

Christian Liberty

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[0 : 00] I want to begin with Galatians chapter 5 and verse 1. Galatians chapter 5 and verse 1. We're told there to stand fast if our freedom has made us free.

For freedom we're told Christ has made us free. The words remind us that our liberty is not something peripheral or secondary.

It is one of our most basic privileges in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was in fact for this freedom that our Savior died.

And that means that our liberty is something which is quite fundamental to our whole position as the people of God. Something to hold fast.

Something to cling to. Something to cherish for ourselves and to respect in others. And that in turn lies on something perhaps even more fundamental.

[1 : 17] That is the fact of redemption. Because the world to redeem is simply the world to liberate or the world to free.

To be redeemed is to be liberated. It is to be free. And that is before us the fact that Christ shed his blood to secure our liberty as the children of God.

That is why this whole issue is so important. We I think have been conditioned to regard our freedom as something that we can negotiate on, can dispense with, can trade with.

Something that lies on the margins of Christian privilege. Not at all, says Paul, we have been redeemed for freedom.

And the price of that freedom was nothing less than the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. That means that when we begin to behave as slaves, we are expressing contempt for redemption and for the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 53] It means that when we infringe the liberty of others, we deny them our redemption privilege purchased by the blood of our Savior.

And so therefore Paul is insisting, liberty is one of our foundation privileges, liberty is one of our foundation privileges, liberty is one of our foundation privileges, liberty is one of our foundation privileges, at the price of his own blood.

I want to ask first of all, from what are we free? What is the content of this liberty which we have in Jesus Christ?

It means, to begin with, freedom from the Mosaic law. Now to us I suppose that is something that isn't all that important.

But in those first days of Christ's church, this was an enormous problem. There were those who wanted to impose on the community believers all the law of Moses, circumcision and all its appurtenances, and of course also the whole content of the yoke of Rabbidism.

[4 : 29] And that was a very great burden for God's people. And it was felt by them to be such an emancipation, to be freed in Christ from this whole Mosaic yoke, and from rabbinical obligation.

So our liberty is first and foremost, freedom from the Mosaic yoke. Now, I suppose that seems to you very remote.

But there is, in fact, in America today, a movement known as Theonomy, which wants to impose on the churches of Christ all the legislation of the Old Testament.

And that movement, in fact, has its origins and roots in North American Calvinism. And that reminds us that the mentality that wants to go back to law, that wants to go back even to the whole of the Mosaic ordinances, is really endemic to human nature.

It's very difficult to eliminate. And that's why I begin by insisting on this, that in Christ we are freed from this Mosaic yoke.

[5 : 57] We are freed from this bondage of Old Testament ordinances. Secondly, we are freed from the curse of the law.

We are freed from the curse of the law. Now, we are freed from the law itself.

The law that is God's law in the Decalogue. God's law, our law is still binding. We are bound by every single imperative that God has given to His Church.

To all those great sanctities of truth and life and marriage and so on. We are bound by all of these. But we are free from the curse of the law.

The law no longer has the authority to accuse the child of God or to instill in its heart the fear of final condemnation.

[7 : 06] We are still bound by the precepts. We are still bound to live as God's people according to the law.

But the law no longer has the right to condemn the people of God and to fill them with foreboding in the prospect of the final judgment.

We are free from the law's curse. And we are free, thirdly, from the dominion of Satan and sin.

We are free from the dominion of Satan and the dominion of sin. Now, I know that many folk find that difficult to believe, difficult to accept.

What I'm saying is not that we are free from sin. Nor are we free from satanic influence. Sin still rages in the believer.

[8 : 11] And Satan still has access to the belief. And sometimes in backsliding, it's even true that Satan has us.

We find, in fact, the apostle Peter of the Lord asked himself to Satan, get thee behind me, Satan. There are times in our lives when Satan has almost taken God's child over. And yet, the almost is important.

Sin rages, Satan influences, but it doesn't reign. Satan influences, but he does not dominate. He is not in control.

We are not slaves. Let's put it to you this way. In our natural sin as men and sinners, our wills are enslaved.

[9 : 15] They're in a state of bondage. That means that they are absolutely incapable of any spiritual good accompanying salvation.

The Bible is the language of the Reformed Confessions, and it is, of course, very, very strong language. We are absolutely incapable of any spiritual good accompanying salvation.

So I think that no matter how somberly we paint the power of indwelling sin in a child of God, it is a betrayal of the grace of God and a contravention of biblical teaching to suggest that the believer, that is the saved man of the saved woman, is absolutely incapable of any spiritual good.

