

Discover the Freedom God Designed: Soul Liberty Explained – Your Conscience, God's Way

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[0:00] Tonight we're looking at the subject of soul liberty.

! So it's the liberty of a person's conscience.! It's basically the choices that we make and the decisions that we make and whether we go one way or the other way with different subjects. There's a degree of flexibility there where we might have a different mind on certain subjects. So we'll unpack a bit of that as we go along. But the soul liberty idea is that really God's given us freedom, personal faith and freedom.

And you see, it happened right back in the Garden of Eden, this truth. And so here's the download for the study notes there for anyone that might be watching. And you've got the paper copies in hand here today.

What is soul liberty? It's the liberty of conscience. The God-given right and duty of everyone to seek God. And we've got his word to form beliefs, to guide our conscience.

[1:05] And it's without human coercion. So it's not something that God forces on us or people should force on us. It's our conscience. We've all got the conscience, which is our inner moral compass that's shaped by the Holy Spirit and his word.

And it's ultimately accountable to God alone. It tells us that every one of us shall give account of himself to God. So we're all accountable to God for our decisions of conscience, those choices that we make.

And we've got a freedom to do that. And we see that in Galatians 5. It tells us there, verse 13, For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty. Only use not your liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

We've got a liberty of our conscience. But it doesn't mean that we just ride roughshod over other people who might be different from us. So it's a freedom for joyful obedience.

He gives us freedom to obey, joyfully obey him. It's not a freedom from following God or obeying God. And there's a quote there, Soul liberty gives the believer freedom to follow scripture as he understands it, but it never gives him liberty to disobey what he knows the Bible clearly commands.

[2:17] So some people might, as a really left field example, say, The Bible doesn't say that I can't smoke pot, so I'm going to smoke pot. I've got the liberty to do that.

Of course, that would be silly based on really the whole understanding of scripture and the things that the Bible tells us. Even though something is not directly forbidden, the concept of taking drugs is something that is against the tenor of scripture as well.

So it doesn't mean we just find a cop-out for everything. We want to find an excuse to go and do just because the Bible doesn't say not to do it, or likewise to do something when the Bible doesn't actually say to do it.

So what's soul liberty is not? It's not a license to sin. As you said, you can't just use it as a cop-out. It's really this clear biblical commands that must be obeyed.

It's not a freedom from consequences. The Bible tells us that we read what we sow. When we make choices, there's going to be outcomes. It's not an excuse for division too, to divide over people, getting picky or petty about differences and falling out with each other, calling someone who disagrees with you a heretic, just because they've got a different view on something.

[3:34] It's not an excuse for division. And it's not a freedom from wisdom too. The Bible encourages us to seek godly wisdom, to get godly counsel, to bounce things off others and find the truth by getting to that mind of God on it, and honouring God with our choices as well.

So the biblical foundation is this truth of soul liberty, of the liberty of conscience is that God's given us personal choice. And he's wired us for choice.

He's made us such that we can choose. And it happened right back in the beginning, right back in the garden in Genesis 2, where the Lord God commanded the man, commanded Adam, of every tree thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it. For in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die. God gave Adam a choice right back in the beginning. And it's always been God's dealings with man, that he gives us a choice. We've got a freedom of choice.

And what did Adam choose? He chose sin. And God allowed him to freely make that choice. And God deals with us as individuals, and he calls us to willing faith, not to something that's coerced, but something that we freely come to believe.

[4:50] There's three pillars you could say about this concept of soul liberty. So three things here that you could pick out as what it rides on. Number one, personal accountability to God.

We're all accountable. It tells us there, Romans 14, 12. Then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. We're all going to answer to the Lord. In Ecclesiastes 12, 14, it says that every secret thing is going to bring it to life.

We know in the Bible it says that God sees the heart. 1 Samuel 16, 7, The Lord looketh on the heart. So we're all accountable. There's a truth of accountability to God.

One day it says, For believers we must all personally appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

That's 2 Corinthians 5, verse 10. The second principle there is it's a freedom in non-essentials.

So where the scripture is silent, God gives room for personal conviction. And that avoids legalism.

In Joshua 24, 15, it says, Choose you this day whom you will serve.

[5:54] God's offering us the choice. Who are you going to serve? Are we going to serve the false gods or are we going to serve the true God? And he gives us that freedom to choose.

And in the notes there it talks about how we got the choice, the invitation. In Revelation 22 it says, Come, let him take the water of life freely.

There's an invitation. And we see that there's a truth that we're not to judge people in doubtful things. It says there, Romans 14, which is a real key passage which we'll talk to a bit tonight as well. And then Galatians 5, 1 it says, So there's a freedom and there's not a bondage or it's not a forced thing.

There's a freedom that we have, ideally to choose God's way. And salvation itself is that personal choice. And then the other principle, the third one there, is obedience to God.

[6:55] To obey God above human authority. When human rules conflict with God's clear commands, our duty is to obey God. So in Acts 5 Peter said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

And the authorities were commanding them not to preach. But they said, No, we ought to obey God rather than men. And we're going to keep on preaching. And you see another example in Daniel 3 where Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they disobeyed the rule to bow down to the pagan idol. And they were willing to face the fiery furnace because they obeyed God above human authority. Some examples we're going to come to where it shows some kind of grey areas where the Bible gives principles rather than specific commands.

And that's why it's the reality is that amongst ourselves as believers, we're going to hold different convictions on different things. That doesn't mean that it's something sinful.

