



# NEW LIFE

## BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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*"For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:9)*

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My dear readers,

## Christian Freedom

By John Calvin, Institute of the Christian Religion 3.19.1-13

### Part 2 of 2

*[Note: Last Sabbath, we published the first 7 sections of this excellent and well-balanced treatise on Christian Freedom. In the first part, we saw that Christian Freedom has three aspects. The first aspect is freedom from law-righteousness. That is: believers do not need to, nor should they attempt to, keep the law in order to have a right standing before God. The second aspect is freedom from the constraint of keeping the law. That is: believers keep the law out of loving and willing obedience and not out of necessity or compulsion. The third aspect is freedom in "Things Indifferent." That is: Christians must not allow their conscience to be held captive to things which God has not indicated whether it is right or wrong to use. In this concluding part comprising 8-13, we shall be considering a few implications, which arise particularly out of the third aspect of Christian Freedom.]*

### 8. Freedom in the use of God's Gifts for His Purposes

"I know," says Paul, "that nothing is common" (taking "common" in the sense of "profane"), "but it is common for anyone who thinks it common" [Rom 14:14]. With these words Paul subjects all outward things to our freedom, provided our minds are assured that the basis for such freedom stands before God.

But if any superstitious opinion poses a stumbling block for us, things of their own nature pure are for us corrupt. For this reason, he adds: "Happy is he who does not judge himself in what he approves. But he who judges, if he eats, is condemned, because he does not eat of faith. For whatever is not of faith is sin" [Rom 14:22-23].

Amidst such perplexities, do not those who show themselves rather bold by daring all things confidently, nonetheless to this extent turn away from God? But they who are deeply moved in any fear of God, when they are compelled to commit many things against their conscience, are overwhelmed and fall down with fright. All such persons receive none of God's gifts with thanksgiving, yet Paul testifies that by this alone all things are sanctified for our use [1 Tim 4:4-5]. Now I mean that thanksgiving which proceeds from a mind that recognizes in His gifts the kindness and goodness of God. For many of them, indeed, understand them as good things of God which they use, and praise God in His works; but inasmuch as they have not been persuaded that these

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good things have been given to them, how can they thank God as the giver?

To sum up, we see whither this freedom tends: namely, that we should use God's gifts for the purpose for which He gave them to us, with no scruple of conscience, no trouble of mind. With such confidence our minds will be at peace with Him, and will recognize His liberality toward us. For here are included all ceremonies whose observance is optional, that our consciences may not be constrained by any necessity to observe them but may remember that by God's beneficence their use is for edification made subject to Him.

## **9. Against the Abuse of Christian Freedom for Gluttony and Luxury!**

But we must carefully note that Christian freedom is, in all its parts, a spiritual thing. Its whole force consists in quieting frightened consciences before God—that are perhaps disturbed and troubled over forgiveness of sins, or anxious whether unfinished works, corrupted by the faults of our flesh, are pleasing to God, or tormented about the use of things indifferent. Accordingly, it is perversely interpreted both by those who allege it as an excuse for their desires that they may abuse God's good gifts to their own lust and by those who think that freedom does not exist unless it is used before men, and consequently, in using it have no regard for weaker brethren.

Today men sin to a greater degree in the first way. There is almost no one whose resources permit him to be extravagant who does not delight in lavish and ostentatious banquets, bodily apparel, and domestic architecture; who does not wish to outstrip his neighbours in all sorts of elegance; who does not wonderfully flatter himself in his opulence. And all these things are defended under the pretext of Christian freedom. They say that these are things indifferent. I admit it, provided they are used indifferently. But when they are coveted too greedily, when they are proudly boasted of, when they are lavishly squandered, things that were of themselves otherwise lawful are certainly defiled by these vices.