That is simply not true of a child of God. Certainly, there is indwelling sin. Certainly, there is the flesh. Certainly, sin rages, but it does not reign.

It has been a historic weakness of Reformed theology that it has been too prepared to accommodate sin in the life of a Christian.

[10 : 49] Now, of course, sin is there. But this believer is not dominated by Satan. He is able to believe. He is able to repent.

He is able to love God, to love his neighbor, to see beauty in Christ, to desire Christ. He is able to show spiritual stamina and sobriety and able to experience spiritual growth.

So, all that happens to a man in whom there is indwelling sin, in whom there is still the flesh. But as I said, it is a betrayal of biblical teaching to suggest that because of indwelling sin, we are still in bondage to Satan and actually and totally enslaved to sin.

Thank God in our conversions, the dominion of sin has been broken. Our wills have been liberated. And God has given us an ability to render to himself what is a true obedience, even though it is not a perfect obedience.

So then, we are free from the Mosaic law. We are free from the curse of the moral law. We are free from the spiritual dominion of sin and Satan.

[12 : 23] And fourthly, we are free from every doctrine and commandment of men. We are free from every doctrine and commandment of men.

In other words, we are free from human tradition. We are free from all merely human authority. We are not bound by any merely human taboos.

Now, of course, this is the core of this doctrine, the Reformed thought. But it does, in fact, involve two distinct elements.

First of all, we are free from every human principle that contradicts the word of God. We are free from every human principle that contradicts the word of God.

Now, this applies unconditionally, it applies universally, it's true in every single area of life. that no man can be required to do what God's word forbids.

[13 : 40] Now, this principle is not confined to the religious sphere. It is true in the military sphere, in the commercial sphere, in the professional sphere, it's true in the medical sphere, it's true in every single sphere of life.

I can't be required by any human authority to contradict the will of God. Now, that can produce some very serious problems.

For example, a military commander has no right in any circumstance to require someone to violate the will of God.

It is true again in the political sphere. That was a great principle behind the Nuremberg war trials, where it was established that the mere fact of a command which came from the supreme Nazi authority from the Fuhrer himself could not be alleged excuse for the perpetration of atrocities.

It was no use saying but I was commanded I was required to do it by Hitler himself. It is not vested in any military power or any political power to require what God forbids.

[15 : 17] And that is even true in the domestic sphere. A parent has no right to command any child to do what God forbids.

And that can put a believing child in a very difficult situation. Suppose a non-Christian parent requires a Christian child to do something for him of the Lord's day.

What is that child to do? No authority no matter how lawful and some authority is lawful parental military political and so on.

They all have lawful policies but they have no right to require anyone to do what God's word forbids to take a life to steal property to falsify no power no authority has that right.

In other words we are free from any obligation that contravenes the word of God. But the second principle is more difficult.

[16 : 36] We are free from every human directive which is additional to the word of God. Now I hope that you've grasped that one fairly precisely.

We are free from every human directive that is additional to the word of God. And I say I hope you've got it correctly because it is in fact a false principle.

It is incomplete. We are free from every human directive which is additional to scripture provided that is in the realm of faith and life.

In the realm of the spiritual of the ecclesiastical we are free from not only what contravenes God's word but from what supplements God's word.

Now in its first form my principle was false. My principle then was free from every human directive that is additional to scripture.

[17 : 55] That was false because in many areas of life human directives inevitably are additional and supplemental to scripture.

The great body for example of parliamentary statute law is additional to the word of God. For example vexatious things like speed restrictions on roads are additional to the word of God. And the poll tax is additional to the word of God. Now that doesn't mean that they aren't binding. They are supplementary to the word of God.

But they are legitimate directives emanating from a lawful authority. And I'll come back to that. But in the area of faith and life, in the life of the church of God, no member of that church can be bound by a taboo or a directive which lacks the sanction of scripture itself.

Now this is the crucial area because of course in the church of God there has always been a tendency to multiply directives and to multiply restrictions and taboos.