There's going to be differences between us on different viewpoints, on different slants on this or that. And that's not a sin as long as we're acting in faith. Romans 14, 23 says, Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

[8:13] So we don't want to do something that we could say, Oh, I'm going to do it even though I'm feeling troubled about it. And I know maybe it's a bit so-so and I've got a caution about it. No, if you're feeling that way, don't do it.

If you've got some caution about it. It's not to act in a way that's against faith. But it says in Romans 14, 5, to be fully persuaded, to be fully convinced in your own mind.

So try to get that peace with God about whatever the decision is that you're facing. And also the principle of not judging. Sometimes we might differ with another believer and we might judge them. And really, no, that's not what is meant to happen either. But that in all of the decisions we make that we're going to pursue peace. So in a church setting, now there can be times, of course, where we as a church have got a stand on something.

We make a stand, have a standard where we want things to be done orderly or in that godly witness. And those sort of stands need to be respected, of course.

[9:18] You don't want someone who might come, who differs about something and they think they've got the liberty to question the church stand on this or that and to come and stir up strife and sow discord and be contrary to where the church stands on various issues.

So that's not acceptable either. As much as they're free to believe what they want to believe, as far as their conviction and their conscience with God, but they haven't got the liberty to come and stir up strife and cause trouble in a church.

Because that needs to be respected, the order and the stand, the testimony of the church. So we're going to unpack here in that next table in your notes there, some different kind of topics that really they're examples of where issues come, where Christians can differ on this or that.

And this is not to say in that table in the notes there, it's not to say that one is necessarily more right than the other. Because as Christians, we still can see our brother or sister in Christ might have a different opinion and a different stand, a different preference on this or that.

We've got them listed here. For example, music style. Some Christians think that contemporary music is accepted and others think, well, it's hymns only.

[10:43] As a church, of course, we stand for the time-honoured songs of the faith, the songs of praise that have been time-tested. So we sing essentially hymns.

But there are some Christians who might sing a variety of things. So it's not to say, as much as we might have our own stand, our personal stand and our church stand, it's not to say that we condemn other Christians who might sing different songs, for example, because the Bible's not specific about that in a direct way, for example.

Likewise, the next issue there, instruments. Some think that all types of instruments are okay. There are some churches that take a real extreme view that they don't have any instruments at all.

There are certain churches in America called the Churches of Christ. They don't have any instruments at all. So you can see the big spectrum there between anything goes, any kind of musical instrument to no instruments at all.

And again, it's that question, well, that's something, a question of conscience, a question that a church might make a stand on. Some think that you can only sing a cappella, so unaccompanied music.

[11:58] It's just that example there of how Christians can have a different view on that. And it's not meaning that those Christians that differ from another Christian are necessarily out of God's will or anything.

They've got to make their own conscious decision about it. The next question there, the Bible, Bible versions. Some churches or Christians think, well, multiple translations are okay.

And others say King James Bible only. Now, we happen to be a church that we do stand for only the King James as far as what we preach from, teach from, and endorse and encourage people to read it and use it in all of our ministries of our church.

But we don't look down on others who might have different views about that. And, of course, as a personal level, you might choose to have different Bibles that you might refer to at home, for example.

But as a church, we do only stand on the King James Bible. As the Bible, it's faithful and we know that it's accurate, it's true to the original, and it's a faithful translation and a translation of the faithful manuscript.

[13:10] So, I'm just making the point that as Christians, there's different views on these things. And we can accommodate that there's different views. And people are welcome to come, for example, to this church who might use a different Bible.

But if they're ministering in any way, then we'd expect them to preach or teach or use the King James in that category as far as whatever ministry they're doing in the church.

Next one. Dress is one thing too. And as far as church attire. And some people, some Christians think that it's casual dress is acceptable.

And that's their choice of conscience. That's absolutely fine. And some would think, because it's a reverent thing, we're going to dress more formally. Again, it's a question of conscience.

You've got to come to your own mind on it. I'm not saying one way is more right than the other. Of course, I've got my own personal convictions, as every one of us have. And it's just coming to that mind. Yeah, you've got to come to that mind on it.

[14:11] What's the right way to dress at church, for example? Next question is the building. Of course, you've got some church buildings where there are cathedrals and it's stained glass and there's all kinds of ornate carvings and this or that.

And then on the other side of the coin, you've got church buildings that are very simple. And it's very plain. Not wanting to distract people by decorations or images and icons and things.

I mean, even the question of having a cross, there's questions about all of that too. Back in the Reformation days, they had what was called the iconoclasm, where they got very radical at some of these churches that have all kinds of statues and images, where those that were more minded to be biblical went to these churches and basically destroyed the statues and the images and all of that because they felt that was really a distraction from the reverent worship of God.

I'm not saying necessarily go to that extreme, but again, just to illustrate the point that people have got different views about what church buildings should look like. I know some people might object to flowers and arrangements and this and that.

So it's a question of conscience is the point. The next point there is technology. Some churches look down on technology. They think it's a worldly intrusion. I mean, we're using it right now to project the message or to project songs.

[15:38] We use technology and we see it more as a helpful tool. But again, some Christians have got a question of conscience about technology. The next one, giving. Some think tithing is required.

Others would say it's free will giving. Again, it's coming to a mind on these things for yourself, to come to a mind as far as your conscience. How would you see the right way to give whether we're still under the law, under the tithing arrangement, or we've got more of the free will giving today under grace.

