



LECTURE 3

INDIVIDUAL
SOUL LIBERTY

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“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.” Ephesians 4:15

INDIVIDUAL SOUL LIBERTY

Our local church is a group of baptized believers who have voluntarily joined themselves together to carry out the Great Commission. We identify ourselves as Baptist people, and we have certain distinctives of our faith.

The Bible, the Word of God, is the sole authority for our faith and practice. If the Bible speaks about something, then we should speak about it. If the Bible is silent on a subject, then we are to be silent on that subject. We are people of the Book. We make no apology for this. All that we believe and teach we find in the Word of God.

When we say that the Bible is the sole authority, we are speaking of all the Scriptures, the whole and its parts. We should preach the whole counsel of God. In the Bible we find the gospel—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We should proclaim the gospel because Jesus Christ said that we are to take the gospel message to every creature. When we open the sixty-six books of the Bible, we find more than the gospel. Of course, that scarlet thread of redemption runs through all the Bible, but the whole counsel of God must be proclaimed.

If we are going to be spiritual people, we must be scriptural people. It is impossible to be a spiritual person without being a scriptural person. We need to know and live the Word of God.

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The Bible says in Romans 14:11-12, *“For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”*

Let us consider the twelfth verse, *“Every one of us shall give account of himself to God,”* or the subject of soul liberty, our personal accountability to God.

In our nation we hear people talk about religious tolerance. Religious tolerance is something created by government. It is a “gift” from government. Religious tolerance is something man has made. Soul liberty is something God established when He created us. We find a clear teaching of this in His Word. Soul liberty is a gift from God! God’s Word says in Galatians 5:1, *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”*

Soul liberty does not rest upon the legal documents of our nation—it is rooted in the Word of God. This individual freedom of the soul is inherent in man’s nature as God created him. Man is responsible for his choices, but he is free to choose.

This powerful declaration about our Baptist position was made by J.D. Freeman in 1905:

“Our demand has been not simply for religious toleration, but religious liberty; not sufferance merely, but freedom; and that not for ourselves alone, but

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for all men. We did not stumble upon the doctrine. It inheres in the very essence of our belief. Christ is Lord of all....The conscience is the servant only of God, and is not subject to the will of man. This truth has indestructible life. Crucify it and the third day it will rise again. Bury it in the sepulcher and the stone will be rolled away, while the keepers become as dead men.... Steadfastly refusing to bend our necks under the yoke of bondage, we have scrupulously withheld our hands from imposing that yoke upon others....Of martyr blood our hands are clean. We have never invoked the sword of temporal power to aid the sword of the Spirit. We have never passed an ordinance inflicting a civic disability on any man because of his religious views, be he Protestant or Papist, Jew, or Turk, or infidel. In this regard there is no blot on our escutcheon.”

Remember that, when we are talking about individual soul liberty and the relationship of the church and the state, in America the Constitution does not place the church over the state or the state over the church. Most importantly, Scripture places them side by side, each operating independently of the other. This means there is freedom in the church and freedom in the state. Each is sovereign within the sphere of the authority God has given to each of them (Matthew 22:21).

Read carefully this statement made by Charles Spurgeon concerning Baptist people:

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“We believe that the Baptists are the original Christians. We did not commence our existence at the Reformation, we were reformers before Luther or Calvin were born; we never came from the Church of Rome, for we were never in it, but we have an unbroken line up to the apostles themselves. We have always existed from the very days of Christ, and our principles, sometimes veiled and forgotten, like a river which may travel underground for a little season, have always had honest and holy adherents. Persecuted alike by Romanists and Protestants of almost every sect, yet there has never existed a government holding Baptist principles which persecuted others; nor, I believe, any body of Baptists ever held it to be right to put the consciences of others under the control of man. We have ever been ready to suffer, as our martyrologies will prove, but we are not ready to accept any help from the State, to prostitute the purity of the Bride of Christ to any alliance with Government, and we will never make the Church, although the Queen, the despot over the consciences of men.”

This a marvelous statement about Baptist people. I am rather troubled when I see so many people who claim to be Baptists who do not understand why they are Baptists. We should be able to defend our position and do it biblically. If we are people who know and love the Lord and His Word and if the Bible is our sole authority for faith and practice, then we have no reason to be ashamed of the position we take. May God not only help us to take this position, but to take it with holy boldness and compassion. May He

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enable us to take His Word in hand and heart and defend what we believe to a lost and dying world.

So much of what we have in our country to enjoy can be credited to Baptist people. For example, if you study the history of our nation, you will find that the Virginia Baptists were almost solely responsible for the First Amendment being added to our Constitution. We enjoy this freedom of separation of church and state and the freedom to worship God as our conscience dictates because of the influence of Baptist people on the Founding Fathers of our nation.