[19 : 27] That's what Paul calls in his epistle the beggary elements. And of course the difficulty is that not only do human authorities and ministers for example and elders have a tendency to multiply directives but there is something in the believer itself an element of childishness that craves the security of such directives taboos we want to go back to the womb we want someone to tell us what's wrong give us a list of taboos and so very often we find that the church is asked through its committees to give pronouncements on a whole range of topics for example can we belong to a

masonic lodge can young folk go to a disco people want the church to say yes or no to such things now the whole point here is that as believers we are first of all spiritually adults and we're free from the doctrines and commandments of men now in every branch of the church there is a long list of taboos taboos with regard to smoking and drinking and dancing and wearing cosmetics going to football matches and such things the list was certain standard elements also certain variables some of those things right or wrong in given situations things but the problem is the imposition of taboos simply on the basis of human tradition and what this principle means in reformed theology is that as God's people we are free from every doctrine and commandment of men in the area of faith and life no man can impose on another's conscience and say to you must believe this doctrine although it's not in the Bible you must obey this bishop although there is no bishop in the New Testament you must observe this taboo although it's not to be found anywhere in the New Testament you must worship God in this way of this way is not laid down in the New Testament there is this whole tendency on the part of those who read the church to impose restrictions and taboos upon the people of God and our own confession says that is unacceptable because these things have only a human authority now let me again say here is something basic Paul said cling to your freedom our Puritan forebears when they gave us our confession of faith they deemed this principle sufficiently important to the confession now this confession of faith it doesn't contain all doctrines there are many things not mentioned at all in our confession the confession consists only of primary and fundamental doctrines and here in the judgment of his men was one of them this whole idea of liberty in the gospel of Christ so we are free from the mosaic law we are free from the curse of the moral law we are free from the dominion of satan we are free from human traditions a from those that contravene god's word and b from those that supplement god's word in the area of faith and life in that area we ask ourselves is this taboo a biblical one is this law is this form of worship is it imposed by the word of god itself well let me go on to ask a second main question what is the basis of this freedom on what do we found this principle that we are free from the doctrines and commandments of men well it's based on three principles it's based first of all on this that we are members of the family of god we are sons of god now in Galatians 4 Paul brings out that point very beautifully god sent forth the son made of a woman to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive the adoption of sons there is a very intricate movement you see going on there and in summary it's this god son became a slave so that we who are slaves might become sons as the NIV paraphrased it adoption means that we have all the rights of god's children we are members of god's family we are slaves in god's family we are sons and daughters in the family of god now the crucial thing there is this that no outsider has a right to interfere with the internal workings and affairs of the household of god nobody outside the family dare interfere i put it to you as parents and householders yourselves how would you react how do you react when others interfere with your children people try to impose rules and laws upon your family we are members of god's family no outsider has the right to interfere with freedom of members of this family but of course in practice it doesn't emerge side the problem comes the problem comes from inside the problem comes often from those who think they have authority or prestige in the church of god and to therefore feel that it is within their power to interfere with the liberty of god's own children in other words those whom god has made stewards in his family in his household begin to behave as lords i think ministers of bishops of popes i think of elders i think of older christians i think of those who want to tyrannize over the flock of god now the principle is absolutely elementary and crystal clear this is god's family god makes the rules god lays down the taboos and no little minister has the right to come along and say oh god miss this out and so i'm putting it in or god put the silver hand taking it out because in the church of god you see all authority is ministerial the most senior office bearer is only a servant and it is his duty you see to implement god's own law he may be in the kitchen of god's church it's still god's church god made the rules god laid out the laws and none of us has a right to interfere with god's children if that intervention means finding fault with the laws that god has given and that's what so often happens you see the whole mentality but we could have done it better than god god should have forbidden discos god should have forbidden going to football mansions or smoking or whatever god should have and here am i i'm making good god's deficiencies and so i'm laying down that this is taboo in this congregation now it can't be done you see if we accept that we are members of the household of god and the most senior of us is only a steward in god's house and we have no right to lord it over younger and less experienced members of the household of god the second principle

is this our liberty is based on the fact of the sufficiency of scripture now we we all know that you see the word of god is the only rule to direct us the only rule you see and i see the churches of god i see in my own church very often see that there is great lip service to that principle and in some context you know it is imposed with with very great vigor and great rigor the bible the only rule to direct us and so you see people impose on the church a particular form of worship because they say that is the biblical rule and in this church we can't have hymns because they are not in the bible now let me accept that is perfectly true ah but then you see clerical collar you must wear a clerical collar the same people same establishment and you say but purity of worship is not in the bible we have such enormous difficulty being consistent the world is the only rule to direct us it is sufficient for every single purpose of the christian life what are we doing we're saying again you see in practice this should have been in the bible but it isn't so I'm putting it in we're finding fault again we're saying no the bible is not enough that's why some churches are prophets because the bible is not enough it's why the roman church has tradition because the bible is not enough an infallible teaching office because the bible is not enough and we protested the same thing with our old tradition we say the same thing exactly the bible isn't enough we must have more rules and more taboos than there are in the word of god itself and the third principle is this that is even more awkward for me god alone is lord of the conscience first I said that liberty is based on the fact that we are members of the household of god second it's based on the sufficiency and finality of scripture as the word of god and thirdly on this principle that god alone is lord of the conscience now that is a marvelous phrase straight out of a puritan theology which found its whole found I suppose in the