You could look at even humour in preaching something. Well, humour is not fitting in the pulpit. It's irreverent. You could think the question of children in church services, whether we include them in worship or we have separate classes.

And really, it's a question for the parents of the family, the mums and dads. Some mums and dads might see it more fitting that their whole family is in church hearing the word of God. And, you know, I think that's a commendable thing too.

Whereas others think, well, their children might be better served in the Sunday school, in the children's classes, where they get some ministry more directed at their age level. So these are all questions of conscience.

[16:48] And Christians can be minded one way or the other. Another issue can be titles. And in some churches, they make a lot about calling the pastor, pastor so-and-so.

And that can be overdone sometimes because we know in Matthew 23, it says to be not you called rabbi. I'd be quite happy to be called brother Craig or brother Andrew, rather than making it an elevation.

But then some people get in the habit, the pattern of calling pastor or evangelist or the elder or the deacon. Again, they might like to refer to the people by a title. And again, it's a question of conscience, whatever you feel is right for you.

Over the page, next set of categories here. Think of personal appearance. And what really matters is modesty and decency.

For example, in your notes there, it says, for example, some have got a problem with women wearing trousers. The question probably is if it's modest.

[17:50] The more the issue is the gender distinction. Is it clearly men's clothes or women's clothes? And we've all got to come to our own convictions on that. Deuteronomy 22 says to not put on a woman's garment for the man and vice versa for the woman.

And again, as a church, we try to set a standard, not to be an onerous thing, but when someone's serving, for example, if a woman's serving in the church, we like to see them not dress in trousers, but to wear a female dress.

It just seems more fitting that way. That's more of the church kind of environment. But for yourself personally, as women, you might choose a different view to that in the home place, for example, or in other settings.

It's something that is a question of conscience. You've got to come to your own mind on it before the Lord. Likewise, with makeup and jewelry, sometimes it can be just tasteful adornment and just a modest thing.

Whereas others see it as something of vanity when it can be overdone. You've got to come to your own mind on that, women as well. The next question, tattoos and piercings.

[19:02] Some will say that's a modest thing. It's okay if it's modest. And then some would say that it should be fully avoided. And I've got my own convictions on all of these things, believe me.

But I'm just saying that as Christians, we might fall in one camp or the other. And it's a question of conscience. Again, hairstyles is another thing. The Bible talks about men having short hair, women having long hair.

It's more the question of there's a distinction between the genders. And then some would take a very strict approach and would measure the hair length and get the ruler out and make sure that the hair's not touching the collar for the men.

It can go to extremes on some of these things, of course. And of course, a woman may not have long hair. There's nothing necessarily wrong with a woman having short hair. But you see these different views of conscience, isn't it?

And I'm just putting it out there that they're things that Christians can differ on. And not to make a big fuss about it or fall out with each other about it is probably the point here too.

[20:06] Next category, think of daily living and ethics. Now, I know we've talked about alcohol and I've made my view very clear that I would not touch the stuff.

I would have nothing to do with alcohol. And I'd have for myself personally, a zero tolerance of alcohol for myself. But that's not to say others might have a different view, something, you know, especially in certain cultures where it's more predominant that they have alcohol in the home. That they're still a believer and they might think that socially it's okay or maybe in the cooking it's okay, this or that. But we've all got to come to our own mind on the matter. Of course, moderation would at least be the extent we'd go because the Bible is very clear that we should not be drunk with wine wherein is excess.

And sometimes it's better to take a stricter approach, even though you might feel the liberty to drink, rather than cause another to stumble. So there's all of those questions too. As we talked about on that previous night, we went through that quite exhaustively about alcohol.

Some Christians would say, Jesus made the water into wine in John 2. So my view would be that that was non-alcoholic, that it was the fresh fruit of the vine, it was fresh grape juice, freshly provided, not alcohol.

[21:29] But that's, again, it's another question for debate and for conscience sake. The next one, credit. Some have got a very strict view about getting into debt, but the reality these days is it's pretty hard to buy a house without having a mortgage, for example.

But how can we weigh that up for ourselves? What's wise use of credit or having a loan or whether we avoid it entirely? Again, it's your question of conscience. You might take one camp or the other. Entertainment. We've got to be careful, of course, about entertainment. Use discernment. And then some would say, avoid it altogether. It's not profitable. It's worldly. The question of sports on Sunday.

Of course, that's, again, a question of conscience. Some would say, well, that's permitted. And some would say, well, we should honour the Lord's Day and have nothing to do with any sport on a Sunday.

The question of counselling. It's accepted. If it's biblical, some would see it. Some would say, no, we should avoid counselling because it's a humanistic thing.

[22:36] Of course, the Bible talks about not sitting in the seat of the scornful, not taking the counsel of the ungodly. But there could be places where we could say, getting Christian counselling is going to help me.

And that's helpful. That's permitted. Another question. Organ donation. It's, again, a very personal thing. Whether we choose to be an organ donor or not. Some would see that as being an act of compassion.

Well, I don't need it anymore. So someone else can have those parts of me that are left over. And then some would say, no, that's disrespectful for the body. I wouldn't allow my body to be cut up and used that way.

And again, you could think about cremation as another question too. Some Christians have got very strong views about cremation and not to be cremated. So again, these are things you've got to grapple with for yourself.

