

(The Recovery of the Apostolic) 4. Liberty of Conscience

by Dale Heisey

The sermon emphasizes the importance of continual choices in faith, the necessity of humility, and the characteristics of a voluntary church community.

Duration: 1:15:10

Scripture: Ephesians 4:21, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 1 Timothy 1:5, 1 Timothy 2:2

Topics: "Free Will", "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that faith does not come from human will or effort, but from the mercy of God. He explains that not everyone is able to believe on their own, as it is a result of being born of God and being driven by the Holy Spirit. The preacher also highlights the importance of having compassion and treating others as we would like to be treated. He references Romans 14, emphasizing the need to refrain from judging others and to be fully persuaded in our own minds. The sermon emphasizes the individual heart connection with God and the responsibility of every believer to live in obedience to their Bible-taught conscience.

Transcript

We are increasingly conscious that the faith of your heart at the present hour depends upon the choice and choices that you have made since last we were together. I want to inform you this afternoon that abiding in the vine as John chapter 15 teaches it is an ever up-to-date and present tense decision that I must continually make to abide in the vine, to abide in the Lord Jesus Christ. We did not at one time in our experience choose to unite with God and thereby have that life that comes from the living vine flow out through our branches to produce fruit on the end.

That was not a past tense experience that can remain there, but if we are abiding in the vine today it's because we have, as of up to this present moment, continually decided to do so. And so I'm asking you to examine your heart this afternoon. Are you in Christ Jesus by having chosen Him as Lord of your life? And are you living in that spirit at the present moment? And I realize that you may have had sometime in the past an experience with God.

He may have touched your life. He may have redeemed you, your soul from destruction, and set your feet upon a firm place and foundation. But if we are saints today, if we are saved at this moment, it is because

we have chosen since last we were together to make decisions continually in light of the fear of God.

And with that vision before us, we've decided for Christ throughout the moments of time since we have seen each other last. And so let every man examine himself. And so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

And so may you and I discern the Lord's body and may it ever be a voluntary body, one that is voluntarily chosen to be in Christ Jesus. This is our defense this afternoon. We are here to defend the doctrine of a voluntary church, those who continually choose the way of the Lord Jesus Christ and ever yield themselves in power to him.

I have, there's some papers here that I'm going to ask the brethren, if they will, to pass out to those of you who may not have yet received one since you've entered the building this afternoon. Would you young men take care of that, please? We are reaching, may I say it cautiously, brethren, a critical moment in these studies. And so for that reason, I want to share your heart's concern with you before we go further into the new study of the afternoon.

Upon what at this present moment is your fate hinging? Upon what are you facing this afternoon in your salvation? I got a call from a brother quite a few miles from here who had learned about these meetings and would like to have received a degree of input from it and asked me some questions about how it was going. And I told him that I have this one concern and so I'm sharing it with you this afternoon. I told him that if we were to rearrange a program, the recovery of the apostolic vision, and reestablish six other subjects in place of these six that we have, rather than coming to it from an historical point of view, I would have chosen to choose six subjects that would have applied to the hearts of you sitting here.

And I will tell you why. I have this concern this afternoon that those of us gathered at these meetings week after week and we appreciate your presence. I trust the rich blessing of God upon all of you here today, those who have been faithful in attendance up to this hour and those of you who may be here for the first time.

I have this concern that as we study the history and the anabaptism and the apostolicity, we have a danger of looking at church groups around us and saying, here's where they're wrong, here they made a mistake, here they're not up to it, here they're doing less than their best, here's where they're away from the doctrine. But brethren, this meeting has amounted to nothing unless it is our hearts that we have examined, unless we see whether we are living the apostolic faith once delivered unto the saints. And so if we would have a series of subjects examined at the heart of men, surely then possibly we could accomplish our aim just a bit more closely.

And so for that reason, I wanted to share with you one challenge this afternoon concerning the humility of your own heart. I raise this question because of the danger we face to go away from meetings like this, and we were well blessed, and we know of those who were not here to enjoy it or here to receive it or appreciate it. In fact, there are some that would even be countering it and against it, and I have heard of some like that, advising people not to come, don't get involved in that kind of thing.

And so there's a tendency in this proud heart of mine and possibly in your own to say, forget them, write them off. If any of you have what we have, you know, in some way or another, speak in a despicable manner concerning those who are not here. And I want to say that we have nothing, dear brothers and sisters, this afternoon, we have nothing but the Lord Jesus Christ, and were he for a moment to withdraw

his blessing from us, what would we have to offer? I'm urging us to examine our hearts to make sure that we have no fingers to point, that we have no self to elevate, that we have appeared at the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ there to die with him.

And there can be no pride, there can be no self-assertion when one's hanging on a cross. Oh, if we get lifted up, let it be because the cross has lifted us up to God and for no other reason. Brethren, I'm concerned about this matter.

Would you open your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 66. I am a New Testament believer and I very seldom use the Old Testament in teaching Christian doctrine. I do not believe in a flat Bible.

We'll be discussing that on Friday night of this coming week. We believe in the supreme authority of the New Testament. But I do want to draw attention, if I may, to this Old Testament passage.

Which contains such beautiful truth. Before I read Isaiah 66, the first few verses, I will borrow, if I may, a few phrases from a confession of faith written by a number of brethren about a year ago. Brokenness is characterized by a continual trembling before the Word, seeking its counsel, heeding its warning, obeying its commands, and confessing its rebukes to the heart.

Apart from this experience, there is no spiritual life. Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, the earth is my footstool. Where is the house that you will build unto me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all these things have been, saith the Lord.

But to this man who I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. The New Testament says it this way, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before God. And that man who trembles before the Word of God is not a proud man.

He has not lifted himself up against his church, or against the societies around us, or against the conferences, or call them what you will. But he has examined his heart, and he finds himself continually needing. That's what you find.

If you find anything else in your heart today besides a greater need for God, then there is something wrong with you, and you have not yet returned to an apostolic position. And so let us check that real closely. I do not want to hear, coming as a result of these meetings, as a result of this session this afternoon, I do not want to hear one group pitted against another, or one position against another.

