

**BIBLICAL AUTHORITY
AND CHRISTIAN FREEDOM**

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**the final report of the Covenant Committee
on Freedom and Theology
presented to the annual meeting of
the Evangelical Covenant Church of America
Chicago, Illinois-June 18, 1963**



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Preface

With this report the Covenant Committee on Freedom and Theology concludes its work on the assignment given to it by the Annual Meeting at Miami, Florida in 1958. This committee was originally appointed by the Covenant Board of Ministerial Standing "to plan and prepare a study of the real nature of our highly cherished freedom in the Covenant and of our theological position within evangelical Christianity"¹

In approving the appointment of the committee the Annual Meeting gave it the following assignment:

"... to study problems that have been with us for a long time: first of all, the nature and scope of our freedom which we look upon as a unique part of our tradition; and, second, our theological position related to our biblical heritage and to historical Christianity."²

The first part of this assignment has been completed. The committee presents herewith its findings concerning the nature and scope of Christian freedom within the framework of biblical authority. This is not to be construed as a creedal statement but as an historically oriented description of today's Covenant Church. The subject matter is confined to Authority and Freedom—the authority of the Bible and our freedom in Christ.

The second part of the Committee's assignment, namely a description or definition of the Covenant Church's theological position was begun with a study document on the Nature of the Church and the Sacraments, which was submitted to the 1962 Annual Meeting in Seattle, Washington. This should be considered as the first step in the fulfillment of the second part of the Committee's assignment. The task of defining the theological position of the Covenant Church is conceived as a work that will continue as long as God grants life and purpose to our fellowship. It remains for the denomination itself to appoint such committees or commissions as it considers necessary to continue this work.

The report which follows entitled Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom, when endorsed by this Annual Meeting, will, until such time as it may be revised by further denominational action, serve the Covenant Church in the following ways:

1. A Means of Identification.

Without claiming uniqueness for the Covenant denomination within the family of God, it is herein identified by its concern for biblical authority and Christian freedom.

¹Covenant Year Book 1958, p. 240

²Ibid, p. 242



2. *A Frame of Reference*

As a non-creedal church, the Covenant is subject to periodic pressures from its own membership to define the basis for its unity and the boundaries of its diversity. Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom is a statement to which reference may be made to determine whether or not particular courses of action or types of thought are consistent with Covenant principles and practice.

3. *A Basis for Mutual Understanding.*

As the Covenant Church grows older in years and larger in numbers it becomes increasingly important for its survival as a vital fellowship that its members understand and accept each other in a spirit of mutual trust and confidence. The basis for such mutuality is described in this document.

4. *A Definition of Freedom*

By examining the implications of our freedom in four significant areas of our common life as embodied in Biblical Authority and Christian Freedom the committee has sought to provide adequate guide lines for both the limitation and protection of this freedom.

The Covenant Committee on Freedom & Theology

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Walter Thorell and Arvid Carlson found it necessary to resign from the Freedom Committee for personal reasons.

CHAPTER I

The Authority of the Bible

THE COVENANT CHURCH was born in the pietist movement, and in the Scandinavian revivals of the 19th century. It found its source of vital spiritual life in a renewed appreciation of the Scriptures. The established church of the day honored the Bible and accepted its authority, but its concern was more often with the letter than with the spirit. Although it was rigidly orthodox, it often did little to meet the needs of the heart and made difficult a warm-hearted and vital relation to the message of Scripture.

The spiritual power of the pietist movement lay in its recovery of a vital and dynamic use of the Bible. This early pietist approach to the Scriptures was not new. Rather, it was the rediscovery of the living view of the Bible which characterized the early Reformation.

It has been and remains the conviction of the Covenant that the Bible is "the Word of God, the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine and conduct." Our fathers considered the Bible to be a book which, while referring to many things, is primarily about one thing – our salvation and the power to walk therein. Its essential content is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. To read it properly, therefore, is to find it an altar where one meets the living God and receives personally the reality of redemption.

In its primary sense God's revelation of himself is made in the person of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In his birth, life, teaching, ministry, death, and resurrection the redemptive action of God in history is seen at its decisive focal point. On the cross atonement for our sins is accomplished; in the resurrection our victory over sin and death is assured; in the promise of his second coming the consummation of his purpose for history is made sure.

