**'Spiritual Liberty and Spiritual Offense'**

1. Introduction to what we will cover: wine or grape juice, praying in public, wearing nylons, facial hair, head coverings, alcohol, music, meds, Lord's Day games, pronouns and prayer, clothes, earth?
2. Several passages to form our foundation:

1 Cor 8:1-13 and then continues a thread through chap. 10

Rom. 14:13-23

Galatians 6:2-4.

Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 20: Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience

1. The **liberty** which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their **freedom** from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the 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 a willing mind. All 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 f**uller communications of the free Spirit of God**, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.
2. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free 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. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.
3. 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.
4. 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 pretence 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 their 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 conversation; 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 (and by the power of the Civil Magistrate – in original but removed in by American Presbyterians in 1789 because this paragraph ultimately deals with concerns in the church and not the state, in other words the state cannot punish someone who has difference with his church).
5. Some issues we need to deal with: Who is the weaker brother? What is licentious liberty?

John Calvin in Institutes, 3.19.11. An offence is spoken of as received when something, otherwise not wickedly or unseasonably committed, is by ill will or malicious intent of mind wrenched into occasion for offense. Here is no “given” offense, but those wicked interpreters baselessly so understand it. None but the weak is made to stumble by the first kind of offense, but the second gives offense to persons of bitter disposition and pharisaical pride. Accordingly, we shall call the one the offense of the weak and the other that of the Pharisees. Thus we shall so temper the use of our freedom as to allow for the ignorance of our weak brothers, but for the rigor of the Pharisees, not at all!

1. Paul is not trying to leave the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in his weakness.

We all have heard the saying, let your \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ be your guide or follow your conscience. Is this bible or good advice?

Sometimes we are asking the wrong questions, and the temptation is to simply want answers, can we do this or that and why not. Our children have asked the same questions.

The real freedom we need to consider and focus on is being freed to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ without any bondage or constraint, it is to pursue righteousness in hope in all things.

1. Let’s take this scenario: an unbeliever invites two believers to his house for a meal. One of the believers has a strong, biblically-informed conscience. He knows there is nothing wrong with eating meat offered to idols. But the other believer has a weak conscience. He's fearful of eating pagan meat. His conscience will be defiled if he eats, and therefore for him to eat would be a sin.  So what does the strong believer do? He wants to glorify God, and he wants to further the gospel, but he also wants to use his liberty for the good of his own brother. What does he do?  Notice that he is in a real dilemma here. If he refuses the meat offered to him, he offends his host, the unbeliever. But if he accepts the meat, he will hurt the brother with the weaker conscience. What is a believer to do in a situation like that?

1. Our liberty is not only freedom spiritually from bondage to sin, to the curse of the law, but it is freedom from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of men. 1 Cor. 10:29

In a sense we can say that Christian liberty is the freedom to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ as much as we can, to live as much in righteousness as we can. Sin is slavery, but a certain kind of liberty is also slavery, when it is engaged in sin, when we do not pursue righteousness. Slavery to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is freedom but not freedom to do whatever we want.

Hodge says, Christian liberty is not an absolute liberty to do as we choose, but a regulated liberty to obey God without hindrance from man. It is a freedom usurped authority, in order that we may be more perfectly subject to the only legitimate authority.

Some else put it this way: “If God has commanded us to be subject to the lawful commands of the authorities whom he has appointed, then the Christian liberty that he has granted us could ever exempt us from those obligations. Christian freedom is a radical and counter cultural call to sere those around us in obedience to the law of God. Christians who best know their freedom in Christ will strive to be the very best citizens and the very best church members.”

1. Believers are not to be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ by people who are perpetually offended about things God says we have liberty with, no matter how much they protest.

D.A. Carson says it this way:

“Incidentally, one should not confuse the logic of 1 Corinthians 8:9-10 with the stance that finds a strong legalist saying to a believer who thinks that eating meat offered to idols is acceptable, “You may think that such action is legitimate, but every time you do it you are offending me—and since you are not permitted to offend me, therefore you must not engage in that activity.” The person who utters words to that effect, however, is in no danger of being swayed by the actions of those who engage in the activity. They are using a manipulative argument to defend a misguided position in which they are convinced that the act of eating meat that has been offered to idols is invariably wrong. In other words, they operate out of the conviction that this activity lies in [an] indisputable column—and thus they find themselves at odds with Paul’s wisdom and insight.”

1. All of this relates to family so fathers, church so elders, and society so civil authorities as God has appointed each of these.

Our God is the freest being that ever was or will be and yet he is bound, bound to his own righteousness and character and being. God is good and he does good, is righteous in all his ways and works and in him there is no shadow of change. When we then become most like him will be truly freest. To enjoy our God to fullest, not seeking our own will but God’s and seeking to be a servant to others. Freed from sin, we become the servants of Christ. Christian liberty is more about how and why we do what we do, than about what you can and cannot do in your life.