Paul's statement best distinguishes among things indifferent: "to the clean all things are clean, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is clean, inasmuch as their minds and consciences are corrupted" [Tit 1:15]. For why are the rich cursed, who have their consolation, who are full, who laugh now [Luke 6:24-25], who sleep on ivory couches [Amos 6:4], "who join field to field" [Isa 5:8], whose feasts have harp, lyre, timbrel, and wine [Isa 5:12]? Surely ivory and gold and riches are good creations of God, permitted, indeed appointed, for men's use by God's providence. And we have never been forbidden to laugh, or to be filled, or to join new possessions to old or ancestral ones, or to delight in musical harmony, or to drink wine. True indeed. But where there is plenty, to wallow in delights, to gorge oneself, to intoxicate mind and heart with present pleasures and be always panting after new ones—such are very far removed from a lawful use of God's gifts.

Away, then, with uncontrolled desire, away with immoderate prodigality, away with vanity and arrogance—in order that men may with a clean conscience cleanly use God's gifts. Where the heart is tempered to this soberness they will have a rule for lawful use of such blessings. But should this moderation be lacking, even base and common pleasures are too much. It is a true saying that under coarse and rude attire there often dwells a heart of purple, while sometimes under silk and purple is hid a simple humility. Thus let every man live in his station, whether slenderly, or moderately,

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or plentifully, so that all may remember God nourishes them to live, not to luxuriate. And let them regard this as the law of Christian freedom; to have learned with Paul, in whatever state they are, to be content; to know how to be humble and exalted; to have been taught, in any and all circumstances, to be filled and to hunger, to abound and to suffer want [Phil 4:11-19].

## **10. Against the Abuse of Christian Freedom to the Injury of the Weak!**

In this respect also many err; they use their freedom indiscriminately and unwisely, as though it were not sound and safe if men did not witness it. By this heedless use they very often offend weak brothers. You can see some persons today who reckon their freedom does not exist unless they take possession of it by eating meat on Fridays. I do not blame them for eating meat, but this false notion must be driven from their minds. For they ought to think that from their freedom they obtain nothing new in men's sight but before God, and that it consists as much in abstaining as in using. If they understand that it makes no difference in God's sight whether they eat meat or eggs, wear red or black clothes, this is enough and more. The conscience, to which the benefit of such freedom was due, is now set free. Consequently, even if men thereafter abstain from meat throughout life, and ever wear clothes of one colour, they are not less free. Indeed, because they are free, they abstain with a free conscience. But in having no regard for their brothers' weakness they slip most disastrously, for we ought so to bear with it that we do not heedlessly allow what would do them the slightest harm.

But it is sometimes important for our freedom to be declared before men. This I admit. Yet we must with the greatest caution hold to this limitation, that we do not abandon the care of the weak, whom the Lord has so strongly commended to us.

## **11. On Offenses**

Here, then, I shall say something about offenses —how they are to be distinguished, which ones avoided, which overlooked. From this we may afterward be able to determine what place there is for our freedom among men. Now I like that common distinction between an offense given and one received, inasmuch as it has the clear support of Scripture and properly expresses what is meant.

If you do anything with unseemly levity, or wantonness, or rashness, out of its proper order or place, so as to cause the ignorant and the simple to stumble, such will be called an offense given by you, since by your fault it came about that this sort of offense arose. And, to be sure, one speaks of an offense as given in some matter when its fault arises from the doer of the thing itself.

An offense 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, 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!

For Paul fully shows us in many passages what must be yielded to weakness.

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"Receive," he says, "those weak in faith." [Rom 14:1] Also: "Let us no more pass judgment upon one another, but rather not put a stumbling block or occasion to fall in the way of our brother" [Rom 14:13 p.], and many passages with the same meaning, which are more suitably sought in their place than referred to here. The sum is: "We who are strong ought to bear with the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves; but let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to edify him" [Romans 15:1-2]. In another place: "But take care lest your freedom in any way cause offense to those who are weak." [1 Cor 8:9] Likewise: "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience." [1 Cor 10:25.] "Now I say your conscience, not another's. ... In short, be so that you may give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God." [1 Cor 10:29,32 p.] Also, in another passage: "You were called to freedom, brothers, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh but through love be servants of one another." [Gal 5:13.] So indeed it is. Our freedom is not given against our feeble neighbours, for love makes us their servants in all things; rather it is given that, having peace with God in our hearts, we may also live at peace with men.