Very personal questions really, aren't they? And whether you choose one way or the other, it's up to you. It's that question of conscience. Podcasts or listening to Christian radio, that can be helpful.

[23:36] That can be learning. You can be blessed by listening to such things. As long as you exercise discernment, then others would say such things as, hey, we should avoid that because there's mixed doctrine and there's all kinds of mixed messaging there that get confused as well.

So a question of conscience. Whether we go cooking on a Sunday, something, yeah, well, it's a necessary meal. I've got to cook for myself and my family. That's something necessary. And some would say, no, we should really honour the Lord's day and not do any cooking on a Sunday.

Same with working on a Sunday. Of course, the Bible says it's lawful to do well. And then some would say, well, we should avoid working on a Sunday. Of course, some jobs, you can't avoid working on a Sunday because it's part of the job.

And for example, in health care and nursing and disability care, there's people that actually need to be served. You can't just clock off because you're a nurse on a Sunday because people actually need that service.

So you could put the point, well, some Sabbath work, some Sunday work is permissible. Indeed, it's honouring God to do my job on a Sunday because of the nature of the job.

[24:46] The question of insurance. Some Christians think that you should not have any insurance, that we should avoid it. We should just trust God and he will provide.

Then others think, well, it's the prudent thing that I have insurance. If I'm praying my car or my house burns down, it's a prudent thing. It's a wise thing to do. So again, a question of conscience.

Another question there is holidays, recreational travel. Some would see that as maybe self-indulgent, going on a cruise or blowing a load of money on a trip here or there. But then we could see it as acceptable.

It says come apart and rest a while. There's a time for everything in life, isn't there? A time to rest, a time to relax, a time to laugh and enjoy life.

So it's a question of conscience, how we treat such a thing. And then joining community groups or clubs, joining different clubs. Of course, again, there might be a place for you to join Rotary or some other such benevolent kind of cause.

[25:52] And that could be acceptable. But then you could see it as unacceptable because we're being unequally yoked together with unbelievers. I know, for example, there's one group I can definitely say I think it's very wrong for a Christian to get involved with is the Freemasons, for example.

Because the Freemasons essentially very much in the dark side. And when people rise through the different levels, they actually see that it's Luciferian. So we've definitely been very clear about that,

that there's no place for a Christian to join the Freemasons, for example.

I hope this isn't making everyone really confused because I know it's just giving you a whole lot of things that, oh, which way shall I go on this or that? For example, on the family side of things, the principle really is of discipleship, that we're bringing up the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

There's questions for a mum and a dad about birth control, whether they hold off having children or whether they trust God to provide children. It says the fruit of the womb is his reward.

So there's that truth that God gives you children, then it's a blessing. You don't want to stop that.

The question about schooling, some would say, we think that our children can go to a public school or a Christian school, or hey, we're going to do homeschooling.

[27:13] Again, it's a question of conscience that you need to make your own mind up about that as a believer, as a family. And the family size as well, it's a personal decision.

Some people think large families are what we should aspire to, whereas we know it's as the Lord leads, isn't it? You come to that conscience of your own self as to the question of the size of your family.

Next category there is holidays and celebrations. And Romans 14, 5 says not to judge people about days. Some people have got particular views that Christmas is a joyful witness and we should have it.

We should celebrate Christmas. Others would see it as having pagan roots and to avoid it altogether. So there's those questions you need to come to your own mind on that. Should we have a Christmas tree?

Should we have a Christmas celebration? Or should we actually say, no, that's not really, I don't feel right about that. Easter and Lent as well. Some would see that as it's rightful that we celebrate the resurrection.

[28:24] In some cultures they call it Resurrection Day, Easter Sunday. Others have got a problem with Easter because of some of the pagan side to it.

And likewise with Halloween. I think it's probably a bit more clear that one as far as Halloween, that we should abhor evil. And Halloween has really got that foundation to it.

There's a lot of darkness there. But then some would say, there could be light in the darkness and they use Halloween. For example, they might get some Halloween tracts that they give out on the trick or treat night and use it as a chance to witness to the ones that knock on their door, for example.

So again, it's a question of conscience, isn't it? How far do we take it? What side do we fall on? And you can fall on either side and that's your choice. It's your conscience. Next category we see technology and society issues.

We think, for example, social media. Some people think, well, I can use my social media, my Facebook as a ministry tool. I can put Bible verses out there. I can share the gospel.

[29:27] I can share my witness of Christ on the social media, on Facebook, whatever. And then others would say, no, I'd rather steer away from that. Keep a large barge pole between me and social media because it's a risk to my purity.

I don't want to be misled or my time wasted. And I want to keep my heart with all diligence. A question of conscience. Same with entertainment, TV, movies.

Someone thinks it's quite fine for me to have a TV in my living room. I'll be selective. And others would say, no, I'm going to avoid that because it's something that's worldly and I don't want to be corrupted or contaminated.

Next question there. Next point is politics and voting. Should we be voting or not voting? There's a question you could be put about that as well.

Should we be engaged in politics, even standing for election and trying to make a difference, try to be salt and light? Or should we, no, we just want to have a heavenly focus and we're not going to be partaking in that?

[30:36] And then the question of military service or even self-defense. Should we learn self-defense or should we turn the other cheek? And of course we see this, there's a truth of, some would see it as defending

the country, defending our freedom and serving in the military.