Only the Word of God held forth for us all to behold, and practice, and obey. I wonder, in soberness this afternoon, if the censorious and somewhat critical nature that history tells us was part of the character of dear brother Conrad Grebel, who is sometimes noted to be the founder of the Swiss Brethren, the founder of Anabaptism, possibly. I wonder if because of his harshness, and because of his critical attitude, I wonder if that had anything to do with the reason why his life was cut as short as it was.

I wonder if that's the reason why God had someone like a pilgrim Marpeck take over some of the work there in South Germany, in northern Switzerland, in the place of brother Conrad. I wonder if that's why it took a Michael Sattler, with the heart of compassion that he had, who wrote possibly the church order, the congregation order you have inside your program, and the Schleitheim Confession of Faith. I wonder further, and I tremble as I ask this question, if the nature that that man had in those areas of his own experience were possibly he failed to put on the Lord Jesus Christ as he ought to have, if that has anything to do with the fact that his wife, Barbara, never joined him in apostolic faith.

There are these sobering possibilities, and God forbid that this effort to seek renewal in our hearts and our churches would be marred by such a spirit coming from us. And so we hold this challenge before you this morning. Now looking at this sheet that was passed to you, if we may, I'm going to be willing to put myself out on a limb to state something that I believe.

This afternoon we have heard a considerable number of challenges with the fact that this meeting is not sponsored by an organized church or by an established church. I'd like you to go to the Bible and show me the definition for organized church or for established church. Where did that term come from? What do you mean by that? Not part of an organized church, not part of established church.

I want you to think about that for a while and examine that concept in light of the scriptures and see what you come up with. I think what is really meant for those terms, for those expressions, is this, church group or church conference or some similar denotation. I think that is what is meant.

Well on this sheet that you have, in the middle of the page, we have here a simple outline that's prepared by Menno Simons in which he gave what he considered to be the true signs by which the Church of Christ may be known. I would like to just, in a public way, this afternoon read these six points. The Church of Christ is known by unadulterated, pure doctrine.

He has references there from both Old Testament and New, and these references are his and not my own. He says the Church of Christ is recognized by scriptural use of the sacramental signs, and that to my mind was one of the errors of Menno Simons, is his over-frequent use of the word sacrament referring to Lord's Supper and Baptism. I don't believe he really understood the connotation that we understand the word sacrament to have in our time.

A sacrament, to clear up your understanding of this, as it is used today in theology, means a means by which the grace of God comes to the heart of a man. And so if partaking of a wafer for having a water sign of baptism applies to you, if your understanding is that grace from God and the living life of God enters your heart, enters your experience of these sacramental signs, then as far as I'm concerned, you are part of a monolithic Corpus Christianum state church concept. But I understand what Brother Menno meant by this.

I believe he meant that the Church will properly use the fortresses that he has given them to us. Number three, by obedience to the word. Number four, by unfainted brotherly love.

Number five, by bold confession of God and Christ. You heard our brother's testimony in that regard a few moments ago. And number six, the Church of God is known by oppression and tribulation for the sake of the Lord's word.

One of the things that is characteristic of the Church is that it's continually persecuted. It is never a persecutor. And I take the right this afternoon from the authority of this book and the words of Jesus Christ to take any body, any church body or any church organization that has been guilty of persecuting the saints of God.

And we do not consider that person, that group or that institution to be part of the body of our Christ. Jesus Christ is never a persecutor. I would say if there's anything that this lesson this afternoon as we get into it should make us conscious of and warn us about, it is this that we would never be guilty of persecuting the saints of God and of rejecting them and of ostracizing them or in any way at all to hinder them in their faith

and walk with God.

For to do so, as Jesus said, requires a millstone to be placed around my neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. If I offend one that believes in him and so may we be carefully conscious of in no way being a persecutor here this afternoon or wherever we go. And so this is the Church of Jesus Christ and where saints are met together as we said tying last week and this week's lessons together.

Where saints are gathered together in this kind of apostolic position with love in their hearts for each other and a total desire to know and obey the truth. I am satisfied that the Spirit of the Lord will take up residence there. And there is the church in a visible form, in a visible body.

Now one more problem at the bottom of that sheet. Last week at the board there appeared this chart much as you see it here with one exception. On the extreme right-hand side where the label at the bottom says Antibaptism and trying to portray three concepts of the church and how it might be graphically portrayed.

There was at the board last week the word God at the top, the word believers at the bottom interconnected with each other by those brotherhood circles meaning and showing rather the interdependence one brother upon another. And there was one arrow going from those believers up to God. And we felt to correct a misconception that that may have given to you.

It almost gives you the impression that one is only connected with God as what he is part of this brotherhood here. And that apart from that he has no individual responsibility to God. But that the brotherhood will somehow provide for him, take care of him and support him, meet all his needs.

And so as I am part of the brotherhood, I find my relationship with God in that manner. That really is somewhat of a dangerous position. And I will show you later on this afternoon how that that is a form of Lutheranism.

By God's grace we'll explain that to you. But I still contend that the quotation we found here, a man cannot come to God except together with his brother, is valid if we understand these two points. Would you note them? Number one, that wherever we have the New Testament souls being added to the church, coming to the visible body of our Lord, of the Lord here on earth, we always have that being done, always being received at the hands of previously established brethren in Christ.

Whether it's Cornelius, who I am sure was received of God before Peter ever got there, or whether it is Enoch on the way down to his home in Africa, you find that the saints of God are present to receive into the fellowship those who God has called, those in whose spirit God is working. And so I want you to understand this quotation in that connection, and then also in this one, that Jesus has said in the 13th chapter of John, in verses 34 and 5, that the evidence of my being one with God is this, my love relationship with my brother. By this, I know that you, my disciples, would be of love one for another.

And so we must ever see ourselves relating properly to our brothers and sisters here on this earth before we have the assurance that God has received us. And so let us understand this in that manner. We make a mistake, excuse me, if we give you the impression that the individual does not have a responsibility before God.