We have a country that has been so influenced that we do not believe it is right to exercise any control or coercion of any kind over the souls of men. From where did this conviction come? We find it in the Bible, but someone imparted it to the Founding Fathers. It became the law of the land, and it should remain the law of the land. We need to understand it. It comes out of the clear teaching of God’s Word concerning the subject of soul liberty.

My wife and I have had the privilege of visiting the land of England a number of times. England is a marvelous place to visit. Among the sights to see, there are places where people were martyred for their faith. The religious persecution came as a result of the laws of the land. Although many Baptists have been martyred, you will never find Baptist people persecuting anyone anywhere for his faith, no matter what his faith may be.

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Let us take some serious subjects from God’s Word and give the clear distinctives we have as Baptists, especially emphasizing the matter of soul liberty. These distinctives can be remembered by using an acrostic of the word Baptist.

- B** is for biblical authority. The Bible is the sole authority for our faith and practice.
- A** stands for the autonomy of the local church. Every church we find in the New Testament was a self-governing church with only Christ as the head.
- P** represents the priesthood of believers and the access we have to God through Jesus Christ.
- T** stands for the two church officers—pastors and deacons. We find these officers in the New Testament.
- I** stands for individual soul liberty. Most people, when asked, say that the sole authority of the Scripture in our faith and practice is the single, most important distinctive of our faith. However, if we did not have individual soul liberty, we could not come to the convictions we have on all other matters.
- S** stands for a saved church membership.
- T** represents two church ordinances—baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These are the things that Jesus Christ ordered that we do. Both of these ordinances are pictures of His sacrifice for us on the cross of Calvary.
- S** stands for separation of church and state. Of course, this has been reinterpreted in our times to be something entirely different from what our Founding Fathers meant for it to be. The ACLU and People for the American Way define separation of church and state as an obligation of the state to erase every vestige of Christianity from our public institutions. This was certainly not the intent of our Founding Fathers.

These are the distinctives of Baptist people. Baptist distinctives are often given in this acrostic form so they are easier to remember.

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PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY TO GOD

We find this accountability in the opening verses of God’s Word. When God created man, He created man capable of giving a personal account of himself to God. God did not create puppets; He created people. He gave man the right to choose. That is why we find the man Adam choosing to sin and disobey God in Genesis chapter three. Of his own volition he chose to sin and disobey God. Genesis 1:27 says, *“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”* We were made in God’s image, and when God made us in His image, He made us with the ability to choose. Eve was deceived, but Adam chose to die rather than to live without Eve. He willingly chose to disobey the Lord.

It is not right to try to force one’s religion or belief upon another individual. He has a God-given right to believe anything he wishes to believe. This does not mean, however, that he can be a Christian by believing anything he wishes to believe, because Jesus Christ said that there is only one way to heaven. He said in John 14:6, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”* He is the only way to God. The only way of salvation is the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this age of tolerance, people say that nothing is really wrong. The same people who say that no

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way of believing is wrong will not accept the truth that one belief can be the only way that is right. The truth is, you may believe anything you choose, but God has declared that there is only one way to Him and that is through His Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only way of salvation—that is why He suffered and died for our sins. The only way to know God is through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Someone is certain to say, “Who are you to declare that everyone else’s religion is wrong?” We are saying that everyone has a right to choose his own way, but God has clearly taught us in His Word that there is only one way to Him. The Lord Jesus says in John 10:9, *“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”*

No human being is going to live on this earth without being sinned against by others. Many children are greatly sinned against by their own parents. However, we cannot go through life blaming others for the person we are, because God has made us in such a way that we have an individual accountability to God. This comes out of our soul liberty and our right to choose and respond to things in a way that God would have us respond to them. God has made us in His image. Again, He did not make us puppets or robots; He made us people, created in His image with the ability to choose our own way.

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Romans 14:11 says, *“For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”* We are responsible because we have direct access to God. God has given us the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and access to the throne by prayer. We, therefore, must personally answer to God at the judgment seat since God communicates to us directly.

We are living at a time when people do not like to be held personally accountable for their actions. The truth of the Word of God is that every individual is personally accountable to God. You are personally accountable to God. In other words, you are going to meet God in judgment some day; I am going to meet God in judgment some day. All of us are going to stand before the Lord some day and answer to Him. We are individually accountable to God. One of our Crown College professors, Dr. Robert Dalton, states, “Since the state cannot answer for us to God, it has no right to dictate our conscience.”

