liberty to believe and do whatever 'takes our fancy', ... or choose outside laws that are contrary to God's Word.
 - * Governments say abortion is legal; the Bible is against it.
 - * Governments say homosexuality is legal; the Bible says it is wrong.
 - * Governments say gambling is legal; the Bible rejects it.
 - * Governments pass all types of laws that are contrary to God's Word ... but, for the believer, God's Word has priority.
- * ... Our liberty is dependant upon our obedience to God's Word.
- * Brother Andrew was once confronted by someone who told him he shouldn't bring Bibles into countries where the government has banned it. Brother Andrew calmly informed the man that with regards to this matter he is answerable to God's Law and not man's. ... God's clear teaching always takes priority where man's law contradicts God's.
- * ... If the Bible says something is wrong and God's people should not be involved in it ... then it is wrong *and God's people should not be involved in it!*
- * In other words, our liberty is defined by the teachings of God's Word.
 - * "I can do whatever I like, because I'm a Christian and I'm no longer under any law" (antinomianism) ... well no, you're wrong ... "The old dispensation of the Law is finished, - I can do whatever I like because I'm under grace now" ... no, you're wrong again, because since you are a Christian you are under the obligations of God's law.

- * You find His law in His Word and you *must* obey His Word and it is through your obedience to His Word that you enjoy freedom and liberty in Christ!
- * God has given us only one perfect and sufficient rule for faith and life that everyone who is alive today, - or who has ever lived or who will live, - must answer to ... and it is His Word; His Word is the basis and standard which gives true satisfying liberty and *all* God's creation has a responsibility to study it, attempt to understand it and live by it.
- * This concept of liberty of conscience must not be secularised, i.e. if the world does it then it must be alright for me in the church to do it ... and the world is in so many churches today Christ has been 'pushed out'.
- * No, the world teaches if you want to be happy in life then you ought to pursue the lifestyle with which you are most fulfilled (hedonism). ...
- * Take *hedonism* into the church ... In many so-called worship services today 'worshippers' come along to 'get a religious fix' for the week ahead ... the church is the place you come to be made to 'feel good'. Wrong! These 'worshippers' are seeking the 'feel good' factor, instead of worshipping the Sovereign God in Spirit and in truth.
- * ... Yes, sometimes you come to church, you listen to God's Word and you may go away 'on a high', but there are other times when God's Word has had such a dealing with you that you cry out like Isaiah, [Woe is me for I am undone](#).
- * "... Oh, to get people into our churches we need to do this, and that, and the other. We need to be free of the old traditionalism to choose our own form of worship which suits us best. ... I want to exercise my liberty of conscience! Let's have a more traditional service for the oldies at 9.30, and then a more contemporary service for the younger people at 11a.m."
- * ... No, no, no! Christian liberty and liberty of conscience is bound within the parameters of the glory God's people bring unto Him! *God is the Focus* and such is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit within us that He teaches us, - through His Word, - to seek after that which only gives Him pleasure, and is worthy of His Name ... and Christian liberty and liberty of conscience is very simply fulfilled in a striving after obedience to God's Word, as is becoming the true child of God.

SOME AWKWARD QUESTIONS ...

- * Under the title of liberty of conscience what am I allowed to do and what am I not allowed to do?
- * [Should a Christian eat meat](#) or should he be a vegetarian? [Rom. 14:15 if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.](#)

- * If what you eat or drink offends your brother or sister, then don't offend them, don't do it! If you were out for a meal with a Jewish friend, you wouldn't ask for a pork sausage!
- * Should a Christian smoke? "C.H. Spurgeon smoked a cigar ..." There is nowhere in the Bible where it says a Christian should *not* smoke ... and there is also nowhere in the Bible that says a Christian should smoke!
- * If your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, why should He have to share it with the fumes of a stinking tobacco?!
- * Should a Christian drink alcohol? Despite the best efforts of well-meaning Bible teachers I cannot see that the Bible teaches total abstinence. However, it certainly teaches against drunkenness; King Solomon, - himself a lover of the pleasures, - said, [Eccles. 10:17 Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!](#) ... When drunken to excess [Prov. 20:1 Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.](#)
- * According to Paul drunkenness is one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:21).
- * I hear of young Christians who go out to the pub together, - what kind of a witness is that? What kind of a conversation glorifying to Christ can you have in the pub?! Would you like to be found in the pub if Jesus was to return?
- * Should a Christian play the lottery? Many Christians have no problem with playing the lottery ... but surely it is a mismanagement of what the Lord has blessed you with. If you feel you have enough money to throw away on such pursuits, you would be better bringing it to church and putting it on the collection plate!
- * Should a Christian woman wear trousers? Should she wear a hat when she comes to church? Should she wear earrings and make-up? Should she have her hair done up in a bun? Should a man wear a kilt? Should you go to the cinema? ... We may have all our laws but ...

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY? According to Romans 14 there are some issues that are secondary. For example, while some would have held to certain feast days, others wouldn't. ... But their observance or non-observance in no way compromised their salvation.

- * You may wish to do some things I would not do ... I may wish to do some things you would not do ... but if you are soundly saved by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and what you are doing is not contradicting His Word, I must keep silent.
- * I meet with brethren each month who hold to the doctrine of infant baptism, - I strongly believe that such a doctrine has its foundation in tradition and has absolutely no warrant in Scripture.

- * However, I wouldn't set out to offend them, as they wouldn't set out to offend me. Our salvation doesn't depend upon the doctrine of paedobaptism.
- * I have many friends who believe the Church will be raptured and will miss out on the Tribulation, - I, on the other hand, believe the Church will go through the Tribulation. I have Pentecostal and Charismatic friends ... I have friends who believe in the errors of Arminianism ... but I have no doubt they are soundly saved with the same blood that Christ shed for me.
- * Slating a fellow believer only hurts feelings and causes tempers to flare; it rarely leads to peace and edification, and glorifies Christ.
- * You just won't get two people to agree exactly on absolutely every point of doctrine and everything else.
- * If the Word of God is direct and straightforward, there is no problem, - obey it, and don't argue. Where it is less clear you cannot afford to be so dogmatic. *Exercise Christian liberty!*
- * And remember too ... Every Christian starts as a little baby who only has a rudimentary understanding of the Christian things. If we are too quick to condemn them over minor doctrinal disagreements we are not following Paul's example of forbearance. They need to learn, and they will learn better from those who speak the truth in love!
- * And that is important too ... because God wants you to learn, - if you don't learn you don't grow. Some Christians are happy being weak because it gives them the opportunity to 'play the hard-done-by' ... and that is wrong too. (They don't like doctrine, etc)
- * Christian liberty means setting up no stumbling-blocks for your brother and sister to trip over. And neither does it mean that some fool uses it to excuse disobedience to God's Word.

Conclusion

Christian liberty and liberty of conscience are Biblical principles that teach the only true source of liberty is the liberty wherewith Christ has set us free.

- * It is a liberty rooted in His redemptive work that gives freedom from the guilt and penalty of sin as well as from the power of sin.
- * This liberty in Christ is a privilege gifted to every child of God and it must be tempered by love for the edification of the body.
- * John taught, [I Jn. 3:14, love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.](#) ... And, indeed, what a privilege it is to know this Godly liberty, [I Cor. 7:22 For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.](#)