And may I say at this point, as far as I'm concerned, it's a beautiful and simple thought that right here is the simple and harmonious answer to the crying need that we hear across our churches and in church periodicals, the warning that's continually given against individualism. I'll tell you the simple answer. The

simple answer to individualism is individual responsibility before God.

Peter said that you're going to build up a spiritual house made out of lively stones. And there's the individual stone that's important, prepared by God, quickly framed and prepared without the sound of iron and chisel and hammer and brought together into a living body, each stone filling a lively place. Living stones mean that every stone next to me receives a connection because of the light that's moving through me, out to everything that touches me at all sides.

In Romans chapter 12, in 1 Corinthians 12, read in your hearing last week, we are told there explicitly that we are all members one of another. And every member must set that responsibility to make the individual contribution that God has created in him, a specific personality in order to make. And then as our brother just read a half an hour ago to your hearing, what did he say? If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? What are the next words? Follow thou me.

What's it mean? Peter, you have an individual responsibility to myself, to my lordship, to my claims upon your heart, regardless of James and John and Nathanael and all the rest of the apostles. You have a personal responsibility here. Follow thou me.

So may every brother live up to the light that they have. May every brother be faithful in the calling wherewith we were called. And may everyone make the contribution that God has placed you into the church body to make.

And may we then all recognize the individual contribution of everyone else. For that is also an equal part to the vision. Is this making sense to you this afternoon brothers? Now, lesson four, liberty of conscience.

It says in this description, the Bible answer to the twin threats of individualism on one hand and a monolithic coercion on the other. Would it be appropriate to do a little defining here? Coercion is the kind of forcing upon oneself where that the powers are so overbearing that there's not enough strength to give any resistance. And so you are coerced into a pattern, into a position.

Monolithic is a term that comes from the prefix here, mono meaning one. Monolithic, all elements of the society being of one nature, of one structure, of one component. No choice, no alternative, no diversity.

And so it's a statement here where we're talking about all parts of a certain sacral group or society all being forced or coerced into one mold as you might call it. You know what individualism is, where a person senses no responsibility one to another. Everyone does that which is right in his own eyes.

His judge's way times two of explaining what individualism is. These are twin threats. They have always been in the church and we want to view them with caution this afternoon.

We cannot construct a church through coercion. There have been various methods used to coerce people into a church. In the time of the Reformation, of course infant baptism was the means.

You're part of the church because we baptized you. You were born at eight days of age when you were a struggling little squalling baby and could do nothing about it. You had a sign of a cross put on your forehead through the spit of a priest and you've been brought into the church.

That's coercion, a form of it. Of course the infant gives no resistance. He's passive.

He's brought in. Another is the use of the magistrate, the sword. There's the biggest difference between the sons of the crescent and the sons of the cross.

Muhammadism, the Muslim folk go from place to place and with the sword they conquer. Of course you know what happened up at the Battle of Tours where finally they were defeated. They would have desired to conquer all of Europe with their sword policy.

I can hardly refrain at this point from telling a little story that well describes the message of the sons of the crescent as opposed to the message of the sons of the cross. But that is one example of a religious group who feels that by force of the authority, by force of the government, you can make everybody part of your religious order. Of course Catholicism has done the same thing.

Oh it happened I guess during World War II. At the end of World War II, let's see, in Turkey where there was a refugee camp there, the Allied forces had just liberated as the term that they used. It's interesting that that term comes up here in subject of liberative conscience.

Liberated these various towns in Turkey and I wish I had more of the history of it than what I have this afternoon. I wasn't planning to give this. We're going to have to depend on our memories a little bit.

There was a hospital ward there set up under a tent where some of these people who were in this refugee camp in great need of medical attention were coming to be checked by doctors and so on. The line was long. The needs were great and the course it took a lot of time.

And one lady noticed that here was a young girl about 12 or 14 years of age who was squirming and wiggling and she wouldn't sit straight and obviously in great pain. And so this woman who was not in near that sad of shape took some compassion on her and would like to have helped her in some way. And so she went to her and said, could I help you here? Why don't you just rest against me? Lean your back against me.

The girl said, I couldn't do that. She was squirming. And the nurses were walking past taking care of the ones that they were working with at that hour and this girl was being ignored.

This woman just could not have it. This girl was in such misery. She asked someone to examine this girl.

The girl said, I'll show you what's wrong. And she took her loose fitting garment that was draped about her shoulders and dropped it down her back. And there she revealed the ugly wounds and burns that were put upon her back by the Muslims.

She said, this is the way it was. Every day they would say to me, the cross or the crescent, cross or crescent. And she said, every day I would say, I'll take the cross and they would add one more burn to my back every day.

And finally they had etched on her back, the sign of a Christian cross burned onto her skin and on her back. She said that she had told them that she will carry her cross for Jesus. And so they forced her to do it by taking that burning iron and scorching it into her skin until they had a cross burned on her back.

That's a form of coercion, but it's not, it's not the way to build the church of Jesus Christ. That poor girl suffered there at the hands of the sons of the crescent. There's another message.

It's used more in our time. It's peer pressure to coerce people into the church of Jesus Christ. I'd like to use your reference from John 1. We could quote this, but you could follow along in your Bible.

Let the written word impress your heart. This pressure, pressure from parents, pressure from young people to join church, as it said, a horrible term. It's one that we defy, this matter of joining churches it is called.

But as many, verse 12, as received him, then gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them which believe on his name, that believe on his name, which are born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God. The word was made flesh and dwelt among us and so on. And so we cannot coerce people into the church of Jesus Christ.

Peer pressure of any kind will not do it. God wants no compulsory service. On the contrary, he loves a free, willing heart that serves him with a joyful soul and does what is right joyfully.

Paul Filbinger, a man about to murder, said those words right before his death. God accepts no compulsory service. Faith is a gift of God.

Do we get this, brothers and sisters? Faith cannot be forced on anyone, not at work. It is the gift of God. Faith is a gift of God, Romans, excuse me, chapter two.