We live in a country where there are many false religions. As Baptist people, we would defend the right of anyone in our land to worship as he sees fit. This is unheard of in most of the world. If a man is a Moslem, I do not agree with his Islamic religion, but I must defend his right to worship as he sees fit. The clear teaching of the Catholic church teaches that salvation comes through Mary,

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but this is not the teaching of the Bible. We must take a stand against false religions, but we must also defend the right of people to worship as they choose to worship. Why? Because individual soul liberty is a gift from God to every human being.

If the Bible teaches individual soul liberty and personal accountability to God, then it is a truth that will endure to all generations.

John Bunyan is the man who gave us *Pilgrim's Progress*. This wonderful book was planned during Bunyan's prison experience and written when he was released. The trial of John Bunyan took place on October 3, 1660. John Bunyan spent twelve years in jail for his convictions about individual soul liberty, failure to attend the Church of England, and for preaching the Word of God. During his trial, John stood before Judge Wingate who was interested in hearing John Bunyan state his case. Judge Wingate said, “In that case, then, this court would be profoundly interested in your response to them.”

Part of John Bunyan's response follows:

“Thank you, M'lord. And may I say that I am grateful for the opportunity to respond. Firstly, the depositions speak the truth. I have never attended services in the Church of England, nor do I intend ever to do so. Secondly, it is no secret that I preach the Word of God whenever, wherever, and to whomever He pleases to grant me opportunity to do so.

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“Having said that, M’lord, there is a weightier issue that I am constrained to address. I have no choice but to acknowledge my awareness of the law which I am accused of transgressing. Likewise, I have no choice but to confess my guilt in my transgression of it. As true as these things are, I must affirm that I neither regret breaking the law, nor repent of having broken it. Further, I must warn you that I have no intention in future of conforming to it. It is, on its face, an unjust law, a law against which honorable men cannot shrink from protesting. In truth, M’lord, it violates an infinitely higher law—the right of every man to seek God in his own way, unhindered by any temporal power. That, M’lord, is my response.”

Remember that Bunyan was responding as to why he would not do all that he was doing for God within the confines of the Church of England. The transcription goes on to say:

Judge Wingate: “This court would remind you, sir, that we are not here to debate the merits of the law. We are here to determine if you are, in fact, guilty of violating it.”

John Bunyan: “Perhaps, M’lord, that is why you are here, but it is most certainly not why I am here. I am here because you compel me to be here. All I ask is to be left alone to preach and to teach as God directs me. As, however, I must be here, I cannot fail to use these circumstances to speak against what I know to be an unjust and odious edict.”

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Judge Wingate: “Let me understand you. You are arguing that every man has a right, given him by Almighty God, to seek the Deity in his own way, even if he chooses without the benefit of the English Church?”

John Bunyan: “That is precisely what I am arguing, M’lord. Or without benefit of any church.”

Judge Wingate: “Do you know what you are saying? What of Papist and Quakers? What of pagan Mohammedans? Have these the right to seek God in their own misguided way?”

John Bunyan: “Even these, M’lord.”

Judge Wingate: “May I ask if you are particularly sympathetic to the views of these or other such deviant religious societies?”

John Bunyan: “I am not, M’lord.”

Judge Wingate: “Yet, you affirm a God-given right to hold any alien religious doctrine that appeals to the warped minds of men?”

John Bunyan: “I do, M’lord.”

Judge Wingate: “I find your views impossible of belief. And what of those who, if left to their own devices, would have no interest in things heavenly?”

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Have they the right to be allowed to continue unmolested in their error?”

John Bunyan: “It is my fervent belief that they do, M’lord.”

Judge Wingate: “And on what basis, might I ask, can you make such rash affirmations?”

John Bunyan: “On the basis, M’lord, that a man’s religious views—or lack of them—are matters between his conscience and his God, and are not the business of the Crown, the Parliament, or even, with all due respect, M’lord, of this court. However much I may be in disagreement with another man’s sincerely held religious beliefs, neither I nor any other may disallow his right to hold those beliefs. No man’s rights in these affairs are secure if every other man’s rights are not equally secure.”

I do not know of anyone who could have expressed the whole idea of soul liberty in the words of man any more clearly than Bunyan stated in 1660. Every man can seek God as he pleases. This means that we cannot force our religious faith or teaching on anyone. It means clearly that no one can be coerced into being a Baptist and believing what we believe. It means that we can do no arm-twisting, or anything else of that sort, to make anyone believe what we believe because every man

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has been created by God to be able to choose to follow God or to follow some other god.

Personal accountability to God is a distinctive of our faith. It is something we believe, and out of this distinctive comes other distinctives that we identify with as Baptist people.