[31 : 44] North America with this affirmation of independence god alone is lord of the conscience you see it doesn't say to us that conscience is autonomous conscience is not autonomous it is not the final court of appeal nor is it self regulating and self monitoring conscience has a lord every human conscience is only an inferior court there is a court superior to conscience namely god himself but god is the only lord of the conscience there is nobody else god and god's word are lord of the conscience but no human authority no church authority can lord it over the consciences of men and women now let me make my way through the resultant difficulty make it as contemporary as I can we are witnessing in this decade of ours a remarkable and unexpected fluorescence of passionate conviction religion there is observable a worldwide fundamentalist phenomenon using that word in its broadest sense affecting not only the christian faith but also notably islam but peripherally also communism and so on now this of course is utterly unexpected and it raises very huge problems because islam for example has shown in response to salman rushti that it's prepared to invoke the power of the sword to suppress certain opinions it is prepared to force conscience and you say to me how horrible but if I look at my own tradition

I don't think that we are all that far removed ourselves from that same attitude let me put it to you for example in the most provocative terms since I'm old enough to survive any resultant feedback now if there is a proposal to build a mosque for example in Stornoway is it right to say that the Muslims of that community enjoy liberty of conscience and we therefore must not to feel the freedom to worship God as they themselves wish to do it do it so my worry is that if Islam preaches and practices intolerance and we Christians practice intolerance we're facing disaster on an appalling scale and the only remedy open to us the only hope open to us is that we shall espouse the principle of toleration with passion and with conviction and that is my position at the moment that we have to allow to others the freedom that we claim for ourselves and that we have no right to invoke the power of the sword against

Muslims but you say to me we westerners we wouldn't use a sword we wouldn't execute them or hang them or slaughter them but you see the whole philosophy of legal process is based on coercion and based on law suppose you forbid Muslims building a mosque suppose they in defiance of that law go ahead and build a mosque what do you do you send for the police the police force which you respect is a form of coercion ultimately arrest and imprisonment that is coercion that is assault do we in fact believe our own principle that the gospel is not to be advanced by carnal weapons that other men's consciences are as important as our consciences and that they will answer to

God not to men and we therefore say here at the heart of reformed theology at the heart of protestant religion is a principle which deserves a passionate commitment it deserves to be asserted with zeal with total spiritual energy paradoxically only if we transfer the passion of militant fundamentalism to the principle of toleration will this world of ours have a chance in the decade to

come otherwise those faiths will grind each other to powder let me ask then a third question and deal with it briefly what are the limitations under which liberty operates here we are as God's people and we are free but is that all is there anything else that comes in to control and qualify the exercise of our Christian liberty well again there are three general principles which I simply articulate as starkly as I can first our liberty is qualified by civil power lawfully exercised it is qualified by civil power lawfully exercised so the qualification is important because civil power isn't always lawfully exercised but when a competent lawful government passes competent laws lawfully then the Christian conscience is bound by those laws even though these laws are supplementary to the word of

[39 : 19] God now this is particularly important when government passes bad law there is a monumentally important distinction between bad law and incompetent law it is possible for a lawful government to pass a competent law which is nevertheless a bad law and my position is that the badness of the law is never a self justification for infringing that particular law that we may think or we may not think that the poll tax for example is a bad law whatever our views on that we are still bound to obey it and to comply with it because however bad it is it is not incompetent it is imposed by a lawful government and the revenue from it is being used for lawful and beneficial purposes so long as government possess competent law we are bound to obey that law and such laws qualify our

Christian liberty secondly our liberty is qualified by ecclesiastical power lawfully exercised Christ now here again the qualification is important that this is the church using its power producing its power in a competent way that is enacting implementing applying God's own rules laws I extend that slightly with some words to my logic by reminding you also that sometimes those who lead the church have to make decisions for which they cannot claim the direct sanction of revelation they can claim its general sanction and beyond that they can claim that they are acting on the base of Christian prudence and common sense for example a Christian church might decide to pronounce a certain day a fast day or a thanksgiving day in doing so it is in inverted commas compelling the attendance of all its members now that is what was seen as a competent and lawful exercise of ecclesiastical power there is a general principle that it is good to have fast days and thanksgiving days but the decision as to what particular day and what time of day is the matter simply for local church office bearers but their decisions restrict limit qualify our own