It cannot be forced on anyone. Romans chapter nine, verse 16, gives a beautiful portrayal of the individual faith requirement. And by no other means can a person come to God.

What did I say? Chapter nine, verse 16. So then it is not of him that will it, nor of him that run it, but of God that showeth mercy. And so it is up to our God to give us this gift of faith that we cannot coerce it upon anyone.

This Hans Buehler gave one of the most beautiful defenses of the freedom of faith and individual faith, as I'm going to read to you from pages 292 and 293 in the outline of Anabaptism. Honorable, dear sirs, I beg you in all friendliness that you would have fatherly compassion on me as a father's compassionate children. Please do not burden my conscience since faith is a free gift of God.

It does not have its source in him who chooses or in him who runs the race, but in the mercy of God. Not all are able to believe as the scripture says, for it does not come by the will of the flesh, but must be born of God. They are the children of God who are driven by the Holy Spirit.

Have compassion on my four little children and let me go home for a little while, as you wish that men should do to you, do also to them. The beautiful portrayal there, the simplicity of how it is that faith comes to the individual heart. It cannot be forced upon him.

From Menah Simon, may I quote, yet you should not acknowledge your dear noble, illustrious lords, you judges and officers of the law, that as often as you take, condemn and put to the sword such people that you thrust your tyrannical sword into the blessed flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ. There Menah has a very beautiful picture of how the body of Christ is the living saints here on this earth. And explain the lesson we were trying to teach you last week, that the body of Christ spoken of in the Lord's Supper is the church of Jesus Christ.

That ye break the bones of his holy body, for they are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, Ephesians 5.30. They are his chosen beloved brethren and sisters who are together with him, born from above of one father, John 1.13. They are the dearly loved children who are born of the seed of the holy word. They are his spotless, holy and pure bride, whom he in his great love has wed. Then just one more from Zerk Phillips, if I may.

Those who persecute others on account of their faith can never be counted as the church of the Lord. From this it is evident that no church may exercise dominion over the conscience of men with a carnal sword or seek by violence to force unbelievers to believe, nor to kill the false prophets with sword and fire. With the word of God she must judge and expel those in the church who are found wicked.

What is done over and above this is not Christian, nor evangelical, nor apostolic. Those beautiful words from Zerk Phillips who says any method is used about expelling the heretic, about expelling the false brothers, the false man from the church is not apostolic in what we're doing there. Now I want you to be sure this afternoon that you realize that the Anabaptists did not teach individualism.

They did not teach doctrinal indifference in matters of faith. They were concerned about what a man believed. There is an immovable connection of faith which is the opposite of doctrinal indifference.

Their faith was so convicted and so convincing that they were willing to die for it, and that's just the opposite of not caring. If faith did not matter and anybody's view would suffice, there's no need to go to the cross or go to the stake for anything else for one's faith. Get this interesting thought.

There is a positive content of faith, and so our faith must find scriptural, spiritual limits and confines. There must be a content in it. I think it was a Hutterian brother, I could be wrong about that, he wrote these words one time, they're not in my notes, I'll try to recall them.

He said that whosoever would baptize somebody who does not have the content of living faith in them is the same as a person who would take upon himself to sign and seal an empty letter. Nobody would do that. You would want to make sure what the contents are before you signed and sealed it and delivered it.

We do not tolerate any and all religious thinking at practice within the brotherhood. I can show you from Anabaptism those who needed to be put away from the faith or from the fellowship because of their wrong doctrine, because of their wrong errors. Menno Simons himself expelled two that I know of, Adam Pastor and David Juris, and possibly some others.

You might be aware of the fact that the Sassinians are referred to them in the first meeting, who actually gave birth later on to the Universalists, the Unitarian position, anti-Tritarian, they did not believe in the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. They came to the Swiss brethren and asked for union of thought because they noticed that both of them were opposed to Catholicity, to the Catholic Church. But because there was an error of doctrine there, the brethren would not unite.

So they went to the North Mennonites. By this time, the Mennonites had been established in Holland and also found a closed door there. They would not accept them.

In the Schleidheim Confession of Faith, which we have called to your attention, it makes it very clear in there that there are false brethren with whom we must separate ourselves. The scriptures teach this and we ought to be aware of it. In fact, the very reason for the Schleidheim meeting on the border in February of 1527 was for the purpose of uniting the Church against such false positions as were showing

themselves, making themselves felt at the Church at that time.

In answer to these Thessalians who came and asked for oneness with the brethren, it is interesting to note that in their reply, and they wrote to them back with a letter, and I have a copy of that letter if you would like to read it, they answered, Dear Men, rather than responding, Dear Brethren, when they wrote their answer. Which tells me that at that time there was a distinction held between those who were considered the children of God and those who were not. Now, we have a number of things to discuss here, and I must get a couple of views clear into your mind.

One is this, that we're talking, first of all, of liberty of conscience from the Anabaptist point of view, of a situation where the Church is allowed to function where spiritual life and vitality is allowed to function undisturbed by a carnal state. They recognize the powers of state. And you know, I noticed that I read to you from an assignment where he called the leaders of state noble and illustrious men, or leaders, and they were held in high honor by the Anabaptist writers.

But they did not feel that a person could force one's faith upon them with a sword, nor could a state responsible for the maintenance of civil orders, nor could they judge a Church in matters of faith, for only a spiritual man can do that. And so, it was a matter of asking for religious toleration for their thinking and for their view within a carnal state. Today, however, and may I just add this, they tried to teach their people, tried to teach the leaders in that time from the parable of the tares, how Jesus taught, the field is the world, and in here you have tares growing, but you also have the pure and the true wheat.

And we don't go in there and try to riddle this thing around as it is growing, but at the end of time, this sorting process will take place. And felt that that should help the state realize that they did not meddle into the affairs of the Church and try to root that out, or try to decide which ones are heretics, which ones are not from a secular point of view. Now, I want to show this same concept from somewhat a different side this afternoon in the remaining moments of our time together.