We learn from the Lord's words how much we ought to regard the offense of the Pharisees: He bids us let them alone because they are blind leaders of the blind. [Mt 15:14.] His disciples had warned him that the Pharisees had been offended by his talk. [Mt 15:12.] He answered that they were to be ignored and their offense disregarded.

## **12. On the Right Use of Christian Freedom and the Right Renunciation of it**

Still the matter will remain in doubt unless we grasp whom we are to consider weak, whom Pharisees. If this distinction is removed, I do not see what use for freedom really remains in relation to offenses, for it will always be in the greatest danger. But Paul seems to me most clearly to have defined, both by teaching and by example, how far our freedom must either be moderated or purchased at the cost of offenses. When Paul took Timothy into his company, he circumcised him. [Acts 16:3] But he could not be brought to circumcise Titus. [Gal 2:3] Here was a diversity of acts but no change of purpose or mind. That is, in circumcising Timothy, although he was "free from all," he made himself "a slave to all"; and "to the Jews" he "became as a Jew" in order to win Jews; to those under the law he "became as one under the law... that" he "might win those under the law" [1 Cor 9:19-20]; "all things to all men that" he "might save many" [1 Cor 9:22], as he elsewhere writes. We have due control over our freedom if it makes no difference to us to restrict it when it is fruitful to do so.

What he had in view when he strongly refused to circumcise Titus he testifies when he thus writes: "But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek, but because of false brethren surreptitiously brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom, which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage—to them we did not yield submission, even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved among you" [Gal 2:3-5]. We have need also to assert our freedom if through the unjust demands of false apostles it be endangered in weak consciences. We must at all times seek after love and look toward the edification of our neighbour. "All things," he says elsewhere, "are lawful to me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good but another's." [1 Cor 10:23-24] Nothing is plainer than this rule: that we should use our freedom if it results in the edification of our neighbour, but if it does not help...

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our neighbour, then we should forgo it. There are those who pretend a Pauline prudence in abstaining from freedom, while there is nothing to which they apply it less than to the duties of love. To protect their own repose, they wish all mentioned of freedom to be buried; when it is no less important sometimes to use our neighbours' freedom for their good and edification than on occasion to restrain it for their own benefit. But it is the part of a godly man to realize that free power in outward matters has been given him in order that he may be the more ready for all the duties of love.

### **13. We must not on Pretext of Love of Neighbour Offend Against God**

All that I have taught about avoiding offenses I mean to be referred to things intermediate and indifferent. For the things necessary to be done must not be omitted for fear of any offense. For as our freedom must be subordinated to love, so in turn ought love itself to abide under purity of faith. Surely, it is fitting here also to take love into consideration, even as far as to the altar [cf. Mt 5:23-24]; that is, that for our neighbour's sake we may not offend God. We must not approve the intemperance of those who do nothing without raising a tumult and who prefer to tear into everything rather than open a matter gently. But those people also are not to be listened to who, after making themselves leaders in a thousand sorts of wickedness, pretend that they must act so as not to cause offense to their neighbours [cf. 1 Cor 8:9]; as if they were not in the meantime building up their neighbours' consciences into evil, especially when they ever stick fast in the same mud without hope of getting out. And suave fellows are they who, whether their neighbour is to be instructed in doctrine or in example of life, say he must be fed with milk while they steep him in the worst and deadliest opinions. Paul recalls that he fed the Corinthians with milk. [1 Cor 3:2.] But if the papal Mass had then been among them, would he have performed sacrifice to furnish them with milk? No, for milk is not poison. They are therefore lying when they claim to be feeding those whom they are cruelly killing under the guise of blandishments. Granted that this sort of dissimulation is to be approved for the moment—how long will they feed their children with this same milk? For if these never grow up sufficiently to be able to bear even some light food at least, it is certain that they were never brought up on milk.