Christian liberty thirdly and most important our liberty is qualified by the principle that whatever we do we must do it to the glory of God whether therefore you eat or drink or whatever you do do all to the glory of God now of course the historical context of that particular principle was precisely this question of Christian liberty eat and drink was a very specific reference to the problem that faced those early believers that is going to a meal or a feast where there was food that had been offered to idols and the question was is it right to eat this food do you know what's been offered to an idol is it right or wrong to eat this particular food no

Paul's answer was that in general that was completely indifferent the principle was due to the glory of God it depends on the circumstances do the God glorifying thing in a particular situation sometimes you eat sometimes you don't eat sometimes you drink sometimes you don't drink you do the God glorifying thing and that admits I think of many applications it really is never enough to say I am free to do this therefore I shall do it we couldn't of course come into one lifetime all things we're free to do so we have to make judgments this thing is free I am at liberty to do this but is it expedient that is is it for the glory of God that means that even when I face something which really is a matter of liberty a matter of what is called indifference

[45 : 24] I've got to ask the general question what is the God glorifying thing in this situation situation but I also go to ask supplementary questions such as what is for the benefit of God's church in this situation what would edify the church what would build up the church I must always be governed by concern for the people of God will this divide the people of God will this mislead the people of God or is this good for the people of God I've got to ask that I've got to ask is this for the good of the gospel we contextualize Paul says I became all things to all men among the

Jews I lived as a Jew among the Greeks I lived as a Greek it was different to Paul you see those Jewish food laws those Greek food laws habits of dress social custom he simply contextualized same as when William Chalmers Burns went to China he dressed in the Chinese fashion to the Chinese I became as a Chinese what was for the good of the gospel if I do this would it make it more difficult for me to witness to Christ make my witness less acceptable make my witness less

credible there is no doubt at all but in many cultures if you are known to frequent football matches or discos that is the end of your witness so you ask yourself what does this do for the gospel and then you ask will this be beneficial to my own spiritual life sometimes there are things that aren't sins which are weights or impediments let us the apostle says lay aside every weight not only the sins but the weights those things that hold us back

I read something very disturbing recently the claim that nobody ever achieved anything really significant who had hobbies now when I say it's disturbing I mean that my mind is not settled on it but I'm disturbed by it because we live in an age where there is so much pressure easier men to have hobbies we're all threatened with burnout and cracking up and breaking down and so on so we must have releases and hobbies and so on but there is something I think very very searching in this that those people who have achieved significantly have tended to be men of one consuming passion and

I'm not sure but it is one of the devil's current devices for the church's impoverishment to get us ever more involved in a wide variety of leisure pursuits none of them themselves wrong or trivial some of them I accept restorative and in the true sense recreational but I give it to you simply maybe as a principle overstated that these hobbies can imperil achievement professionally and above all spiritually and so I'm saying yes we are free to do this I am free to play golf I played golf once one memorable forenoon I was addicted and I said if I do this again I never stop so I never started because we have to weigh out our temperaments our own inclination to addiction in different directions to obsession with particular pursuits right for others it may be for every other preacher in the world a perfectly right thing to play golf but for one it's not you make up your own mind you see is this good for me is it good for the church of

God is it good for the gospel is it good for my spiritual life do you ask yourself also this will this make men praise God you see the great difficulty with so much that is lawful is its sheer vanity and futility vanity and futility it's lawful and surely there is reason to ask ourselves today how much of our time do we spend doing things that are simply vain and simply empty of course you cannot keep the bow taught all the time we need to relax there are ways of relaxing that all of us must find out for ourselves but you ask is it lawful yes it's vain it's trivial but it's lawful well is it so trivial and so vain that it doesn't make people glorify

[51 : 44] God now I accept that much in life is inevitably vain in the sense of lacking shall I say existential significance depends on the quantity of vanity that we cram into our own lives the proportion of nothingness of futility of the ridiculous of the absurd that we tend to fall a prey to so you see there is this great principle of liberty you are free from every doctrine and commandment of men with the qualifications I've suggested and yet it is never enough for me to know I am free to do this therefore I'll do it because there are always other considerations now let me say it once that these are considerations for me

