

Week 7 Book III: Christian freedom

1. 3.19.1-5, 7-15 The True Nature of Christian Freedom
2. 4.11.1-3, 5; 4.12.1-11 Church Discipline [add 4.10.1-8, 27-32]
3. 4.20.1-4, 6, 8-9, 14-16, 22-25, 30-32 Civil Government

In the original 1526 edition of the *Institutes* these three sections we are looking at all appeared together to form Chapter 6.

1. Christian Freedom (3.19.1-5, 7-15)

a) *Christian conscience rises above law righteousness.* 'And at the same time he teaches that through the cross of Christ they are free from the condemnation of the law, which otherwise hangs over all men [Gal. 4:5], so that they may rest with full assurance in Christ alone.' (3:19.3)

b) *Freed from the law the Christian conscience obeys God's will.* Calvin's 'third use of the law': the **Christian is freed by Christ alone to obey the law, rather than by obeying the law to be set free.** (3.19.5)

c) *Freedom to choose or not chose things that are considered indifferent.*

'And we have never been forbidden to laugh, or to be filled, or to join new possessions to old or ancestral ones, or to delight in musical harmony, or to drink wine. True indeed. But ...' (3.19.9)

'But it is sometimes important for our freedom to be declared before men. This I admit. Yet we must with the greatest caution hold to this limitation, that we do not abandon the care of the weak, whom the Lord has so strongly commended to us.' (3.19.10)

Freedom vs obedience

'...there is a twofold government in man: one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing God; the second is political, whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men.' (3.19.15)

2. Church Discipline (4.10.1-8, 27-32;)

a) **Freedom of Conscience and Church Laws and Traditions**

Dilemma

'For our consciences do not have to do with men but with God alone' on one hand. Yet 'if we must obey rulers not only because of punishment but *for conscience sake* [as per Rom. 13:5 (my italics)], it seems to follow from this that the rulers' laws also have dominion over the conscience.' (4.10.5)

'distinguish between genus and species' (4.10.5)

Church Law and Discipline: 'the first type pertains to rites and ceremonies; the second, to the discipline and peace.' (4.10.29)

Form of Worship

'But because he [the Lord] did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies to prescribe in detail what we ought to do (because he foresaw that this depended upon the state of the times, and he

b) **Jurisdiction of Church Law**

- i) **Distinction from civil law** (4.11.1-3, 5)

‘For the church does not have the right of the sword to punish or compel, not the authority to force; not imprisonment, nor the other punishments which the magistrate commonly inflict. Then, it is not a question of punishing the sinner against his will, but of the sinner professing his repentance in a voluntary chastisement. The two conceptions are very different.’ (4.11.3)

ii) **The importance of applying discipline in a church** (4.12.1-5)

‘... discipline is like a bridle to restrain and tame those who rage against the doctrine of Christ; or like a spur to arouse those of little inclination; and also sometimes like a father’s rod to chastise mildly and with the gentleness of Christ’s Spirit those who have more seriously lapsed.’ (4.12.1)

iii) **The importance of moderation.** (4.12.6-11)

Having spent the first five paragraphs in chapter 12 explaining the importance and purpose of church discipline, Calvin then spends the next eight exhorting moderation in its application.

3. Civil Government (4.20.1-4, 6, 8-9, 14-16, 22-25, 30-32)

a) The Magistrate

i) *The two kingdoms: church and civil*

ii) *Form of government*

iii) ‘it is not easy to distinguish which one of them excels in usefulness.’ (4.20.8) *Specifics of the government’s mandate*

iv) *Use of force, in peacetime and war*

v) *Taxes*

b) The laws

i) *Variety based on the moral law*

‘the law is a silent magistrate; the magistrate, a living law’ (4.20.14 quoting Cicero). Therefore, as a government makes its own statutes (and it is free to do so) it should be ‘in conformity to that perpetual rule of love, so that they indeed vary in form but have the same purpose.’ (4.20.15)

ii) *Christians and litigation*

‘Yet this equity and moderateness of their minds will not prevent them from using the help of the magistrate in preserving their own possessions, while maintaining friendliness towards their enemies...’ (4.20.20)

c) Those governed

i) *Obedience towards bad rulers*

‘be mindful of our own misdeeds... By this, humility will restrain our impatience.’ (4.20.29)

It is the role and duty of some magistrates ‘to restrain the wilfulness of kings’.

‘how absurd would it be that in satisfying men you should incur the displeasure of him for whose sake you obey men themselves! ’ (4.20.32) [

ii) *Drawing a line?*