The early church proclaimed this revelation of God in Christ as the central theme of its message of redemption. This message was understood in the light of the Old Testament and preserved in the New Testament (*I Cor. 15:3-4*). The Scriptures, written by godly men inspired by the Holy Spirit, arose in the life of the believing community. Used in the writing were of necessity human words, figures and concepts which were in relation to the culture of their time. In and through this temporal language God speaks his eternal word wherein is our salvation.

The Scriptures are both the witness to God's redemptive action in history and the interpretation of that action. Both the redemptive action in history in which God discloses himself and the interpretation or meaning which the Scriptures give of

that action together constitute revelation. The Church sees in such revelation the glory and mystery of God who condescends to speak his Word through the words of men and finds in it a mystery which can be compared to the Incarnation of the Eternal Son in the Man Jesus. It looks upon the revelation, writing, gathering, and preserving of the Scriptures as a great work of God.

While the Scriptures address themselves both to the mind and heart, the proof of their authority is not determined ultimately by the tests of human reason but by God himself as he bears witness to the Word through the inward work of the Holy Spirit in our minds and hearts.

Because there is no other channel through which redeeming knowledge of God is now disclosed to man, the church is bound to the Scriptures. Only in and through them does it find the source of its life. Therefore, its faith, its worship, its conduct, its fellowship, and its freedom must all arise out of, be judged by, and be renewed by the Scriptures.

Because the Scriptures have arisen within history and are transmitted to us through historical processes the church in its educational task is obliged to use the best available methods of scholarly research to answer questions pertaining to text, authorship, circumstances of origin, content, and meaning.

Because the Bible is the Word of God the church is obliged to treasure its message, guarding against every temptation to obscure its plain teaching or evade its truth, and humbly submitting itself to responsive obedience in the Holy Spirit.

The Evangelical Covenant Church is a community of people which "believes in the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, as the Word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine and conduct."

What does this statement mean for the understanding of ourselves as a Christian community?

1) It means that we are a people of a Book. We believe that the Bible is the place where God is to be met, where His forgiveness is proclaimed, and where His will is made known. This is not to say that He is unable to speak through other means; but it is to affirm that He has chosen to speak to man through the Bible. The Bible is the means by which God has chosen to reveal himself to us.

Accordingly, we believe that when God speaks through a sermon, it is because the sermon is the message of the Bible. When He speaks to us in prayer, it is because our prayer is prayer according to the Bible. When we hear Him speak in the events of history, or in the world of nature, it is because we have learned through the Bible to understand what it is that He is saying in these areas. The Bible is for us a meetingplace with God.

2) Our statement of faith also means that we believe the Bible stands in judgment upon our sinfulness. Its message is the story of God's love for the world, of His calling us men from our sin, and of His demand that we share in His redemptive ministry; as such it stands in judgment upon the Christian Church and condemns all thought and action which does not conform to the will herein revealed. The carelessness that would distort the Gospel out of concern for success or growth; the excessive concern for the comforts of life in a world of misery and need; the

failure to live as persons accountable to God for all expenditures of money, talent and time; the factionalism and exclusivism by which the members of Christ's Body are separated from one another; the sinful pride and prejudice which prevents loving of persons of other races, religions and classes; the failure to understand appreciatively those in the Christian fellowship with whom we disagree; the unwillingness to extend to individualists and non-conformists the freedom required for creative spiritual growth, and the joylessness sometimes attendant upon the Christian community in its excessive concern for self and its neglect of the grace and power available in Christ – all these the Bible condemns, and in judgment calls the Christian to repentance and renewal.

This message of judgment, then, is only the context for the more positive function of the Bible. It is not only a book that judges. It is also a means of grace, and as such the Christian community has experienced it. Through its message God confronts men with the grace of forgiveness and the gift of new life, and through the reverent reading of it God's Spirit nourishes the faith, deepens the love, guides the conduct and encourages the hope of the Christian man.

