



COVENANT
AFFIRMATIONS

The reality of freedom in Christ. The Covenant Church seeks to focus on what unites followers of Jesus Christ rather than what separates them. The center of our commitment is a clear faith in Jesus Christ. The centrality of the word of God, the necessity of the new birth, a commitment to the whole mission of the church, the church as a fellowship of believers, and a conscious dependence of the Holy Spirit form the parameters in which freedom is experienced. Here followers of Christ find the security to offer freedom to one another on issues that might otherwise divide.

Freedom is a frequently misunderstood concept. In western culture freedom is often understood as autonomy and independence. No one, however, can truly be autonomous and independent. Authentic freedom manifests itself in a right relationship with God and others. It is for this reason that freedom in Christ is so highly valued in the Covenant Church. Freedom is a gift of God in Christ to all who are willing to receive it. “If you continue in my word,” said Jesus, “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31b-32).

Liberation is one of the Bible’s major themes. Early in their story, God’s people were liberated as slaves from Egypt and began their long journey to the promised land. The story continues with the liberating work of the judges, who delivered Israel from its enemies. Israel’s greatest king, David, liberated them from the Philistines and established a kingdom committed to Israel’s God. But this kingdom did not stand. The Hebrew Scriptures end with Israel once again in bondage to their enemies, but living with the promise of God’s deliverance. Throughout this story the freedom of God’s people is not just freedom *from*, but freedom *to*. They are set free from Egypt to worship and serve their God. In their law they are called not only to serve one another, but the stranger, the alien, the widow, and the orphan—all who suffer and are

marginalized by the bitter circumstances of life.

Jesus came as God's anointed one to continue God's program of liberation. He sets us free, according to Paul, from the power of sin to condemn, control, and destroy. God's people are not without sin, but find in Jesus's death and resurrection the glorious liberty of the children of God. But, as in the Hebrew Scriptures, this freedom is never simply personal and individualistic. By the power of his life-giving Spirit, Christ moves us into a new realm—a new kingdom where light and life and joy prevail. “For freedom Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1a). Thus empowered, the believer not only seeks to obey and follow God, but to effect the liberation of others from the sins and oppressions of their lives. This freedom is “in Christ.” By grace God makes a person, with Luther, “a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none” and at the same time “a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” For Paul such freedom means believers are set free from the binding restrictions of culture and creed to live into a new reality: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

True freedom is found in this creative tension between the “lordly” and servantlike spirit. God wants individuals to be who and what they were created to be in perfect freedom. This freedom is not for self-indulgence but to serve the community and the world out of love for God (Galatians 5:13).

The Covenant Church has sought to honor the tensions inherent in this freedom. The Covenant Church has understood that God's word is sovereign over every human interpretation of it—including its own. Covenant freedom operates within the context set by other principles the Covenant Church regards as primary, particularly the authority of Scripture. Within these parameters the principle of freedom applies to doctrinal issues that might tend to divide. With a modesty born of confidence in God, Covenanters have offered to one another theological and personal freedom where the biblical and historical record seems to allow for a variety of interpretations of the will and purposes of God. This has at times led to controversy over such matters as baptism, the second coming of Christ, the precise nature of inspiration or how the atonement may be understood, and various matters of life and practice. Nevertheless, commitments to the Bible as the word of God and the historical interpretative consensus of the Christian church have remained a constant.

This commitment to freedom has kept the Covenant Church together when it would have been easier to break fellowship and further divide Christ's body.

To some such freedom is no freedom at all. They would rather have the marching orders clear and an unimpeachable source of authority to bear the whole burden of responsibility. It is not easy to be free. But such limitations of freedom show not wisdom, but immaturity. They show a people who have not come into their majority as heirs of God's good gifts (Galatians 3:23-29). Nevertheless, to seek freedom for its own sake is to lose it. Freedom is not for self-indulgence or self-aggrandizement but to serve and love God, in whom alone is found true freedom.

The Covenant Church cherishes this freedom in Christ and recognizes, as one of our forebears put it, that freedom is a gift and the last of all gifts to mature. In the meantime there will be questions and conflicts. Full maturity and full understanding await the day when "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ, when he shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). In the meantime we offer freedom to one another, since for Covenant people freedom is not something we claim for ourselves, but offer to the other. In this we are simply sharing the gift of freedom God has given us in Jesus Christ.