That is, that the Bible also teaches that there is liberty of conscience, not only as the Church is separated from the world, a called-out body of believers, but there's also liberty of conscience must be maintained within the body of the saints. Back in Yuletide, if you recall, in Jeremiah 35, would you turn to it, there was a group of people back then already known as the Rehobites, who had some rather strange, and you might call them individualistic, positions that they were holding. But they were violating the laws of God.

They were no threat to the community in which they lived, but they had, because of instruction from their father, taken it upon themselves to practice a position of life different from the community around them. This, of course, was viewed as a threat by the rest of Israel. They didn't drink any wine or use any fruits from the vine, nor did they build houses and move into cities.

They maintained the rural pilgrim life that the children of Israel had practiced while they were in their 40-year wilderness wandering. And so God comes here to the prophets, Jeremiah, and tells them to take these people into the house of God and set wine before them and tell them to drink. Drink ye wine, verse 5 of chapter 35.

But they said, We will drink no wine, for Jenedab, a son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye nor your sons forever, neither shall ye build a house, nor sow a seed, nor plant a vineyard, nor have any. But all your days ye shall dwell in tents, that ye may live many days in the land where ye were strangers. They said, At this present time we have obeyed our conscience, as our

father has taught us how to obey it.

And we will not drink wine here in this temple this afternoon, although you might make a religious service out of it. We will stick by the conscience that we have been taught to be from our father. And God says to bring this thing to a conclusion, that because they were willing to stand for what they knew was right in the midst of an apostatizing Israel, when all Israel goes into captivity, they will be saved.

They shall not fail to have a man stand before me forever. So there's an example of liberative conscience by Kennedy. I see the same principle that Gamaliel tried to call to the attention of the Sanhedrin in Acts chapter 5, I think was brought to your attention either last week or two weeks ago by Brother Marlon.

I'm not quite sure which. In Mark chapter 9, would you turn to it? And I might even be wrong in this reference. I did not look up the reference.

I just wrote it down by memory. If I'm wrong, somebody correct me. I think it's in Mark 9. I want the reference where there were those who were casting out devils, but were not following Jesus at that hour.

Verse 38 says, And Jesus answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name. Thank you, brethren. And he followed not us.

And we forbade him because he followed not us. But notice the tolerant and very holy attitude that Jesus has here. For Jesus said, Forbid him not.

For there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name that can likely speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part. That's the kind of toleration.

I should not use that word possibly. That is the kind of acceptance that Jesus was calling for here on this occasion. Zwingli and Luther both defended liberty of conscience against Catholicism before they realized that their imposition was threatened because their brethren, who they saw gaining the ascendancy over themselves.

And so if we don't somehow squelch this movement, if we don't somehow squelch these people, they will rise above us, and our position, of course, will be challenged and in jeopardy. And so they, of course, began to take up the sword and became persecutors at that hour. It can be documented where both Zwingli and Luther taught liberty of conscience.

Jacob Breville, the father of Conrad, died because he believed in liberty of conscience. He served there on the 200-member council of Zurich, the great council that Simon Stumpf was countering. When Zwingli says the council shall decide concerning the mass, and Simon Stumpf says, as recorded in your program, the Spirit of God has already decided it, Jacob Breville served on that council.

And because of him, it was difficult to bring persecution to bear upon this fledgling group that was rising in Zurich. But they found a way to eliminate this man, and Jacob Breville, the white-bearded man as he was, lost his head to the executioner's sword. He died for liberty of conscience.

In the city of Strasburg, William Compton lived, who was also a former, and wrote a beautiful letter in denunciation of the martyrdom of Michael Sattler. If you ever have a chance to read this or ask me for it, I'd love to have you read it. There was that kind of toleration there, and the city of Strasburg was never guilty of shedding the blood of any Anabaptist, because the people in that council believed in liberty of

conscience, although they felt responsible to somehow suppress the movement with rhetoric, oratory, or dispute, or debate, and so on.

But in that sense, they really were not degrading religious freedom. But concerning this William Compton, Michael Sattler was brutally and torturously killed, and he wrote back to these people who were responsible for this terrible atrocity, and said this to them, he appealed to you to be taught from the scriptures, and you should have been fathers to him and teachers, and you turned out to be an executioner. What was wrong? What a tremendous thought.

And so this view showed up throughout church history at times, even among the reformers themselves, this desire to be tolerant. In the year 1689, something happened in England that you probably don't know anything about, but you have benefited from it ever since. In that year, the Toleration Act was passed by William and Mary in Great Britain.

I don't know if you know the story of how these persons in exile were called back to Europe to the throne, and with them came religious toleration from the oppression, of course, of the Catholic reigns of Bloody Mary and so on. I'm not going into that history this afternoon, but only to call attention to the fact that the toleration they granted there is not liberty of conscience, as we're using it this afternoon. Here's what they meant.

They had to establish 33 specific doctrinal points, and any group that would ascribe to those 33 points would then be granted religious acceptance in Great Britain. That allowed a spectrum from Anglicans all the way through to Quakers, believe it or not, and there were about three or four or five groups between there. Catholics were not permitted by this act of toleration because one of those 33 points was that you had to denounce the Pope in order to be granted toleration in England.

That kind of toleration there was mainly a situation where that reason is going to be elevated higher than belief, and we're just going to simply take the position that that's foolish to kill each other, we're going to stop doing that. That was not really liberty of conscience. Toleration, in fact, is a word that the Anabaptists did not use, and that's why I've corrected myself for having used it here a while ago.

They knew nothing about this kind of toleration, but rather they were respecters of the Spirit that blew wherever it lifted, and they wanted to be able to make sure that they accepted and received what the Spirit received. Notice this. Whatever is done to prevent the Spirit from moving among the brethren is to extinguish the landed of life's righteousness, for the Spirit must supply the oil.

Toleration. I want to say a word about toleration. Some of you might feel, well, I'm glad I'm tolerated where I am.

So-and-so group would not tolerate me, but this group will tolerate me. I'm good that I'm being tolerated. Toleration, as I understand it, is nothing more than some pious way to control hatred.

Toleration is controlled hatred. That's all it is. Toleration is not love.