3) Clearly implied in our statement of faith is the conviction that a spiritually healthy Christian community must be sustained by a right use of the Bible. For the Bible, through which we hear God's judgment upon our sinfulness, is also the means by which there comes God's saving and healing Word of Life. To receive these words of judgment and renewal we must restore the Book to the place which our Fathers gave it. It must be the center of our life and worship. It must be the daily bread of every Christian; it must be the constant diet of every church.

Our times of Bible study are to be regarded as times of prayer. After using all our resources to determine the original meaning of a passage, our task is to turn its message into a prayer, marking its relevance for our lives as members of a Christian community in a world that needs salt and light.

If, as individual Christians and as a Christian community, we learn to listen to God's voice breaking through to us day after day, and week by week from the pages of His chosen Book, we will discover a deepening of our love for Him who saves us, a widening of our love for this sinful world, a strengthening of the bonds of fellowship and mutual trust within the Christian community and a growing Christlikeness in the lives of His saints.

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CHAPTER 2

Freedom Within Authority

THE COVENANT CHURCH, accepting the authority of the Scriptures must inquire into the nature of Christian freedom, the way in which it has experienced that freedom, and the ways in which that freedom may be maintained.

A. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM?

The human situation, as described in the Bible, is a situation in servitude. Man is enslaved to numerous powers; to sin, law, death, and spiritual forces. These debilitating servitudes keep him from realizing his own meaning and potential. Enslaved by these powers he cannot discover what God meant him to be. He is not free.

The good news assures us that these many servitudes may be exchanged for one new commanding control – a voluntary bondage to God. Paradoxically, this voluntary bondage to God is freedom itself. For the yielding of one's life in obedient love to the will of God is the avenue to man's fulfillment. In this yielding of himself to God, man discovers his own true destiny. Hereby he becomes what he was meant to be: the servant, the son, the friend of God. To become what one is meant to be, to realize the very purpose for which one is created, that is freedom.

Freedom, then, is the gift which comes through obedience to God's will. This will is made known to man in and through the Scriptures, and particularly through Jesus Christ. In Christ God has spoken, revealing both his judgment and his salvation. Through Christ God has acted, calling man to repentance, to the forgiveness of sins, and to a new life of fellowship with himself.

Freedom is a gift which one must rightly use if he would retain it. On the one hand, the Christian has been set free to live in fellowship with God and man in obedient conformity to God's will. On the other hand, he is threatened with the continuing possibility of some new or old servitude and stands in continual need of the resources of grace. Thus, freedom is conceived as a state of being free and a process of becoming free. "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (*Galatians 5:1*).

What relevance has this definition of the Christian's freedom and this description of the human situation to us who are confronted by a diversity of opinions in many matters of doctrine and by a variety of standards in many areas of conduct? If we believe that our freedom is found in our conforming to the will of God, then it becomes imperative that we know what that will is. According to the Christian faith

God has revealed his will to man in the Bible and supremely in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hence, the Bible is the avenue to freedom. Its message is God's Word, to which man, if he would be free, must respond in obedient faith.

On the central issues of our faith, doctrine, and conduct the biblical message is sufficiently clear – the creation of all things by God, man made in the divine image but fallen in sin, his consequent moral inability to achieve his redemption, the incarnate and sinless life of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, his atoning death and resurrection, redemption through faith in him, the regenerative and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of Christ's coming again to consummate his kingdom and judge the world. These affirmations constitute the essential core of the biblical message and are sufficiently clear for our salvation.

However, the meaning of the Bible or the nature of its relevance is not so clear as to remove all diversities of interpretation. Christians do hold divergent views on the theological definition of such doctrines as biblical inspiration, the sacraments, the incarnation, the atonement, the application of the Christian ethic, and the consummation of the age. Thus, while there is unity on the level of faith in Christ and the Gospel there is diversity on the level of theological expression.

The diversity is not in itself contrary to the will of God. The Bible affirms that God created us as finite human beings. Our diversity is a reflection of our finiteness as well as our immaturity. Hence, his will is that we should recognize this finiteness and be dependent upon and responsive to the revelation he has already given to us. While attempting to state the content of the revelation in terms that are meaningful to us, we must keep in mind that our apprehension of the revelation is subject to the limitations of our humanity and that we are subject to error and often in need of correction.