So it's a question for your conscience to come to that mind on it. And one way or the others, it's up to you. It's not saying one way is right or wrong. And the next category there is health and stewardship.

Some would be particular about what they drink or eat. They would say that they're going to abstain because of health reasons or just their conscience. And others would say, no, everything's acceptable under grace.

I can partake of anything that I want to partake of. Same with vaccines and diets and things. Do we trust God or do we say, no, we're going to be wise.

We're going to take the advice. We're going to take the diet that we feel is going to make us feel more healthy. So again, these are all questions and I don't mean to cause confusion here tonight, but it's just laying it out for you that as Christians, we can have a different perspective on all of these different subjects.

[31:51] And over the page there, you see really the principle is to balance this idea of love and wisdom, that we've got responsibility, but we don't want to use our liberty for the flesh.

So just because we think we've got the liberty to do something, we might actually abstain from doing it. For example, as we've talked about the alcohol issue, some people might think I'm afraid to drink.

It doesn't say that I can't drink, but then it's very clear we shouldn't get drunk. And it does say we shouldn't do something that's going to cause our brother to stumble. So if they're around another person who's got an alcohol problem, you wouldn't want to be drinking around that person.

You want to abstain for the sake of your brother. And also the principle of not judging another's convictions. For example, you might go out to a meal and the other people might be vegetarians. And you might think, oh, I'm going to make a joke about, oh, don't you want some meat? You might just make a joke and might be a put down of that other person's convictions, when really, actually, we should just be respectful.

[32:59] That's their conviction. That's their conscience. And we're going to be respectful of that. And as ministers, as preachers too, we should be helpers of people's joy, not lording it over people.

I know for myself, I've got pretty strong convictions on some of those things that we talked about in that table. And but I don't want to impose my preference on others necessarily and say, that's a law for you.

When that's really, it's a question of conscience for you as to all of those things in that table, as to where you're going to stand, that I'm not going to be lording it over you to dictate to you.

But we've got that principle of freedom, that freedom. We're all going to come to our own mind and it's between you and the Lord. Ultimately, it's just like it was between Adam and God in the garden. It's between you and God, your question of conscience.

And you see this principle here of avoiding really two extremes. You can go two extremes here with all of this stuff. You can have an arrogance that, oh, I'm in camp A and you're in camp B and I've got the right view on this or that.

[34:02] And I'm going to look down on those who've got a stronger conviction on it than me. And trying to divide the body of Christ just because we might have a particular view about one of those things and the other person's got the contrary view and we're going to call them, oh, you're being too strict, you're legalistic.

Rather keep humble and accept that different Christians have got different stands on these questions. And then you could take the other view, legalism, where you're forcing your personal standards on others.

Hey, I'm in camp B and you're in camp A and you're living too worldly because you're accepting this or accepting that. And so legalism can be another extreme.

So you've got two sides of the coin here where you get arrogant or you get legalistic. And we want to avoid both of those. Keep humble and keep sweet with others.

Love others. We want to have that principle of love. Again, not mocking or despising people who differ from you, not being a stumbling block, helping others to grow. They might come to the same

conviction as you on one of those issues.

[35:11] At the moment they're not there yet. But as they grow in their faith, they may come to the same conviction as you and come to the same mind as they get convinced and convicted by Scripture.

So be loving and gracious with those that differ from you. Of course, as parents, as mums and dads, we want to help our children as far as they're making choices that are going to be led by Scripture.

And so they can make their own mind up for themselves. They may have a different conviction from you when they've grown up older, but you can help guide them to at least have the mindset, hey, I'm going to come to a mind based on what the Bible shows to me about all of those things so I can make some godly decision making.

What's the role of the church in all of this? Really, as the church, we want to teach sound doctrine. We want to be holding fast the faithful word. We want to maintain orders and standards.

But we also want to respect conscience where the Bible is silent. So if someone wants to abstain from me in our church, another may not want to abstain from me, everyone's accepted.

[36:21] We're not going to prefer one person over another. But then the question is, for example, where there's this big difference, for example, in the notes there, if one denies Christ's deity, then the church must correct that because that's a false doctrine.

It's a false gospel. So clearly there's some teachings that, no, absolutely not. We're not going to condone that. But it's all in that vein of restorative church discipline too, where if there is a problem, we're going to restore people and love people and bring gentle correction and loving discipline so that the purity of the church is going to be protected.

As far as the government, it regulates civil order, but it cannot regulate faith or spiritual conviction. We look back in history, like a place called Geneva. I think there was some very strong theocracy where they tried really hard to govern the city by the Bible, but they were very strict on anyone who wasn't conforming.

And you see that, for example, in England, where it was like the church was running the country in England, whether it was Catholic or Protestant at the time, and they were very heavy handed with anyone who had a different view.

And people were tortured and killed because they differed from the state. And so the state really shouldn't be taking that place of dictating doctrine.

[37:57] And you see that the government really should provide a religious liberty for all. And we should even defend ourselves that there's religious liberty for all, because even for those that we disagree with, the Bible says, love your enemies, because if there's religious liberty for all, then that will include us too.

Whereas in some countries you see, for example, when it's run by Islam, for example, that the state dictates that religion and any deviation is heavily handled and there's much damage when the government intrudes on religious liberty.

Some practical applications you could think of, really, how can I make this practical for myself?

When I'm faced with this decision, am I in camp A or camp B?

Look at the scriptures, study the scriptures for yourself. It says they search the scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. And you are responsible for what you believe.

