

The Substance of Christian Liberty

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – the substance of the liberty Christ has purchased for believers under the gospel
2. aim – to cause us to celebrate that we have been set free from every form of slavery by faith
3. passage – Romans 6:8-14

b. outline

1. The Source of Christian Liberty
2. The Freedoms of Christian Liberty
3. The Extension of Christian Liberty

c. opening

1. the **basis** of this sermon series
 - a. when I was in my 20's and 30's (in the 80's and 90's), I thought turning 40 in 2000 was way off in the future
 - b. **wisdom**: as we age, time “seems” to go faster around us; when young, we feel as though we are able to “control” time, but as we age, we learn that time has complete mastery over us
 - c. **truth**: we are *under* so many things that we cannot *control* – we actually have very little **liberty**
 1. **i.e.** the Fall enslaved humanity to forces beyond our control, *including sin and death*
 2. **i.e.** the current cultural struggle is a struggle of *liberty* – a struggle for *the freedom of thought*
 - d. **principle: the follower of Christ possesses a liberty that the fallen world cannot understand**
 1. or, when the world comes to take away our *physical* liberties, they will not (cannot) take away the *ultimate* liberty that we have in Christ, an *eternal* liberty that gives us hope beyond this life
 2. or, when the world tries to *force* us to repudiate a Christian worldview, we resist *because* we maintain a hope in our true liberty *that is not in (or of) this world*
2. the **essence** of this sermon series
 - a. a series of three (3) sermons from **Chapter 21 of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith**
 1. **reason #1**: because I have to preach them at Family Camp the week of July 5
 2. **reason #2**: because they fit nicely into the thought flowing from **James 3** into **James 4**
 - b. a series addressing *Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience* (see **Worship Bulletin**)
 1. three paragraphs addressing the topic *in a similar fashion to James*: the **substance** (or definition), the **opposite** (for clarity), and the **abuse** (as the application)
 - c. **note**: I will only address *parts* of each paragraph, and then only in *highly summarized form* ...

The Source of Christian Liberty

a. not a *natural* liberty

“The liberty Christ has purchased for believers under the gospel ...”

1. **not**: a liberty that is enshrined in the *Constitution* – *not* a liberty that is “inalienable” in the world by virtue of all men created equal under God, *nor* a liberty that we can “pursue” through our efforts
 - a. **note**: it should be *obvious* that the *Constitution* no longer defends liberty – nine black-robed deities have made it clear that the founding document no longer protects our basic freedoms
 - b. true, we *should* pursue forms of freedom in this world (**e.g.** life itself), but the most *significant form* of slavery that has settled over us (death!) *can never be shaken off by our own efforts*
 1. **ironic**: the pursuit of “justice” in the “moral revolution” is actually to a deeper form of slavery

b. a *purchased* liberty

1. **rather**: a liberty that was **purchased** by Christ Jesus in his humiliation, incarnation, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and coronation as the King of Kings, and is applied to us in the **gospel** through our faith *alone* in his completed work *alone* – **true freedom is found only in Christ**
 - a. **i.e.** those who reject Christ (and his gospel) can never know true freedom – they will remain enslaved to their sinful passions (and rebellion) *for all eternity*
 - b. **i.e.** those who embrace Christ (and his gospel) know what *true* freedom really is – **they will never substitute a greater form of liberty for a lesser one** (**e.g.** even in *patriotism*)

“Those believers who have had an ordinary love of country, coupled with a naive (and very unbiblical) belief that America could never become an idolatrous adversary to the kingdom of God, are the kind of people who would be quick to acknowledge *on paper* that if we had to choose between God and country, we should always and everywhere choose God. But having ticked that box, they murmur to themselves that they are very glad that they could never be called upon to make that choice. Sorry, but here it is. Right on top of us. ... Pastors don't need to be preparing men to not deny Christ before the Father. They need to teach them how to not deny Him *before men* (Matt. 10:33)” (Doug Wilson, *The Great Cat Poo Medallion*, <https://dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/the-great-cat-poo-medallion.html>, originally published August 26, 2013)

The Freedoms of Christian Liberty

a. the layers of Christian Liberty

1. the “freedom” that comprises a true liberty in Christ is *first* freedom *in relationship to God* (vertically) which then “delivers” the believer from certain slaveries *in the world* (horizontally)
2. **i.e.** unless you are at utterly at liberty *with God*, you will never know liberty *in the world* (**e.g.** you can never truly love your neighbor [unselfishly] unless you *first* love God)

b. the primary layer of Christian Liberty

“... is found in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, and the severity and curse of the law.”