For the Christian to accept God's will involves acknowledging his finiteness and his dependence on God. On the one hand this implies the importance of constructing a theology which will clarify his faith. On the other hand it gives the Christian freedom from bondage to any man-made theological system by whatever name it may be called. It gives him freedom to be open to the correction of his fellows and to the rich possibilities of spiritual growth which accompany this acceptance of his finitude. It gives him freedom to discover his utter dependence on God's revealing work of grace as the only avenue to personal fulfillment. Thus, it gives him freedom to be what God meant for him to be – the dependent, obedient, and victorious child of God.

B. HOW HAS THIS FREEDOM BEEN EXPERIENCED IN THE COVENANT?

This understanding of freedom as submission to the will of God was exemplified in the work and teaching of the founders of our denomination. In the church of their day they saw evidence that the Christian liberty, recovered in the Reformation, was in danger of being stifled by the hardening of forms and dogmas. While they realized that dogmas, set forms of worship, and "official" interpretations of Scripture served a purpose in the life of the church, they were fearful lest such forms become idols which stand in the way of a living encounter with Christ as disclosed in the Word. Similarly, while they were appreciative of the wisdom reflected in the creeds of the church, they saw the creeds to be partial and imperfect summaries of what is said more powerfully in Scripture itself. Therefore, they refused to make any of the written creeds binding in an absolute sense, lest slavish adherence to a creedal statement make it difficult to hear and respond to the full implications of the Word for their

day. They believed that true freedom came by faith in and surrender to Christ and the Word alone.

Further illustration of our fathers' conviction that freedom is implied in the believer's relationship to Christ is seen in their view of the church. For them the church was the fellowship of believers and was brought into being through the redemptive work of Christ and the "renewal of the Holy Spirit." Accordingly, the one basic requirement for membership in the church was the experience of the new birth and a consistent confession of Christ as Savior and Lord. To have added the requirement of uniformity in all doctrinal matters would have been to forget that "our knowledge is imperfect" and would have presumed that a final and authoritative theological position was in their sole possession. Its effect would have been to limit their fellowship to the dimensions of a sect rather than permit it to be the household of God in which the living faith expresses itself in varied ways. Thus, our forefathers found it spiritually meaningful to live in Christain fellowship with persons holding different doctrinal viewpoints in some important areas as long as their life and spirit witnessed to their submission to Christ and devotion to the Word of God.

Such a position did not mean indifference to doctrine or a lack of theological concern. This is evidenced in the lively discussion of doctrinal topics which arose in response to the questions, "Where is it written?" and "What is written?" Our fathers knew that even the simple confession "We acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord" implied in itself a number of theological affirmations. They understood that a part of the task of the church was to spell out in systematic and orderly manner the theological structure implied in its confession. They were aware of the danger of heresy and, therefore, insisted that all theological statements must be continually under the judgment of the revelation given in Scripture.

Our forefathers, in keeping with this principle of freedom, were able to move out into the currents and crosscurrents of spiritual and theological influence which swirled about their lives. This is evidenced not by their interest in the work of the theological schools (for there was little of that) but in their participation in the pietistic movement itself, and in the discussions concerning the sacraments, church order, atonement, and other topics of vital concern in the life of the church. Their interest in doctrine was practical and devotional rather than intellectualistic. Very few of them were professional theologians. In relation to their own spiritual needs they examined in the light of the Scriptures the movements of which they were aware, accepting what illumined the biblical message and rejecting what they thought contrary to it. Through such discussion they found their own understanding of the faith corrected, deepened, and made relevant to the problems of their day.

If we are to be true to this aspect of our heritage, we should sincerely and faithfully use this principle of freedom as a basic element in our existence as a Christian people in today's world. To do so we must enter into the stream of present theological discussion and exercise our freedom creatively and helpfully with respect to the issues which now confront the Christian church. The theological concerns of the present moment differ in many respects from those of our fathers. Although many of the questions now being debated in the church were well known to our fathers, others have arisen since their day and could not have been known to them. Thus, to say that we may differ only at those points where our fathers permitted differences would be to deny to the present generation the freedom in Christ which our fathers enjoyed. In the basic and central affirmations of the Christian faith there must be unity, but in their expression and interpretation there is room for wholesome divergence.