And you can hopefully come to that settled mind of conscience. Yeah, this is where I stand on that. And I feel at peace about that. I've got that witness that before God I'm doing what according to my understanding of the scriptures is, that I'm standing in the right place with God on that matzah.

[39:24] And that's what really matters, that you study the scripture personally, that you stay led by the Spirit, you stay teachable, keep humble and be tender to the leading of God's Spirit.

It says that he'll lead us into all truth. So we want to keep that, that right relationship with the Lord that, hey, we want to know, yeah, I've got God's peace about that.

I've got God's peace about my stand on this or that. And I'm going to keep teachable. I'm going to keep learning and being willing to unlearn and relearn and to be able to keep learning and growing.

And the principle there, number three, that we should pursue unity in the essentials and there's liberty in the non-essentials. So really those things that we talked about in that table, there's liberty there that amongst ourselves, we can have differences without it being a division.

And the principle of loving in all things, we're going to love one another and have that unity without demanding uniformity. So there's a unity without us all believing exactly the same thing on every finer point of preference or conviction, that we can have our own mind on things without it being a divisive thing.

[40:41] And then you see defending freedom for all. So our defense of liberty allows us to freely preach the gospel. Next there you see an analogy of two servants.

And you can picture two workers with the same boss and one of the workers wears a blue uniform and they are convinced that that's the best colour uniform.

And then the other worker is convinced that the green colour uniform is the best. Both work hard to please the boss and it's not their place to criticise the other person.

Hey, you're wearing green when you should be wearing blue or vice versa. And you're making a preference thing become a divisive thing. Because really our role is not to critique one another and the colour of our uniforms in the sense of the various persuasions we have of different views on this or that.

And the boss is going to judge us that we're accountable as servants to the master. And we can accommodate differences is the point here. Because we're all answering to the Lord alone.

[41:54] And the question might be really of this question of difference. Can I do this in faith for the glory of God? And if I can do that with that sense that I'm doing it in faith.

I'm doing it for God's glory. Then it's not a concern. Here's a little guide to how to make a godly decision. Number one, search the scriptures.

Is there a clear command? Of course when the Bible clearly commands us about something, then that's the way to go. Obey God's word. It's not an area of liberty.

If the Bible clearly shows you this is a sin, this is the righteous thing to do, then it's very clear. Obey God's word. But if it's not clear or it's a no, that it's not a clear command, then move to step two, which is pray and reflect.

Ask God for wisdom. It tells us we can ask of God and he's going to give us wisdom. We can tune into the Holy Spirit. Just try to be mindful of how the Holy Spirit would lead us in accordance with his word.

[43:01] He will guide you into all truth. And then examine your motives too. Can I do this for the glory of God? And sometimes we might have this question, oh, can I do that? And in our mind is, can I get away with doing that?

Rather than, hey, is that really going to glorify my God? It's more that, oh, can I find an excuse to do this that I want to do? Or is it actually for the glory of God?

That should be the bottom line. What's our motive? Is our motive right? Is our motive wholesome? In 1 Corinthians 10, 31, it says, whether therefore you eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God.

And that should be our motive. And then thirdly, follow your convictions. If you can come to that decision in good faith, then do it. But if you're doubtful, don't do it.

So if you're convinced, just follow your conscience. But also have the mind that, hey, other brothers and sisters might actually take a contrary view to me, but I'm still going to respect them who differ from me.

[44:04] All right. So follow your conviction, but do it respectfully. And that leads us to the next one there. Be gracious towards others. Godly people can disagree.

It doesn't mean we fall out with each other. If someone's got a different conviction on this or that, we major on the majors, we minor on the minors, focus on the essential doctrines, not preferences.

Sometimes in some churches, they major on the minus and make it all about finding something to disagree with people about or call someone a heretic or whatever it be.

When really, actually, we should just keep on the essential, the fundamentals, the fundamental doctrines and stand fast there and accommodate some differences here and there when it's around the margins.

So, when we're talking about soul liberty, then, it means that God rules your conscience, that he is the Lord of your conscience. You've got that right mind with God. You're choosing rightly.

[45:07] You're listening to what is the godly choice to have a pure conscience. You're going to go to God to direct you, to go to Christ as the mediator, to understand his will.

And the Holy Spirit's going to guide you through the scriptures. There's a quote there, truth wins by persuasion, not force. We know in some religions, you're converted by the sword.

Convert or die. God's not like that. He invites us. He says, let us reason together. Come, let us reason together. He invites us.

And Paul talks about persuading men, persuading men, inviting and offering that gift. It's not a forced thing.

And that's the same with truth. The truth should really, truth should win our hearts by persuasion because it's the right thing. It's not something that God forces on us. And it's the same with all those questions of conscience that we're going to have that freedom.

[46:15] Truly, it's a freedom. We've got a liberty in Christ. There's a wonderful truth that has saved people that we've been set free. We're not entangled again with the yoke of bondage like the Galatians that wanted to keep forcing circumcision, for example, taking people back to the law.

There was this yoke of bondage. They wanted people to be tied up in knots with things that were no longer for them present. And that's the sense in some churches where they're legislating and legalising, making it very legalistic environment, where unless you toe the line and you agree with everything the pastor believes, then you're not welcome.

That's not how we are as a church. That's not to say as a church, we don't want people coming and stirring up strife and causing discord and just coming to cause trouble.