If I tolerate you, I don't love you. I have not received you. I have not opened my arms to you.

I'm not glad for you. I'm not counting on your contribution. I'm not looking forward to your service into my life.

I simply am putting up with you, and so I restrain myself from venting my feelings against you as I would do if I had the chance. And so I feel, in order to give you the pretense of my being under divine control, that I will refrain myself, and I will tolerate you. That's controlled hatred.

That's all it is. That kind of wife in a church will not cause men to say, behold how they love one another. I'll tell you, the world will quickly see through your toleration of your brother.

The New Testament words are acceptance, or receiving. At this point, I will read just one verse from Matthew, excuse me, Romans, chapter 15, verse 7. Wherefore, receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. Matthew 18.

I must call attention to this. It is just a slight deviation from the train of our thought, and yet I will tie together with you if I can. Matthew 18, of course, has a lot to say about the authority of the church where the two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus.

But this chapter does not close without a very careful warning being given to that same church who exercises such authority as to expel a brother or sister from its fellowship. There is a parable here, the very sobering parable of the unforgiving servant. And I guess if there's any message that we ought to have clearly brought before us in our time, it is this, that you and I are the servants who had a debt too large to ever pay.

We are the servant with a \$12 million debt. We are not the servant with a \$25 debt. We are the servant with a debt before God that we can never repay.

And we look out then upon our fellow servants and find there one who owes us \$25. And we take him by the throat, and we put him down, and we ostracize him, and we punish him, and we fail to receive him. We do not forgive him.

And God comes back to us and says, Did not I forgive you a large debt? Shouldest not thou also have a compassion to my fellow servants, even as I have pity on thee? And as the Lord was wrought, and there were them that tormented, we should pay all that we do unto him. I am sorry, but I must note with regret that I am observing that there have been those who have been received and granted great graces and blessings from God, who seem to have difficulty in sensing their responsibility then to receive, accept, forgive, recognize others. It is that kind of liberty and acceptance that we want to teach here this afternoon.

Whom do we receive? Well, I will answer very briefly. Those whom the Spirit has anointed. How can you tell who they are? It is very simple.

Turn to Luke chapter 4, verse 18. Jesus will tell us how to recognize those whom the Spirit has anointed. Luke 4, 18.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach liberty to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. Who are those who have been anointed by the Spirit of God? Why, simply those who can move among men, who can move from heart to heart and share some joy, share some inspiration, share some challenge, affect some healing, cause some life to flow from heart to heart.

It is that person before whom you live who challenges your life, who encourages you along the way. You feel drawn to God because you are in their presence. That is he who has been anointed of God.

You have an option from the Holy One. And where there are brothers who have that kind of life and vitality, God forbid that we would refuse the least one. The sister was a helping hand, a word of comfort, a letter of strength.

I am thankful for a sister who took upon herself in moments of quietness in her house, to write a letter of encouragement, and with possibly just a tinge of warning, and maybe with just a degree of appreciation to some of us as we are involved in this work. If I can get blessing and inspiration from that, I know there is anointing at the other end of that pen. This is those whom we receive.

God forbid that in my blindness of heart, and in my bigotry, and in my traditionalism, or call it what you will, in my formality, I put up such a wall of defense, such a wall of prohibition between me and my brother, that the grace of God effective in their life cannot come through and penetrate into my heart. I realize, and I will take a strong position, that there must be soundness of doctrine, and that purity comes before peaceableness, according to Bible wisdom in James chapter 3. But having said this, there is a responsibility I have to receive my brother. May I read something that's going to startle you? This comes from Leonard Verdine, Dutch Reformed man from Ann Arbor, Michigan.

He writes in *The Anatomy of a Hybrid*, and I think these words are particularly interesting to me because they come from a non-Anabaptistic or non-Mennonite background, and I don't think you'll get bored if I read this word for word. I'm not quite sure how to get the message to you, but listen to this. We must focus on yet another trait of sacralism.

Sacralism is this monolithic situation where everyone inside the unit must be of one mold, must be of one form, or else they cannot be received. The place, or rather the absence of place, assigned to private devotions. The view of the sacral situation in which religion and the cult of religion serve primarily as cement to hold the societal group together, it follows that non-public devotions are at best meaningless and without purpose, and at worst, decidedly undesirable and evil.

They are said to defeat the very end for which religion exists, for the non-public practice of religion tends to fragment society. The non-public cult draws men away from the societal totality. Private devotions feed diversity rather than uniformity for this reason.

The theoreticians, I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing it right, the people that are producing the theory in plain words, excuse me, of the pre-Christian faith have regularly advised against any activity that is not wholesale, not engaged in by all members of the society. Excuse me, but in the past five years, I've heard a tremendous amount of teaching just like this. You do not gather together in that Bible study.

You do not gather together for private prayer or private acts of fasting. You don't come together for the private meetings where God's Word is held forth, because you might receive in your heart some inspiration or some challenge or some understanding that all the rest of us do not have, and we feel responsible to control the diet and the input that the whole body receives. And so be careful that you don't meet together in a private way.

Don't engage in any activity spiritually that is not engaged in by all. That doctrine, that view, is as old as any sickle society ever was. Plato, the Greek, the Hellenistic Greek, wrote to that effect in which he said

that there should be no private idols.

This is written now from the very heathen point of view. There should be no private idols in the house. All the idols should be in the putting market place, up there in the Acropolis.

Come there to worship. The whole community, all Greece, comes there. Let's have no private worship in the home, no private worship in the heart, no private worship in the farm kitchen, on the barn floor, or wherever you might have it together.

It should be noted that in a sickle situation, religion and the practice of religion is not individual. It has been asserted with a great deal of truth that pre-Christian society does not know the concept of the individual, that it knows only the concept of the group. For this reason, pre-Christian society does not know the concept of private property, individual possession.

Therefore, it does not know the concept of private or individual morality, private individual responsibility, or private religiosity. Pre-Christian man knows himself only as an ant knows itself, simply as one of the group. It is for this reason that sickle society frowns.