It is, therefore, our duty to approach the areas of theological tension with courage, brotherly understanding, and unflinching devotion to Christ and the Scriptures. A passive neutrality simply paralyzes our influence and work. Fear of being misunderstood or misinterpreted may well reduce our spiritual impact to the point of diminishing returns, both in the pulpit and in the pew. If we do not speak the meaning of the Word as we see it, we will incur the displeasure of God and lose his power. However, this freedom to express ourselves must be coupled with a sense of responsibility to both God and man in the church and outside of the church. This sense of responsibility must be kept alive enabling us to recognize the various stages of maturity and diversity of historical backgrounds of those to whom we bear witness and to acknowledge our own finiteness in the understanding of God's Word. Through sharing in discussion the insights which each of us may possess and in faithfully seeking to understand the revelation given to us in Christ, we make the faith relevant to our day. In such discussion we shall doubtless find areas of difference, but we shall also find a deepened sense of our basic unity in Christ.

C. MAINTAINING CHRISTIAN FREEDOM IN THE COVENANT CHURCH

The conditions under which our denomination exists today are far different from those of its earlier years. Our members now live within the framework of the changing culture of our day. Evangelism and church extension are bringing many people of widely differing practices and doctrinal concepts into our fellowship. A higher standard of education is making our members conversant with a wide variety of ideas. Our missionary activities are placing us in direct contact with the changing thought patterns of the revolutionary world of today, and modern means of communication are bringing this world much closer to us than it has ever been before. Changing conditions such as these make it necessary to consider whether we may continue to experience Christian freedom in the way in which it has been so meaningful to us in the past.

This question of maintaining our Christian freedom is particularly relevant to the Covenant Church in four significant areas:

1) Christian Freedom in our Personal Relationships.

The wider contacts and greater diversity among people who associate with one another today make it difficult to understand one another. Even words have different meanings for different persons and communication by the spoken or written word presents problems. Strong emotional overtones often become attached to certain words. For instance, words such as "fundamentalism," "neo-orthodoxy," "liberal," and so forth tend to create strong emotional feelings, particularly when they identify persons with movements in a manner which appears to be derogatory either to the persons or the movements or to both.

Is it possible, under these conditions, to maintain the principle of freedom within the authority of the Bible in our personal relationships? Can we continue to look upon ourselves as a fellowship of believers bound together only by our common life in Christ and conformity to Christ as Saviour and Lord? Can we maintain the kind of personal relationships required in a Christian fellowship without any limitations other than that we submit to the authority of the Bible as the revelation of God's will or must we return to uniform dogmas and carefully defined interpretations of Scrip-

ture to help us understand one another? In a word, how does the principle of Christian freedom relate to the problems of personal relationships among us today?

Christian freedom, as has been defined in the first part of this chapter, is a gift which comes through obedience to God's will which is made known in and through the Scriptures. As has also been indicated, such freedom is both a state of being free and a process of becoming free. We all continue to be finite creatures and no one has yet attained to the place of complete maturity.

The New Testament makes it clear that this recognition of our immaturity is highly significant to our personal relationships within the Christian fellowship. For instance, it is among those who "see in a mirror darkly" that Christian love prevails (*1 Cor. 13*); it is the one who deals with the "log" in his own eye who can see clearly to remove the "speck" from his brother's eye (*Matt. 7:3-5*); and it is among those who recognize and confess their sins that fellowship exists (*1 John 1*). Paul admonishes us to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (*Eph. 5:21*), and he himself longs to "be encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (*Rom. 1:11-12*). As the New Testament indicates, it is when we recognize our own immaturity that we also recognize that our brother can contribute something to us.

