

THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH
XX. OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC

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I. LIBERTY PURCHASED BY CHRIST

The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin; from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also, in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love and willing mind. All of which were common also to believers under the law. But, under the new testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected; and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.

I. LIBERTY PURCHASED BY CHRIST

- **The Liberty of our Justification through Faith**

- Purchased for believers by Christ's blood
- Freedom from guilt, wrath, and the curse.

“Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10).

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13).

- **The Liberty of Sanctification by Grace**

- Delivered from the present, bondage to Satan, and the dominion of sin.

“the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age” (Gal. 1:3-4).

“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13).

“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

I. LIBERTY PURCHASED BY CHRIST

- **The Liberty of Life after Death**

- Delivered “from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation.”

“It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes” (Ps. 119:71).

“When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:54-55).

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt. 25:34).

I. LIBERTY PURCHASED BY CHRIST

- **Liberty to the Privileges of God's Children**

- Free access to the Father

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

- Freedom to Obey God's Will

- Not from “slavish fear,” but with “childlike love and a willing mind”

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” (Rom. 8:15).

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I. LIBERTY PURCHASED BY CHRIST

- **The Greater Liberty of the New Covenant**

- The blessings of redemption were also available in the Old Testament

“The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Gal. 3:8-9).

“Our fathers. . . and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:1-4).

- But liberty is enlarged among Christians:

- *Freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law*

“Why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” (Acts 15:10).

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

- *Greater boldness of access to the throne of grace*

“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified” (Jn. 14:13).

- *Fuller communications of the free Spirit of God*

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

II. LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

II. LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

- **God only is Lord of the conscience**
 - Every Christian stands before God as Lord
 - “There is only one lawgiver and judge, . . . Who are you to judge your neighbor?” (Ja. 4:12).
 - “For why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience?” (1 Cor. 10:29).
 - The church may therefore only require what is clearly taught in God’s Word.
 - The “commandments of men” must not be made binding upon Christians.
 - “In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mt. 15:9).
 - Applications of biblical principles – where the Bible is not specific – are left to the individual conscience (informed by godly wisdom).
 - “Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls” (Rom. 14:4).
 - “For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23).
- Implicit faith forbidden – requiring trust in the Church’s doctrine rather than personal faith

III. NO LIBERTY TO SIN

They who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

IV. CIVIL & ECCLESIASTICAL OBEDIENCE

And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, they who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. And, for the publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning faith, worship, or conversion), or to the power of godliness; or, such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against, by the censures of the church.