1. freedom from the guilt of sin – the work of Christ whereby he removes from us all *guilt* before God
 - a. by faith in his substitutionary death, we are declared (imputed) *righteous* in the *judgment*
 - b. in Christ, all of the effects of *original guilt* are removed – the believer, included in the “race” of Christ, is freed from *both* the guilt of personal sin *and* the guilt of being a part of Adam’s race
“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.” (Romans 5:18)
 1. **i.e.** justification = we are no longer guilty for *just being human* (a *standard being erased*)
 - c. **the Christian is no longer guilty before God, and is free to live without the crushing despair caused by past sinfulness or present temptation**
 1. **i.e.** this is *not* to say that we no longer need to repent of our sin or take grace lightly
2. freedom from the condemning wrath of God – the propitiation of Christ taking wrath upon himself
 - a. by faith in his propitiatory death, we are freed from the condemning wrath of God *in hell*
 - b. in Christ, the wrath against those who rebel against God (present tense!) is “absorbed” by him, freeing believers from *both* the wrath of God in this world *and* the wrath of God in eternity
“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth ... In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (Romans 1:18; 1 John 4:10)
 1. **i.e.** justification = we are no longer guilty for *just being human* (a *standard being erased*)
 - c. **the Christian is no longer under the wrath of God, and is free to live without the debilitating fear caused by the threat of temporal punishment now or eternal punishment in hell**
 1. **i.e.** this is *not* to say that God doesn’t discipline us in this life to conform us to his image
3. freedom from the severity and curse of the law – the satisfaction of Christ in fully keeping the law
 - a. by faith in *both* his death *and* his *sinless life*, we are freed from the standard of *performance*
 - b. in Christ, all of the requirements of the *law* are fully met – the believer is unshackled from the **“hamster wheel”** of self-righteousness, the never-achievable perfection of the law for justification
“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ But the law is not of faith, rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us ...” (Galatians 3:10-13)
 1. **i.e.** the sinless life of Christ *satisfies* every aspect of the law for those to whom it is *imputed*
 - c. **the Christian is no longer under law to satisfy God, and is free to live outside the suffocating perfection of personal performance under God’s standards or man’s**
 1. **note:** this will become a *key point* in the discussion of the *opposite* of Christian liberty
4. **the primary layer of Christian liberty is the freedom the born-again enjoy before God – this is where the believer’s hope truly lies, even in the face of the loss of freedom in this world**

c. the secondary layer of Christian Liberty

“It also includes their deliverance from this present evil age, bondage to Satan, the dominion of sin, the suffering of afflictions, the fear and sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation.”

1. deliverance from this present evil age – freedom from this world as our only home
 - a. *“present evil age” (Gal. 1:4)* = the totality of the fallen systems of thought and action in this world
 1. the time between the Fall of Adam and the Parousia of Christ – the “age” of sinful humanity (evil)
 - b. believers, however, are no longer “trapped” in this world, but are looking forward to a greater kingdom
 1. the secularist has no other world to look forward to – all that he can “experience” is here-and-now
 - c. **the Christian has been delivered from this world into the kingdom of heaven, and is free to live in this world in anticipation of a greater age to come**
2. deliverance from bondage to Satan – freedom from the power of the master of sin in this world
 - a. *“power of Satan” (Acts 26:18)* = the influence of the prince of lies over the minds and hearts of men
 1. the ancient serpent that tempted Eve into sin, and now feeds a steady diet of lies into an evil worldview
 2. **i.e.** he continues to use his *subtlety* to influence reprobate men to believe lies (**note James 3:14f**)
 - b. believers, however, have been given *“wisdom from above” (James 3:17f)*, a worldview of *revealed truth*
 - c. **the Christian has been delivered from the power of lies, and is free to live a life that is based on truth and revelation and sincerity**
3. deliverance from the dominion of sin – freedom from the slavery of sin controlling our actions
 - a. *“no dominion over you” (exegete Romans 6:8-14)* = the **second greatest** promise in Scripture
 1. **v. 8**, those included in the decree died *vicariously* with Christ on the cross, and rose with him also
 2. **v. 9**, since Christ died and rose, death has no dominion over him: he lives now without an “end” in death
 3. **v. 10**, the death he experienced abolished the power of sin, for all his own, granting them life