When Christian freedom as thus defined is applied to our personal relationships, superficial barriers become unimportant and each person has the right to be himself as an individual in Christ, and each person makes his contribution to the freedom of the entire Christian fellowship. This means, for instance, that we show our brother the courtesy of hearing and of seeking to understand both his words and their meaning and that we do not judge him without allowing him the opportunity of stating his case. It also means that we exercise care in our use of words with possible emotional overtones and that we never use any disagreement with our brother as an opportunity for personal advancement at his expense. On the one hand, it means that we recognize that others have the freedom to differ with us according to their understanding of the will of God, and, on the other hand, it means that we have the freedom to change our own position as we understand the will of God more clearly. Thus we *are* free in our personal relationships, and we *are becoming* free as we help one another to conform more closely to the will of God as it is revealed in the Bible.

Such freedom in our personal relationships will also lead to a consideration for the contribution of minorities. Christian vitality has not always been maintained by the majority. It has, in fact, often been found only in small minorities. Such minorities have no voice where conformity to "official" interpretations is required. Unless we wish to stifle all emergent spiritual vitality, we must be sure that people within our fellowship will be free to express themselves in ways which are different from the majority position without the fear of being labeled as disloyal.

With the greater complexity of modern life it becomes increasingly important to keep the lines of communication as simple as possible. It is helpful for differing parties to come face to face in order to consider their differences. Where personal grievances exist, they may be most effectively dealt with in personal contacts as directed in Matthew 18:15-17 and in Galatians 6:1-5.

By such applications of Christian freedom we maintain the basic principle of freedom within the authority of the Bible even in our more complex personal relationships of today.

2) Christian Freedom in our Institutional Life and Service.

The New Testament makes it clear that the church is the temple of God (*see Eph. 2:14-22*). In this world it functions in the form of institutional organizations

which express the spiritual realities much as the human body serves the human spirit. In its institutional form the church owns property, conducts business, pays salaries, and engages in many other activities which are similar to the activities of secular organizations. These activities are meaningful only as they serve the purposes of the Spirit of God who dwells in the Church.

Christians may be brought into bondage by placing the chief emphasis on the success and growth of the institution. If we surrender to this temptation, we become subject to pressures for worldly success and even our spiritual activities are evaluated in terms of this motive. The result is that we tend to evaluate men superficially so that their devotion to Christ is measured only by their value to the church organization.

Such emphasis presents the threat that individual Christians will lose their freedom by becoming slaves to institutional success. It also presents the threat that constant emphasis on programs and institutional activities will leave insufficient time for the strengthening of our spiritual forces. Christian freedom is a spiritual matter and it can not exist unless there is sufficient emphasis on the spiritual aspects of the Christian life.

On the other hand, too little recognition of the part which the institution plays in the life of the church presents a threat to the very framework of authority within which Christian freedom exists. The New Testament recognizes that the Christian body has the right and responsibility of discipline (*see for instance, I Cor. 5:3-8*). As has already been indicated, Christian freedom has been understood by the Covenant Church to be within the authority of the Bible. Therefore, whether the body be one of our local congregations or the denomination itself or any other organization within the denomination, it must have some way of determining that its freedom remains within the bounds of Biblical authority. If we were to restrict our freedom by clearly defined creedal statements and detailed regulations on church order to guide us, this would be a comparatively simple matter. However, if we are to continue to refuse to be bound by such man made restrictions on Christian freedom, we must be sensitive to the direction of the Spirit as he seeks to lead us to act according to the will of God as it is revealed in the Bible. Therefore, if we are to maintain the principle of freedom within the authority of the Bible as it relates to our institutional life and service, we must not only be thoroughly familiar with the Bible itself, but we must also emphasize a vital spiritual motivation for the institutional aspects of our fellowship.

3) Christian Freedom in our Intellectual Pursuits.

True scholarship is an essential activity which should be encouraged among us. We are admonished to love the Lord with our whole person, including our minds (*Matt. 22:37*). The most significant battles of our time are those which are being fought in the world of ideas. The people of today's world are being challenged to live by new concepts, many of which are completely lacking in Christian perspective. We must be able to challenge our youth with the adequacy of our Christian heritage in the areas both of profound thought and of simple trust. Scholarly pursuits, therefore, should be considered worthy of the dedication of our finest minds and most devoted hearts.