I never never never have the right to say to somebody else that is not expedient for you if he is free then he himself is the only judge of expediency otherwise we're making it obligatory and non-free it was said of Rabbi Duncan and I hope that we remember this constantly that he had a long creed for himself and a short creed for others and it is very important to us that we should allow others that freedom if people want to go to hear Bob Dylan if people want to play golf then I say yes I protect and respect your liberty to make those decisions but I ask myself a series of different questions and I make my own decisions and I say well I'm content with my

Gaelic music that is no doubt equally feigned and no more but it hoarsen the non-Gaelic music but we make our own decisions you see and we leave others space that is something that the reformed churches have been very very difficult to leave other people's space room to make their own decisions there are general principles the application of these is very often up to the individual but can I leave you on this particular rock that in the last analysis there is nothing indifferent you see we have a list of things indifferent and yet in the actual agony of decision making there is nothing that is indifferent we have we never are faced with moral choices with regard of which we can say these are equal there is the right thing to do not in terms of clear categorical imperatives but for me in my situation there are

I'm sure some Christians who should not listen to Gaelic songs any more than I should play golf that is their decision we can say in general yes Gaelic songs are indifferent but they're not indifferent for me I face a precise situation for me at this time at this place at 6.30 on a Friday evening is this what I should be doing and certainly yes I'm making the whole thing dreadfully serious once again

because it is perilous to trivialize Christian liberty without due care and attention we find ourselves very quickly into antinomianism it's a great burden to be free you see that's why the presupposition of this liberty is that you are an adult child of

God a grown up child of God and you can handle it you are led by the spirit of God that's the context in which you are free so yes we are free from all those human taboos yet the mere fact that we are free to do this does not mean let me get up and do it I must weigh up also those other relevant factors now I'll leave it there it's been rather tedious and tendentious but it has been important to put the position I think fairly precisely any questions if you feel like offering them thank you professor macleod for a lecture which I certainly didn't find tedious it certainly provoked a lot of questions in my own mind but I am now going to give space to all of you and will not impose my questions on the assembly yet are there any questions and will you review sin and will you review sin well sin is really a violation of God's own word not of human taboos or traditions and somebody who simply goes against a human taboo isn't necessarily a sinner

[58 : 05] I would want to know why he's done it if it gives offense to other believers certainly but sin is a clear cut issue which presupposes that somebody's broken God's own law and then I would rebuke it and rebuke myself too I hope before guilty of it but not every breach of a tradition is a sin do you like to understand that this would like a competent law and competent government the short answer is no I wouldn't like to but I try to well I think that a law for government is one that exists constitutionally and which pursues the mandates that God has given to government in other words that it's concerned to be

God's servant it's concerned to seek well being of its own citizens it's concerned to enact laws which correspond to God's own laws and with regard to for example taxation I think it's very important to insist that government should not use the revenue for its own purposes in other words to build itself palaces and secure itself all kinds of luxury power it seems to ■■■■■■■■ in this country we have lawful government and it's also my judgment at the moment digging a hole itself over the politics because it's very it might be very bad legislation but it is not incompetent insofar as it comes from a lawful government and the revenue is being used for a lawful purpose but were that revenue used for wrong purposes I would say that no it was not even competent at a loan good legislation in actual practice I think the bible's position is that all de facto government is good is lawful

I should say that's a general position and only as a subordinate emphasis is there a place for disobeying the government but there is a big place for it in extreme situations but I tend to say that that's similar to the right of a child to kill its father in which I have a vested interest as you can imagine but one doesn't do such things but sometimes it may be the only solution to a problem so in my view it is biblically clear that that we obey the de facto government except in a tiny minority of instances but I'm embarrassed Mr. McKay because the whole question of what is lawful and competent is really obviously very complex and difficult to summarize briefly and with regard to taxation I think one has to ask questions as to where the load has been born evenly by all the population and things of that kind as well but I think that the current government is lawful and the poor tax is competent I think that both are also bad but that's a personal non-theological judgment what do you think that the government is a scriptural view of a properly elected government calling upon its subjects to take up arms in war and in mortal combat well I think in general the government has a right to do that John because I think that defence is the first responsibility of all lawful government and it has to erect both a police force and a military force to secure its own citizens peace and well-being but it seems to me that very very rarely is war justified one has to ask in that instance whether it is a defensive or an aggressive war one has to ask whether it's going to involve significant civilian casualties one has to ask whether whether the use of force in that context is going to create more evil than it actually resolves and I am very close to the position that with modern weaponry nuclear biological chemical weaponry that the just war view is virtually inoperable and I am totally horrified that at the moment there is a linguistic mentality prevalent in large sectors of the western world that doesn't stop to think what's going to happen once we actually unleash our forces against Saddam Hussein because that is going to inevitably escalate

I am gradually discusate it unless I am very much mistaken both sides have said they will not play and that they will fight to win and they will use every weapon available to them and it is very well debating that on television screens but the reality is I think too horrible to contemplate And I think that we should as Christians be very sincerely and ardently praying that that scenario will not occur.