Two reasons prevent me from contending with them more sharply: first, their banalities are scarcely worth refuting, since they are deservedly despised among all sane men; secondly, I do not want to do again what I have already abundantly demonstrated in special treatises. Only let my readers remember this: with whatever obstacles Satan and the world strive to turn us away from God's commands or delay us from following what he appoints, we must nonetheless vigorously go forward. Then, whatever dangers threaten, we are not free to turn aside even a fingernail's breadth from this same God's authority, and it is not lawful under any pretext for us to attempt anything but what he allows.

*Adapted from Pilgrim Covenant Church, Singapore*

# WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

## CHURCH THEME: WALK IN THE NEWNESS OF LIFE (Romans 6:4)

Our **worship services** begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm**.

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
<b>Morning</b>	<b>Today: 03/06/2007</b>	<b>Next Week: 10/06/2007</b>	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	John Poh	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Speaker:</i>	Rev Lim Chee Boon	Rev Lim Chee Boon	
<i>Message:</i>	Who is a Better Master?	What Example?	NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
<i>Text:</i>	1 Kings 11:41-12:4	1 Kings 15:1-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Family Worship</b> for the month of Jun 07 will be held at Sis Yetta's home. For further details, please see Pr Mok.</li> <li>• <b>Prayer Requests:</b> (1) Pray for the students that God will grant them health and wisdom as they prepare for their coming examinations. (2) Continue to pray for Elder Ford who is experiencing knee pain. (3) Pray for Barbara Tibby who has develop early stage Alzheimer. (4) Pray for Sue Teoh who has abdominal pain which requires further scan to determine cause.</li> <li>• <b>Tracting on the Lord's Day:</b> Those who are interested, please gather at the main entrance at 10.30am.</li> <li>• <b>School of Theology at Metropolitan Tabernacle:</b> The theme for this year programme is "The Glory of Christ in the Working Church". It will be held from 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> Jul 2007. For further details, please help yourself to the application form available at the Book Table.</li> <li>• <b>Memory Verse 1<sup>st</sup> Review Exercise:</b> The closing date is today.</li> <li>• <b>Gentle Reminder:</b> Please switch off your mobile phone or put it in silent mode during worship services. To keep the sanctity of worship, please do not bring food and beverages into the sanctuary.</li> <li>• <b>Those serving on the Lord's Day:</b> Please gather behind the pulpit area at 10.30am for prayer.</li> </ul>
<i>Organist:</i>	Anthony	Yanning	
<b>Evening</b>			
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Speaker:</i>	Rev Lim Chee Boon	Rev Lim Chee Boon	
<i>Message:</i>	Making a Positive Impact	Dare to be Different	
<i>Text:</i>	Matthew 5:1-13	1 Thessalonians 4:1-12	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Feng Qian	Joy	
Other Duties			
	<b>Today: 03/06/2007</b>	<b>Next Week: 10/06/2007</b>	
<i>Ushers</i>	Daniel/Joyce	John/Sue Teoh	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	Joyce	Carol	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Volunteers (Hwan Jing)	Constance	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>Bible Study:</i>	BBK / DHW	BBK / DHW	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 08 June	7:30 pm	<b>Young Adults Fellowship:</b> Led by: Rev Lim Chee Boon	
Sat 09 June	4.00 pm	<b>Prayer Meeting &amp; Bible Study:</b> Spkr: Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
Last Week's Worship Service Collections			
<b>Offering:</b> £370.19		<b>Lunch:</b> £44.01	
Memory Verse			
<i>Previous Week (May 07 Wk 4): Acts 2:21</i>			
And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.			
<i>This Week (June 07 Wk 1): Matthew 11:28-30</i>			
28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.			
29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.			
30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.			