But there's a sense where there's a liberty in Christ. And as a church, I believe we've got the balance right that we've got where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. We've got a liberty in Christ that we can have that gracious unity amongst ourselves.

And that's soul liberty. And we see here the next point. Every believer is accountable to God. We've got to make our own choice. And when you're in these questions of conscience, you might say, well, preacher, I'm in category A and I'm not in camp B or vice versa.

[47:45] You've got freedom in all of those capacities of your life. But it's between you and the Lord. You're accountable to him. You've got to answer to him. And if you can, in good conscience, in faith, exercise that freedom, then the Bible accommodates that, where it doesn't give specific commands.

But when you've got that liberty, exercise it with love, with responsibility, keep humble, and have a tender conscience, and avoid offense and respecting others' convictions.

So just because another believer has a different perspective to you, a different preference to you, you can respect that. That's between them and God. They've got to answer to the Lord for that.

And there's different scriptures there. We've covered most of them. Romans 14 is really a key passage that talks about all of this. We've touched on it largely.

James 4 talks about sins of omission, knowing to do good and doing it not. That's an issue too. So you want to make sure if you're getting convicted about something, to do it or to not do it, then to not do what God's put on your heart to do is sin too.

[48:56] It's the sin of omission. Knowing to do a good thing and not doing it. So you want to keep that short accounts with God, where God's moving you, touching you, convicting you, drawing you, and you've got the witness of the Spirit to do something or to not do something.

And just be responsive to God's leading. Again, Bible believing Christians can differ in conviction and practice. But these are not matters of core doctrine where the Bible is clear, where it's explicit, areas of conscience.

We're not saying we just willy-nilly take what we like and dismiss other parts we don't like. If the Bible's clearly teaching something, we want to follow that teaching.

But if it's not something that's clearly spelled out for the present church generation, that there's present church dispensation of this present time under grace as the church of God, taking things from the Old Testament and misapplying them.

We've got to be clear about what the Bible speaks to us about, taking it in the context. And as mature believers, we want to respect one another's liberty as well, because there's disputable things, there's doubtful things.

[50:11] But these differences are within the bounds of orthodoxy and not matters of clear sin or heresy. So we're not saying here tonight that people can believe anything they like and believe something that's unbiblical.

Not wanting to project that message here tonight, that we want to be a biblical people. And if the Bible's very clear about a teaching on this or that, a doctrine, then we want to be very much clearly standing for that, for sound doctrine, and not accommodating what is heresy or something that's sinful.

So hopefully that's giving you a good kind of picture of these things. Somewhat of a controversial issue, really, in the sense that as Christians we know some would be very hard-line on some of these things and say, as a Christian, you must do this.

But really, when it's a preference thing, it's not right to do that. The best thing would be, seek God for yourself, try to come to a peace before God about whatever that question is about that issue, and come to that mind, that clear mind, yeah, that's what honours God, that's what glorifies God, and that's what I've got a settled peace about, and that's what I'm going to stand for.

And have that clear conscience before God, that pure conscience. And not to use this kind of idea, I'm just going to cop out from obeying God, I'm just going to do things that are questionable, and that I'm just going to do something that, because the Bible doesn't say, thou shalt not, I'm just going to go and do it, when actually the broad principles of the Bible are against that.

[51:55] So you've got to look at that concept too. Birthdays, yeah. Yeah, it's a bit of a controversial one. And again, it's purely a matter for you to come to your own mind on it, as to, am I seeing nothing wrong with it, am I seeing something wrong with it?

There's elements of birthdays that I personally don't like. In the Bible it talks about birthdays, but it's mostly, it's essentially pagan birthdays. When they celebrated a birthday it was mostly a pagan thing.

You can look it up on the internet and you can look at happy birthday, when you sing the happy birthday, you blow out the candles, and some of the significance behind that, what it stands for. Again, I don't want to be legalistic on the matter, but there are questions, there are some question marks about birthdays.

Yeah, it can be a vain thing, people can make it a vanity thing. But then, it's good to acknowledge people, hey, it's one day of the year, you make a point of acknowledging someone.

It's just coming to that mind on it. I think sometimes that birthdays can be overdone. And, yeah, if you look it up on the internet, the pagan background of birthdays, there is quite a bit that raises questions.

[53:11] Same about Christmas as well. There's a lot of pagan things about Christmas Day and such things as that. And Easter as well. As much as we would use it at Easter and Christmas as an opportunity for witness and sing the songs of faith and of witness.

And we might, and I know we've talked about it as a church, to have a Christmas choir go down to the shops and do things like that. There's ways you can use it for the Lord, but then there's things, there's elements of it.

Of course, when you look in the Christmas decorations, Christmas trees, and I know for ourselves, just talking personally, Julie and myself, Julie used to go really berserk at Christmas time and the place was decorated in tinsel and Christmas trees and everything.

Now she's totally flipped and she doesn't want anything to do with it. Because this comes to that conviction of your own mind. Should we be, the question of Christmas trees, the question of Nimrod, and this, you can look it all up as to the history of Christmas, the pagan roots of Christmas,

and some Christians got real problems with it and think, no, I'd rather not have anything to do with it.

Because it's associated with Semiramis and Nimrod and all of that. The 25th of December has got very pagan connections.