You see, the difficulty is that we transfer our aversion to an individual into the simplistic idea of hitting him on the nose.

[64 : 32] And I detest all that Saddam has done, all he stands for. But I would not want to be provoked into losing my rag with them at the expense of nuclear chemical biological warfare.

But I would have to say again that that is a non-specialist judgment. It's not worth any more than your own is. It's not a theological judgment. Yes, in the bedroom.

Without wishing to take up on every taboo that you mentioned, would you not view with concern a young Christian going to a place of seductive entertainment, sort of a disco?

Would you not view a concern because of their spiritual welfare? Yes, I certainly would, especially if it were to become a pattern of behavior.

In other words, if we were to attend this kind of thing regularly and preferring it to, for example, church gatherings, as can very easily happen. But then you build into the word seductive.

[65 : 52] I'm not sure that all discos are seductive. I have no experience of those things at all that have been done after my day, as you can see. But whatever is seductive, whatever tempted to contravene God's norms in sexual ethics, for example, we would want to say that's quite taboo for a Christian on biblical grounds.

So if we're talking of sleazy discos and nightclubs and so on and so forth, that to me is out of the area of the, quote, indifferent. It's in a different area altogether. My whole instinct is to say that believers don't go to discos.

But I know, in fact, the believers do go to discos, or some do. And I don't encourage or condone it. But I do not feel free to say that that is per se and in all situations a sin.

It must be, I think, in some ways contextualized. This would apply to many other things, too.

I mean, for example, an addiction to TV soap operas would again be a warning that there are things wrong with that spiritual life. Or it could be somebody who's covetous and who's so concerned with the stock market.

[67 : 19] You know, you're into the same problem again. And what's he for that in a person's spiritual life? So I don't want us to categorize a certain class of sins as worldliness because it's a very complex phenomenon.

But I'm in the difficulty in practice that I observe myself virtually all the taboos. I think that I can fairly safely say that. But I defend others' freedom to contravene them if they cannot claim divine sanction.

I played golf balls, never went to a disco, so I must be really good. And I do it. Thank you. Do you. Do you definitely have a gold mlash limite for it and then ■■■■ Yup. approval. We've heard that extremely which in the renewal, which it would be great. Our men are about stabbing halten and aoi ■■■■ we're missing? when people Europe have been distracted and event about glory in that ■■■■. The divine this is the other and make a story a story I'm surprised to do not allow the these techniques to come to all sorts of thing that we are feeding them before said without reading those cues we are into issors let me know that I think that we see not the progress in ■■■■ of the church, although it's interesting. Wow. to us today in this subject of Christianity?

[68 : 24] Well, my view of those principles is that they are all binding, Morach. I can't see any reason at all to conclude that they are not binding on us because they are obviously post-Pentecost, their apostolic decrees, and they go back to the Ahi ordinance of Genesis chapter 9 or thereabouts.

And they forbid fornication, they forbid also eating things stronger and eating blood. And I do find it difficult to make my way around that prohibition towards eating blood in any form.

And Rabbi Duncan, for example, would never eat anything that contained blood. He would never eat hare soup, which was a delicacy in his culture, although not in mine.

But not to be facetious, you know, our whole Scottish black pudding culture is really in serious difficulty over this particular principle. And the principle here is that the life is in the blood.

And blood appeared to our sanctity throughout the scriptures that we maybe are unconscious of. But I feel that all of those ordinances are still binding until proved otherwise.

[69 : 47] And the truth is that we are not going to be able to do that. How do you view the Reconstructionist movement? If you see a minister for those of the key church who was otherwise orthodox but was exposing the monarchy, why would you do that?

Well, I would view it a very, very serious concern. I think for one thing it is anti-confessional because the confession of faith indicates that parts of the Old Testament are no longer binding upon the Christian church at all.

But we have had in the college students of this persuasion recent years, should have been very fine men in many respects and to my covet for a long term in ministry.

Obviously at one level they are simply trying to be faithful to scripture itself as they see it and I respect that.

It is a plausible view that the whole Old Testament is still binding on us as well as the New Testament. I do however worry that it does often go with a certain lack of care and compassion.

[71 : 02] If I take one simple instance such as that you have to stone all disobedient children for example and stone all homosexuals.

