

Hebrews 13:17, Romans 13:1-7

As a child of God who has been set free by Christ’s glorious gospel, what sort of church members & what sort of American citizens should we be?

A. Before we try to learn the essentials of what sec 4 has to tell us, we need to review what is the “liberty which Christ hath purchased.” Many Christians do not realize the immensity of what Christ has set us free from. Sec 1 says “The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; . . . bondage to Satan, & dominion of sin; from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, & everlasting damnation; as also, in their free access to God, & their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love & willing mind.”

1. My 1st reaction is to say, is all this really mine? It sounds too good to be true!
2. Praise God that it is true! It is this sort of gospel that changed the world & made men, women, & children willing to suffer immense hardships or martyrdom & the self-denial to bring the gospel to foreign lands.

sec 4. “And because the powers which God hath ordained & the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold & preserve 1 another, they who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God.”

1. Before we examine this sentence any further, lets look at the Scriptural background of this phrase, “the powers which God hath ordained.” → Turn to **Rom 13:1-7**
 - a. **(v1)** We are called to be “**in subjection**” or obedient to governing authorities.
— The Greek work here has the notion of placing one’s self under the authority.
 - b. Why? It is because “**there is no authority except from God, & those which exist are established by God. ²Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God**” (vv1-2).
 - c. G.I. Williamson in his work on the WCF discusses when it is lawful to oppose civil authorities.
 - 1) What sort immorality did Rome promote when **Rom 13** was written?
 - 2) How does this compare to what is going on in America in January of 2022?
 - 3) If you don’t like what is going on in American national, state, or local politics— pray & seek to be used of God to spread the gospel.
2. The “powers which God hath ordained” in **Rom 13** refers to the “**magistrate**” or rulers of government; yet, the WCF in this section uses this phrase to refer to the church as well.
 - a. **Heb 13:17** “**Obey your leaders & submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy & not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.**”
 - b. Sometimes in history God, has ordained less than desirable church & civil powers (i.e. Judges).
 - c. Why? Sometimes, God does that to discipline us. → Turn to **Isa 3:1-5.**
3. God gave us both civil & ecclesiastical rulers not to destroy our Christian liberty; such rulers are “not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold & preserve 1 another,...”
 - a. Christians taught right doctrine should make the best citizens & church members.
 - b. We should pray for both the church & federal, state, & local governments to uphold & preserve our liberties in Christ. → turn to **Isa 49:22-23**
4. A person who has a “pretense of Christian liberty” and opposes God’s legitimate ecclesiastical power includes such a one who lives a notoriously wicked live yet says they can do so because they are forgiven in Christ.

Sec 4 goes on to tell us a course of action when people resist the powers God has ordained: “And, for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation), or to the power of godliness; or, such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace & order which Christ hath established in the church, they may lawfully be called to account, & proceeded against, by the censures of the church.”

1. The WCF was written during a time when “such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature” (i.e. homosexual, transexual, & gender confusion) were condemned by both the church & state.
 - a. This was largely due to most in governing bodies outside the Church having a Christian worldview.
 - b. Today, that is not the case.
2. Now we have rulers at all levels of government who are in the practice of actively & zealously “publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature or to the known principles of Christianity.”
 - a. Sadly, there are church leaders who promote such ungodly practices as well.
 - b. It is not just citizens, but those in church & civil leadership whose actions “are destructive to the external peace & order which Christ hath established in the church.”
3. This section says that because of their destructive practices, “they may lawfully be called to account, & proceeded against, by the censures of the church.”
 - a. I delight in the fact that some American Roman Catholics made a stance saying that President Biden should not be allowed to partake of the Lord’s Supper. That is 100% in line with what sec 4 says here.
 - b. The church should hold their members accountable for what they do in their occupations outside of the church walls.

Pray for:

- 1) The spread of the gospel.
- 2) Pray for sanctification so that the people called by God’s name live up to their baptism & profession **(2 Chron 7:14)**.
- 3) For the peace, unity, & faithfulness of the church.
- 4) Pray for our civil rulers:
 - a) That they would not seek to destroy or liberties in Christ yet uphold them.
 - b) That they would seek to serve as our guardians & religious rights.