There is a difference between true scholarship, which is open to all truth, and intellectual sophistication, which often looks on the gospel as foolishness. A Christian who gives himself to scholarly pursuits may be expected to be humble and devoted to his faith. Even such a person, however, faces problems which are peculiar

to the nature of his work. The attitude of objectivity, of openness to new ideas, and of freedom from restrictions on thought often leads him to conclusions which are contrary to popular opinion. Some within the Christian fellowship may become alarmed at these conclusions for fear that they may be contrary to sound Christian doctrine and they may with complete sincerity and earnestness raise questions about them.

Neither stifling freedom of thought nor granting the scholar immunity from criticism can produce harmony. On the one hand, we must recognize that we can remain active and vital in our interpretation of truth only as we permit the scholar to be honest about his conclusions. Human pride or fear may tempt us to reject ideas merely because they seem new. We must recognize and resist this temptation wherever it exists. On the other hand, we must recognize that the scholar is also human, subject to the temptation of pride of learning and to the common frailties of the flesh, and that an undisciplined and irresponsible scholarship has no place within the Christian fellowship.

The solution to our problem is to accept the scholar, as we accept others, on the basis of his Christian testimony, which he should be able to give in language clear and simple enough to be understood by all. His actions as well as his words should bear witness to his respect for the Bible as the Word of God, his devotion to his Lord, his faithfulness to the gospel, and his participation in the life of the church.

Having earned the respect of his fellow Christians, the scholar should be rewarded with the freedom which intellectual pursuits requires, but this freedom must be under the authority of the truth as revealed in the Bible. In order that harmful tensions shall not arise between the scholar and those who may question whether this principle of freedom within authority is prevailing, there must be a continuing communication within the church in order that the truth may be further clarified. Thus the principle of freedom within authority also becomes the basis for our intellectual pursuits.

4) Christian Freedom in our Outreach.

As the traditional walls which have isolated us in the past are breaking down, the way is opening for us to look on all men who do not know Christ as objects of our evangelistic concern.

At this very point, however, we are faced with the temptation to concentrate in our evangelistic outreach on those who are most like us socially and economically. When this happens our entire program tends to become geared to the interests and values of this group. We become specialists to our own class and increasingly it seems right to leave to others the responsibility of reaching other classes. Eventually we conclude that we cannot afford to minister in certain areas because we do not understand or know how to work with the people who live there. Thus we lose the freedom to proclaim the grace of God to all men without distinction, as the New Testament presents it.

The very desire to maintain our concept of Christian freedom may tempt us to limit our outreach. We may hesitate to assimilate people from such a wide variety of backgrounds because of the fear that they will eventually lead us to an interpretation of freedom which will not be consistent with Biblical authority. On the other hand, we may hesitate to assimilate people from backgrounds in which the Christian faith means submission to detailed doctrinal statements because of the fear that they may lead us to an interpretation of Biblical authority which eliminates freedom.

If, however, we concentrate in our outreach on one segment of society because of either of these fears or simply because of our attraction to those who are like us



we deny the principle of freedom in Christ because we do not permit persons in our fellowship the freedom to be different from us. The effect of such concentration is to make it even more difficult to communicate with the world around us. We need the voice of a wide variety of peoples on the floor of our conferences and in our policy making bodies. We need the corrective discipline of their differing backgrounds to keep our message and our work relevant to our generation. Were we to seek to protect the principle of freedom within the authority of the Bible by limiting our outreach to those who can appreciate our heritage we would destroy the very principle of freedom which we were seeking to protect.

It will help us to remember that the principle of freedom within the authority of the Bible, which is so much a part of our heritage, came into existence among us in a time of revival. It must be looked upon as a spiritual discipline which is closely related to the life and vitality of our denomination. To seek to maintain it by limiting our outreach to those who we think will most easily embrace it is merely to admit that we do not believe that the Gospel has the power to do for men today what it did for us in a previous generation.

We maintain this principle of Christian freedom only as we maintain our spiritual vitality, which we have by the grace of God. The problem of maintaining it, therefore, must be approached in a contrite and penitent spirit in which we seek the mercy of God in permitting us to return to Him. Out of such an attitude, we pray, will come a renewed experience of the vital life in which we become free sons of God under the Lordship of Christ as the Truth is revealed to us in the Bible.