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THE PRIESTHOOD OF EVERY BELIEVER

The priesthood of the believer means that every believer can go to God through the merit of Jesus Christ. Christ and Christ alone is the only way to God. All of us who have trusted Christ as Savior enjoy the glorious privilege of the priesthood of the believer and can access God through the merits of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Bible says in I Timothy 2:1-6, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”



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Take special note of verse five, *“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”* Any man anywhere in this world can go to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:9 says, *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”*

You have access to God. You can personally talk to God. You can take your needs to the Lord. Whatever your needs are, you can take those needs to the Lord. You, as an individual Christian, can go to God through the Lord Jesus Christ who is your High Priest who *“ever liveth to make intercession”* for you (Hebrews 7:25).

We have no merit of our own. We do not accumulate merit. People may make reference to a time of meritorious service someone has rendered, but we cannot build up “good works” that get us through to God. Each day, we must come before God as needy sinners approaching Him through the finished work of Christ and Christ alone.

The Bible teaches the personal accountability of every human being to God. We cannot force our religion on anyone or make anyone a believer. We cannot force someone to be a Christian. Think of how wrong it is to take babies and allow them later in life to think they have become Christians

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by an act of infant baptism. Yes, they have a right to practice infant baptism, but we do not believe this is biblical because faith cannot be forced or coerced.

If I have discovered the truth in Christ and believe that God’s Word is inerrant, infallible, and eternal, certainly I want my own children to believe that. I have no greater joy than that they walk in truth, but I cannot make my sons Christians. They must choose Christ of their own will.

There is a real heaven and a real hell. The Bible clearly teaches this. The only way to heaven and the only way to miss hell is by trusting Christ and Christ alone as Savior. I have six beautiful grandchildren. However, I cannot make those grandchildren Christians no matter how much I desire for them to be saved. They must individually trust Christ as their Savior.

There are places in the world where the state is under a religion. There are places in the world where religion is under the state—the state controls the fate of people. This is not taught in the Bible. Then, there are countries like ours where the church and the state operate side by side.

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THE POWER OF INFLUENCE

Where does this teaching of the priesthood of every believer and our personal accountability to God lead us? It leads us to realize the importance of the power of influence. This is the tool God has given us. I want to give you an Old Testament example of the New Testament church. There is a difference between Israel and the church; I am not trying to place the church in the Old Testament, but let us use this as an illustration.

Judges 21:25 tells us, *“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”* Can you imagine that? This was a land of anarchy. Every man did what was right in his own eyes. In the days of the judges, every man wanted to do what he thought was right with no fixed point of reference.

God’s Word continues to describe this time of judges in Ruth 1:1, *“Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land.”* God begins to tell us about a man named Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and his sons. He brings us to the beautiful love story of Ruth and Boaz. God tells us that at the same time in which the judges ruled, when there was anarchy in the land, this beautiful love story of Boaz and Ruth took place.

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This story gives us interesting insight on the responsibility of the Christian and the church. In the midst of everything that is going on, we are to share the beautiful love story of the Lord Jesus Christ and His bride. We need to tell people about the Savior.

The same truth is found throughout the Word of God. Philippians 2:15 states, *“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.”*

We are *“in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation.”* This is why the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”* Let your light shine!

The more churches become like the world, the less influence they are going to have in the world. Preaching ceases, and churches only have dialogue. Singing that is sacred is taken out, and the world’s music comes in. What so many are attempting to do in order to build up their ministry is what will actually cause the demise of their ministry. We will never make a difference without being willing to be different. It is Christ who makes us different.

We cannot force people to become Christians or force our religion on people. It is not right to violate another man’s will; he must choose of his own

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volition to trust Christ or reject Christ. When we understand this, then we understand the powerful tool of influence. We must live godly lives and be what God wants us to be. We must be lights in a dark world as we live in the midst of a crooked generation. The only tool we have to use is influence, not force. As we separate ourselves to God and live godly lives, only then do we have a testimony.

Separation to God and from the world is not the enemy of evangelism; it is the essential of evangelism. There can be no evangelism without separation to God from the world because we have no other tool to use. We cannot make people believe what we believe to be the truth. They must choose of their own will. We must so identify with the Lord Jesus in His beauty, glory, and holiness that He will be lifted up, and people will come to Him.

As this world becomes increasingly worse, the more off-the-wall and ridiculous we will appear to an unbelieving world. The temptation will come again and again for us to simply cave in.

It is because of what we find in the Bible about soul liberty, personal accountability, and the priesthood of every believer that we must use the power of influence to win the lost to Christ. If we conform to the world, we lose our influence.

May the Lord help us to be unashamed to bear His reproach and be identified with our Lord Jesus Christ.

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