Well, at one level one should have to contemplate the social outcome of such a policy. But my main worry would be that these men always assume that others are going to be stoned and never themselves.

And that seems to me to be fairly unrealistic because all of us are sinners. And by those standards I would rate my own chances of survival too highly.

I feel that it is very important for us to come back to the principle of seeing things from below. And that we must accept the possibility that we ourselves shall be on the wrong side of such laws simply through realism.

But my fundamental concern is that I am confident that the New Testament indicates that part of the Old have been superseded.

[72 : 19] And that it is a large part of our liberty in fact in Christ to be free from the Mosaic yoke and all its consequent bondage. And that it is a large part of our liberty in Christ.

We have time for perhaps one or even two questions. We have talked about the difficulty of differentiating between antinomianism and freedom.

and saying that a mature Christian can judge for himself in any situation what his reaction should be. But what point does a Christian become mature to make this kind of judgment?

Well my point Donald was, although I think lacking clarity, that Christians by definition are mature compared to Old Testament saints who are deemed to be in their non-age or minority before Christ. Before Christ came. What I would want to struggle towards is that freedom brings responsibility and great burdens with it.

[73 : 37] And unless we remain close to God, unless we keep our own spirituality, freedom is a very perilous luxury for us to have.

And it really is important for us who are free to have a requisite self-discipline and spirituality. I might maybe extend that to remind ourselves that democracy presupposes a responsible society. You can't have democracy in a society where everybody is simply a law to himself. Unless folk are prepared to receive their own rights and their own demands, the whole edifice collapses.

And it's interesting that in history in fact, democracy has emerged only in Calvinistic countries for the war self-discipline. Like for example, Britain and North America and Holland.

But I don't think that there is any way that a Christian simply as such knows instinctively what is right and wrong. But that he is able to handle his freedom maturely.

[74 : 44] But it is because it is difficult to do so that believers often do wish they were back in a legalistic war.

Where they had a list of do's and don'ts. And there was no agony in decision making at all. And I think that it is an observable phenomenon that every fast growing sect in the world has a clear list of taboos.

They shall not drink tea, they shall not drink coffee, they shall not have blood transfusions. And that is part of the appeal to human legalism and childishness.

And I heard Professor John Murray referring once to this problem of speaking very eloquently of what he called the rigor of Christian freedom. It is very difficult to be free.

We'd all rather be babies carried by our mums and let them make up our minds for us. And that's why you have the Mother Church image because Mother Church knows best. And we've got to avoid that I think and accept that God wants us to be grown up and to make our own decisions rather than to make our own decisions for us.

[75 : 57] Well I think we've had a good innings this evening. I'd like to thank Professor MacLeod very much indeed for widening our horizons in the way he did this evening.

And stimulating our minds. Thank you very much. Let's thank Mr MacLeod. And perhaps Mr MacLeod will close in prayer in a minute.

Could I once again remind you that the next lecture will be on the 11th I think I said of January. Christ's Kirk and for those that perhaps missed the earlier intimation and the lecture record the recording of the last evening's lecture was not I'm afraid available this evening so don't ask for it we hope that it will be available next time could be be upstanding please and mr. Macchi our God in heaven we give thanks once again for being able to sit under the word of God and we give thanks for the sending forth of the Holy Spirit from the throne of God where Christ is how good it is to know that the Holy Spirit is able to lead us into all truth and we pray that we may be glad in our obedience to that spirit as he would teach us the truth and lead us in the application of it we pray most gracious one that we may find in our lives that by the gracious work of the spirit amongst us we are the more able to apply that category of truth from the word that we have been meditating on this evening we ask for grace to enable us to lift up our hearts with our voices anew in glad thanksgiving for the freedom with which Christ has made us free we give thanks for our freedom to the bondage of sin and we give thanks for our freedom to live for Christ and for his glory we pray most gracious one that we may be increasingly instructed by the word and led in these ways by which we will the more be able to show that we are living for Christ and not for sin we pray for Professor McLeod in all his work for the cause of the gospel and ask that he may know the help and the enabling and the overruling of the Holy Spirit giving him much encouragement in his work for the Savior remember each one of us as we go from this place into our different homes into our different congregational fellowships we pray that in whatever ways we may find that the doctrine of Christian liberty is being assaulted by the temptation of the evil we pray that we may be strengthened by the spirit in knowledge and in willingness and be enabled to walk in the ways of the world in this connection we pray that in mercy and mercy part us with your blessing and forgive our sins for Jesus' sake amen so so so so