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- a. the *second* Adam successfully **took dominion** over all things, fulfilling the command of **Gen. 1:28**
- 4. **v. 11**, so, the believer must *also* consider himself dead to sin and resurrected to a new life (in Christ)
 - a. in our *vicarious* connection to Christ, we must consider ourselves resurrected *as he is*
- 5. **v. 12**, therefore (imperative) the believer must not allow sin to rule him or have control over his life
- 6. **v. 13**, the believer must use his “*members*” (his body) for righteousness, not sinful purposes
- 7. **v. 14**, why – because sin will have no “*dominion*” over the believer – he is set free *from its power*
- b. **question:** why would Christ, having defeated the devil and the power of death, having taken dominion over all things in completing the **Creation Mandate**, leave his own *under that power*?
 - 1. **answer:** he does not – Christians are no longer enslaved to sinful habits – true, we may certainly “give” ourselves over to such things at times (*i.e.* in concupiscence), but we are not *enslaved* to them
- c. **the Christian has been delivered from the power of sin, and is free to live a life of holiness and righteousness, under the sanctifying power of the Spirit and the Word**
- 4. deliverance from the suffering of afflictions – freedom from the “purposelessness” of suffering
 - a. afflictions = the normal course of difficulty in life, experience by all in a fallen world (*see John 16:33*)
 - b. “*works all things ... good*” (**Romans 8:28**) = the providence of God whereby he ordains all that comes to pass *according to his decree*, giving **purpose** to all circumstances of life (both good and evil)
 - c. **the Christian has been delivered from the hopelessness of suffering, and is free to live a life of purpose, knowing that God has purpose in everything that happens**
- 5. deliverance from the fear and sting of death, the victory of the grave = freedom from the fear of death
 - a. **IMO:** a fear of *dying* (as a process) is perfectly normal – it is the fear of what comes *after* that is in view
 - b. “*victory*” (**1 Cor. 15:54f**) = the sense in which death “gets the last word” – as though *this life* is all there is
 - 1. the reprobate demands enjoyments *now* because (for him) there is no possibility of them *after this life*
 - 2. the believer, however, looks to the *resurrection* as the source of his hope – he does not have to wallow in the “disappointment” of not achieving or “having” everything *in this world*
 - b. **the Christian has been delivered from the fear of death, and is free to live a life of contentment, knowing that his eternal reward is far greater than any temporal pleasures he might enjoy here**
- 6. deliverance from everlasting damnation = freedom from eternal reprobation (*see above*)
- 7. **the secondary layer of Christian liberty is the freedoms the born-again enjoy in this world – the freedom to recognize our citizenship in a higher kingdom and to live as those who belong to it**

The Extension of Christian Liberty

a. the *extended* freedoms of Christian Liberty (the *extended* layer)

“In addition, it includes their free access to God and their obedience to Him, not from slavish fear but from a childlike love and willing mind.”

- 1. the addition of free access to God = the freedom to enter with confidence into the very presence of the Creator
 - a. “*draw near*” (**Hebrews 10:19-22**) = the work of the Great High Priest to open the presence of a holy God to sinful man, so that they can come “*in full assurance*” by faith into a perfect relationship with him
 - 1. *i.e.* the adoption by the Father of the “brothers” of Christ into his *native* family (**Romans 8:14-17**)
 - b. the reprobate are *precluded* from the presence of God by *their own wishes* – hell is where the reprobate will spend eternity *purposely hiding* from the “presence” of God in their rebellion
 - c. **the Christian has been given the extended freedom of being able to approach God, and is free to enjoy the presence of the Spirit of God delivering all of the benefits of belonging to the royal family**
- 2. the addition of childlike obedience to God = the freedom to obey God with a childlike love and willing mind
 - a. “*no fear in love*” (**1 John 4:18**) = because the relationship between God and the believer is based on *love* (not performance, *see above*), the believer is free to obey God *because he wants to*, not because he is “coerced” to do so through “rules and regulations”
 - 1. *i.e.* faith is based on the **completed** work of Christ, not a “synergism” between our work and his
 - b. **the Christian has been given the extended freedom of being able to love God, and is free to show this love as a true child of God under a willing regenerated heart and mind**
- 3. **the extended layer of Christian liberty is the freedom the born-again enjoy beyond this world – the freedom to truly live, with full access to God himself and a new nature that lives in childlike love**

b. the *expanded* freedoms of Christian Liberty (in the N.T.)

“All these liberties were also enjoyed in their essence by believers under the law. But under the New Testament the liberty of Christians is further expanded. They are free from the yoke of the ceremonial law to which the Jewish congregation was subjected; they have greater confidence of access to the throne of grace; and they have a fuller supply of God’s free Spirit than believers under the law usually experienced.”

- 1. the expanded benefit of being free from the ceremonial law
- 2. the expanded benefit of a greater confidence in grace over law
- 3. the expanded benefit of a fuller supply of the Spirit

c. the *important* freedoms of Christian Liberty

- 1. **the effect of the work of Christ, in faith, is a liberty many in the church cannot understand – we must never substitute a lesser freedom for it, even as a part of the ordinary life of the church**

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