There is nothing that would tend to compromise the group quality of religion. That is why Plato wanted all religious activity that was not group activity suppressed by publicly enacted statute. It is by no means a mere coincidence that the emphasis on the group rather than the individual is a characteristic of every pre-Christian society as it is of all post-Christian societies.

Nor is it a mere coincidence that the emphasis of the individual is a characteristic of societies that have been influenced by authentic Christianity. One more note. Moreover, it is a characteristic of sickle society that in it there are no heretics.

I want you to pay close attention now. The words heretic and heresy are derived from the Greek verb herium, which means to stand before alternatives and make a choice between them. However, in a sickle situation, there are no options on the level of one's highest loyalty.

No choice. No two or more contestants for that loyalty. For this reason, it is correct to say that in a pre-Christian situation there are no heretics because there is no choice.

Just an interesting note. When the Septuagint was written, that is, 70 scholars, that is why it is called Septuagint, translated the Old Testament into Greek. In the Alexandrian era, between the Testaments, down in Alexandria, Egypt, they took the free offering, the Hebrew term free will offering as given there in the book of Leviticus, and translated that into Septuagint as the heretical offering because it offered the worshipper the choice as to whether he wanted to make that offering or not.

And so a heretic is a person who sees alternatives before him, and he voluntarily makes a choice. Now, I have a responsibility this afternoon, and that is to show you what this concept does in the Church if we allow it to exist. I need to take you on a journey through your Bible.

Would you stop first of all at Romans chapter 14? I have heard within less than a past year a serious warning given against assuming a Berean mentality. What am I talking about? Against supposing that a man with his Bible, the Spirit-inspired Word, a desire and hunger and thirst for the truth, that a man like that can come to an understanding that might then be brought to the body of believers for consideration and for examination and told to suppress the desire for that individual devotion and study of God's Word.

That concept is sacral and monolithic and pre-Christian.

Martin Luther, getting back to a thought I earlier introduced, made the serious mistake of backing down from truth that he understood. He believed that an infant cannot be baptized because he does not have faith, and publicly took that position much to the embarrassment of his later years. And so when confronted with the challenges from Balthasar Hubmeier who wrote to him, when confronted with the challenges from Conrad Grebel who wrote to him, he needed to find some way to prove that those infants, after all, did have faith, because he had made that point so clear that he had to convince society that those infants that he was baptizing into Lutheranism, into a monolithic society to please, had faith.

And here's how he decided. He taught that since the body, since the church has saving faith, our members here have faith, we have a belief, we have faith in God, that a child born into this unit, a child born into this society, into this populace, they also receive the faith of the group. Now they have faith now.

Now you can baptize. Now you have to do a little thinking, but I wonder if there's someone here that can see through that and recognize what that means. Anybody, any, I'm talking about church body, any conference or group, recall what you will, who takes this position that we squelch the individual conscience in order to subscribe totally to a group conscience is taking a Lutheran position.

We have a group conscience here. We have a group position. Let us not in any way deviate from that.

It'll be a threat to us if you do. I'd like to ask you if you'd ever like to go to heaven, if you'd like to stand before God, if you'd like the books to be opened and for your heart to be judged on the faith of the group that you're part of. Brother, you better plead God's mercy and the blood of Christ upon your heart if you stand there in that condition.

You need a personal faith in God. You need a personal connection. You need a conscience that is personally and presently responsible to God.

I'm using this word responsibility throughout the afternoon. Individual responsibility to God and to stand there with my responsibility being only to the group is to stand there and monolithic to under the law. You are Galatian.

You are a Laodicean. You are Sardinian. Call it what you will.

Let us have this individual heart connection with God. Let us recognize that individual heart connection we have in each other. But I called your attention to Romans 14, did I not? Verse 4, who art thou that judges another man's service? To his own mastery standeth and follow.

Yea, he shall be full enough, for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another. Another esteemeth every day of life.

Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. These words are not my own. Chapter 14, verse 10.

For why dost thou judge thy brother? For why dost thou set it not thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. And how will you stand, brother or sister, when you stand there? For it is written, As I live, sayeth the Lord, every knee shall bow to thee, and every tongue shall confess to God, so that every one of us shall give account of himself to God. If you want to be part of a secular society and you want to have the conscience of the group and you don't want to have an individual conscience, you

want to have a group conscience, I say you will not want a group conscience then.

It won't do you any good. There you'll stand and give account of yourself to God, and you won't give account of your group, and your group won't give account of you. You'll be standing there before God with an answer to give of my own faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 17 and 18. For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God.

And I say it better be true also that approved of us as brethren in the faith. Let those who are accepted by God be approved by the brethren. That's the teaching of this passage here.

Verse 22. Hath thou faith? Have it to thyself before God. Have a living faith in God.

Don't have a group faith. Don't expect that I have the faith of these others around here. I need a personal faith in God.

Have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in the things which he allows. Sometimes you wonder if these verses are even in the Bible anymore.

We hear so little about them. Brethren, there is ever the danger to return to a monolithic structure that is the continual draw. It happens in the Galatians.

It's ever that tendency to draw back to that. Why is it? Why are we afraid of an individual responsibility to God and God teaching the individual heart? I'll tell you why we're afraid of it. We have not come to experience ourselves as we ought to have.

The effectiveness of the word of God working in my own heart, and consequently, I can't see how God could bring my brother through without my coercion. And so I'll be responsible to restrain him and compel him like I must be continually compelled and restrained. And so you see the continual threat to going back to a monolithic situation.

I want to give you a few more verses to study. Would you follow along quick please with your Bible? I'm soon done. This operation of the faith of God in your heart is accomplished by the daily entrance of the word into your life and is maintained by continually abiding in that word.

I said that earlier. And I realized that as soon as one quits of that, as soon as one leaves that understanding, obviously he's going to lose out with God. And so then go ahead if you want to, go ahead if you want.

I don't want to be part of it, but go ahead if you want to. And that person that you call brother in Christ has lost that personal connection. Keep on calling him brother.