[54:37] It's actually nothing to do with the birth of Christ, the date of the 25th. But then we know we can acknowledge our Lord like we do. We do try to. And when you talk about the Nativity, we talk about Luke 2, we talk about the biblical account of our Saviour being born and the wonder of the Nativity, his God manifest in the flesh, so we can give him praise just like we can any day.

The question is whether some of the pagan elements of Christmas actually, and you look at all the different traditions about Christmas, a lot of them are very pagan, very suspect.

It's a question of conscience, yeah. See, I wouldn't go imposing my view on others. I just, I've got my own stand on it.

And we all come to our own stand on it. And we don't look down on others who've got a different stand. Yeah. We don't want to become extreme. There's some, there's a lot of extremes out there. The different customs that we have. I think doing a toast is some pagan thing with toasting. And when you go, you clink glasses together. There's things to do with that that's a bit suspect.

[55:54] Hip hip hooray. Look at what hip hip hooray. Look that one up on the internet, what that one means. And it's to do with a curse on Jerusalem. It's actually, so saying hip hip hooray is saying curses on Jerusalem basically, or on the Jews, is what it means.

That's where it came from. And there's things that we might do innocently, think nothing of it when actually there's a big question mark about it. So I don't mean to freak you out here tonight that you get a bit paranoid about all this.

But it does make you wonder things that you take for granted. And whether saluting a flag or having a flag, someone would question, really we're under the kingdom of God.

Should we be honouring a flag or should we be doing this or that when really we're a holy nation? We're God's people. We're not, as much as then there's that sense of national pride.

We should be supporting our country and it's a democracy. It's a good country. We should be defending our country. But then it's where does your allegiance lie as well?

[57:07] What are we bowing down to? There's all the questions with like the smoking ceremonies and the welcome to countries and some of the pagan elements that are in that. Where they have these smoking ceremonies, it's virtually a kind of worship.

So should we be involved with any of that? Or should we be involved with saying welcome to country? Because we're paying respect to the ancestors. There's a spiritual element to it.

That there's a connection to the land and all of this stuff. Where it's really, it's a pagan kind of concept that we shouldn't really, personally I think there's problems with that.

And these are all questions of conscience. And it does your head in really when you think all of this stuff that we just routinely do. That there's actually a big question mark about it. It doesn't mean you're going to have to be overwrought about all of this.

It's just coming to your own mind. Hey, I'm for that or I'm against that. And that's my standard conscience. It boggles my mind because there's some churches where they come up on the stage and they get tattooed during the church service.

[58:13] So there's some churches that think nothing of tattoos or a Christian getting tattoos. Whereas personally I can't see why you would do that. Yeah, it's again, it's that grappling with your conscience, isn't it?

Some of them, oh, I'm going to get a, I've got to put a Bible verse on my arm. So they might think, well, I'm being a witness by having a Bible verse on my arm. Personally, I can't see any place for it. But yeah, it's, how far do you go? Do you challenge someone respectfully? You want to hope that people wouldn't do such a thing. But how do you say it without being judgemental?

I think you do it lovingly and maybe just politely and gently. Maybe if it's a younger Christian, they may not be aware of some of the ramifications. I think there's so many questionable things.

It better, sometimes it is the wise thing to err on the side of being stricter. Being stricter with yourself than trying to accommodate the flesh or excuse this or that.

[59:13] Sometimes you're better off being stricter, but not really stricter with other people, but strict with yourself. I think it's about being strict with yourself. We're not out to judge that person.

It's the man in the mirror that we should judge. Am I being strict enough with myself? Is what I'm doing honouring God? Is it glorifying God or is it questionable? If it's questionable, then I shouldn't be doing it.

I'd rather not do it. Even if I might have the liberty to do it. I don't mean to cause you a lot of confusion because, you know, some of these things you think, oh, I'm a bit torn now.

Which side do I sit on with all of this stuff? I just try to make the spiritual choice. Make the godly choice. Yeah. Do you celebrate your birthday?

No. I just don't make a thing of it. But that's just my personal thing. I don't impose it on other people.

Yeah. It's a very minor thing. I don't see that as a major thing.

[60:11] Oh, yeah, other people can acknowledge me and that's fine. But I don't really make a fuss about it. I don't make a big display about it. Yeah. I don't encourage it.

Yeah. It's just my personal stand. So I'm not one person in the country? Yeah, just don't make a fuss about it. Yeah. But you might have a totally contrary view to me and that's perfectly fine too. Yeah, it's just a perfectly fine thing. So I wouldn't condemn anyone who makes a fuss about their birthday. Honestly, it's more of a personal conviction thing.

I don't want to seem extreme on it. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, some it's all putting the person on a pedestal and giving them lots of gifts.

And there's all the obligations that come with that. And yeah, just the traditions like birthday cakes. There's questions about birthday cakes blowing out candles.

[61:14] You could go to extremes. But there's all kinds of side issues. You can get a detour to make a fuss about something and make more of it than you need to. Lord, we thank you that you guide us into all truth.

And Lord, we know there's differences between believers on many questions here. Help us, Lord, to come to that settled mind and heart on these things. And just to be at peace with you and have that clear conscience, Lord.

And to be led by your spirit to search the scriptures and come to find your peace on these matters and these questions. And Lord, that we have that conscience that's in a good place before you.

That we've got that conscience that is minded after pleasing you and giving you all the glory. We praise you, Lord, for these things. Help us, Lord, as we go through life and for the questions of life and of family, of living.

Your Holy Spirit would lead us in all these things. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.