

## ***The Dangers of Fundamentalism***

There are many within the evangelical community that confidently tell others that they are Reformed. They proudly declare that they are ‘five point Calvinists.’ Yet, what may come as a surprise to some, is that the Reformed Faith has more than five points. For example, can someone be Reformed if they do not affirm the doctrine of the church, covenants, or church discipline? The answer to this is a resounding, No! Why is this the case? Reformed theologians have always stressed the idea that the Reformed Faith is nothing less than biblical Christianity. The idea that a Reformed soteriology, or doctrine of salvation, can be divorced from the rest of the teaching of Scripture is therefore unacceptable. Now, with this in mind, we should therefore duly note that when the Westminster divines were setting forth the teaching of Scripture in the Confession and Catechisms, they devoted an entire chapter to the subject of Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience. What is the significance of this subject and why is it a cardinal doctrine of the Reformed Faith?

In Paul’s epistle to the Colossians we see him rebuking them for setting up rules for life that are not contained in Scripture: “Why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men” (Col. 2.20b-22)? It is important that we note that Paul calls these rules ‘the commandments and doctrines of men.’ What the specific nature of these commandments was, we do not know. Nevertheless, what is certain is that they were not commands of Scripture. We see an example of this in the Garden of Eden when Eve told the serpent that God had said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die” (Gen. 3.3b). Now, what God actually said was, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2.17). Notice that Eve added the command that they should not touch the tree. This was a self-imposed command. What does Paul say about self-imposed religion? “These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Col. 2.23). How true this was of Adam and Eve. Their extra command surely had the appearance of wisdom—it set an extra measure of protection around the forbidden tree. In the end, however, it proved to be of no value against Adam and Eve’s disobedience. We see, then, that Paul shows us that there is no value in extra-biblical rules no matter how well intentioned they might be. If a person will not ultimately obey the command of God, what makes us think that he will obey the command of man? This, however, is not the only reason that extra-biblical commands are problematic. There are two other crucial reasons of even greater importance.

First, is because extra-biblical commands question the sufficiency of Scripture. Why is there a need to add a command, such as the abstinence from the consumption of alcohol, where God has seen fit not to do so? God is and was fully aware of the nature of alcohol, even in our contemporary culture, and yet in His infinite wisdom did not prohibit its consumption. Second, the person who creates extra-biblical commands puts himself in the place of God who alone is our lawgiver. Questioning the wisdom of God, the sufficiency

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of Scripture, and taking the place of God as Lawgiver, are of course, very dangerous and sinful actions. This is the spirit of fundamentalism—imposing extra-biblical rules upon others. This is the great danger of fundamentalism—supplanting the Law of God with our own, taking His unique place of authority as Lawgiver. This is much more dangerous than the terrorism of Islamic fundamentalists because it places souls in peril. Indeed, this is one of the major thrusts of Paul’s epistle to the Galatians. The Judaizers were saying that circumcision was necessary for salvation—a man made command. Paul warned them that they had started to believe in another gospel (Gal. 1.8-9).

It is for these reasons that the Westminster divines, based upon these passages of Scripture and theological truths, wrote: “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to His Word; or beside it, in matters of faith or worship” (WCF 20.2). Along these lines Terry Johnson in his book *When Grace Comes Home* writes: “Should you feel guilty about having a drink? Not unless it leads to drunkenness. Should you feel guilty about buying a nice car? Not unless the desire for it is idolatrous. Should you feel guilty about not giving more money to the church? Not if you are tithing. What about eating a large luxurious meal? Is it a sin to eat heartily? Not necessarily. It is only sin if you are being gluttonous. If you are sinning, repent and quit. Get rid of the guilt. There is a great deal of motivation by guilt going on in the church today. Extrabiblical and unscriptural obligations are being heaped up on the backs of people, burdening them with guilt and robbing them of their joy. Frankly, these are the tactics and style of the cult. In cults, everything is governed by a law. Individual freedom is denied and suppressed. Leaders make decisions as to who shall marry whom, who shall do what kind of work, who shall live where. This is bondage. Where you see this or the tendency toward this, flee. Our question is, is it commanded in Scripture? If it is, we must do it, completely, precisely. If it is not, we are free to do and free not to do, as taste and wisdom dictate” (p. 132).

Christian Liberty is a hallmark of biblical Christianity and therefore one of the cardinal doctrines of the legion points of Calvinism, or the Reformed Faith. We cannot and must not attach a cartload of extra-biblical rules to a Reformed soteriology. Fundamentalism and Reformed soteriology are mutually exclusive. Rather than trust in our ability to make extra-biblical rules, no matter how well intentioned, let us trust whole-heartedly in our Lord, our supremely wise Lawgiver.