Keep on receiving him because he has conformed to some kind of sacramental system. Go ahead and do it. All you're doing is giving him a false sense of salvation and eating and drinking the blood of Christ from within yourself.

And I look at that as a very serious infraction against the law of Christ. I will read further. The Bible teaches the every man taught concept.

With the Holy Spirit illuminating the word to each heart, every believer is responsible to live in obedience to his Bible taught conscience. Let's go along to the Bible. Ephesians chapter four, verse 21.

If so be that ye have heard of him and have been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus. That is, if you've been taught. And if you haven't been, then what's verse 21 say? Ye have not so learned Christ.

You need to be taught the very first oracles of God. If this is not the case. First Thessalonians chapter four, verse nine, but as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you.

Why not? For ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. The greatest thing that a man can ever be taught of the Lord Jesus Christ. First Timothy chapter one.

Every man taught verse five. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart and of a good conscience and a faith on faith. First John two 27.

But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you. And ye need not that any man teach you, but as the same anointing teaches you of all things that is truth and is no lie. And even as it has taught you, ye shall abide in him.

I want you to know that every brother and sister is responsible to carry out in his life those things that God has given him. And there is no safer way to live the Christian life than to live in total purity and clarity of conscience. When the time comes that I violate the conscience that God has given me, I am no longer a safe steward of the manifold grace of God.

I want to show you that from the scriptures. First Timothy again. You must ever hold the truth of God in a pure conscience, a conscience that is obedient to the truth.

Now the end of the commandment, verse five, I think I read this verse a moment ago, is charity out of a pure heart and of a good conscience and a faith on faith. Verse 19, holding faith and a good conscience, which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwrecked. You want to make shipwreck of your faith? Or may I say a more serious word? If you want to make shipwreck of the faith of your brother, you ask him to violate his conscience.

You ask him to take the truth that God has taught his heart and count it of ill repute. And here's what you did. You shattered the foundation whereby God communicates to his heart because the conscience is the voice of God in the heart of a man.

And that thing is defiled and impure. Romans chapter one tells us there is no way for God to reach our hearts. We are reprobate.

No man is lost and damned until his conscience can no longer respond to God. And for me to be guilty of starting a man on that course is a responsibility I do not want to answer to God for. Romans, excuse me, the book of Acts, I'm sorry, chapter 24.

This is Paul's testimony in verse 16. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets, and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, birth of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man.

And woe be to Paul in the day ever which come, that he would for some reason or another defile that conscience which God has given him. Others were calling it heresy. All he was trying to do was evade conscience.

All he was calling for was the opportunity to be faithful to the teaching that God had placed upon his heart. Liberty of conscience is therefore combined with the principle of church discipline to maintain a balance between personal faith on one hand and responsibility to the brotherhood on the other. True brotherhood never violates conscience, and personal liberty never violates covenant.

I read these verses to you from Romans, chapter 14, verses 10 through 12, where God warns us to never be guilty of causing somebody else to offend. I want to show you a few more references in the New Testament, then I'm going to close. 1 Corinthians, chapter 8. May I just give a word here? I won't have time to say it in any other services, and so I'll say it now.

I'm sorry if it takes an extra five minutes. The question is asked sometimes, how do we know that it's true conviction? How do we know it's what God has laid in your conscience? How do we know that? How do you know it's not some personal whim or some personal position? How do you know it's the truth? Along with that question, I'll raise another one. It could be that's the way for him, but I'll tell you something, there's no salvation in it.

Make sure you realize there's no salvation in it. Referring to some conscience, that a person has. I want you to follow along in two verses in Romans and 1 Corinthians and see if you still feel there's no salvation in it.

Chapter 8, verse 12. When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Is there any salvation in it now? You see, there was a brother in your congregation whom the Spirit taught to assume a certain position or practice for his life.

He was perfectly in order with your covenant, with your confession of faith, whatever you had. But God had asked him, he felt God was responsible to God to take this position for his life or for his family. And you knocked him down for it, told him to ignore it.

You are a threat to us. You come along with that. You're different from what we are.

We all want to be the same here. And you got him to quit that or change that. And what you have done was you have not only sinned against Christ yourself, but caused him to do the same thing.

Is there any salvation in that? There's no salvation in sin, I will tell you that. 1 Corinthians chapter 12, 10, 1 Corinthians 10, verse 28. But if any man say unto you, this is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake, I showed it, and for conscience' sake, for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

Conscience, I say, not thine own, but that of another, but of the other. For why is my liberty judge of another man's conscience? What is this teaching? And I will close with Galatians chapter 5. What is this passage teaching that I just read? Galatians chapter 5. I realize this discussion has only opened up. There are a lot of ramifications of this that we have not gotten into today.

Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. And I could get out through this chapter all the way through to verse 13. And I'll read that verse only, and close.

For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty, only ye have not liberty for occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. I want to give you a concept that's beautiful in my heart this afternoon, and what you think about it as you go home. What is liberty, Christian liberty, as taught in the New Testament? I will tell you what it is, and it will put into perfect harmony for you every reference on conscience, every reference on liberty that you can find in the New Testament.

It is this, that Christian liberty is nothing more than the new covenant expression, and the new covenant concept of the individual voluntarily choosing Christ for himself, free from the confines, free from the coercion of a monolithic and sacral group, as you had in the Old Testament. And we are free from that. We are free in Christ Jesus to have a personal faith and walk with God.

I'm no longer bound by the level of spirituality that I can find in this group here, but I can go on with God and master heights of attainment and opportunity as the Spirit of the Lord communicates to my heart. I am free in this matter to serve my God, and I can share these impulses and these joys and these blessings with all my brothers, and they have perfect opportunity to grow with us in this spiritual temple as every study contributes to the life and vitality of every other. Brothers, this is the faith of the Church of Jesus Christ.

This is a return to the principle of voluntary church where every man is part of God. Every man contributes his life, his week-long bleeding in the presence of the Lord, in his private devotion, and brings them to the body, and shortly they share and contribute in this living organism of the Church of God. I ask you to give consideration to those thoughts as you go home.

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