

# Anti-Biblical Theories of Rights

~~ Robert L. Dabney<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction<sup>2</sup>

When the friends of the Bible win a victory over one phase of infidelity, they naturally hope that there will be a truce in the warfare and they may enjoy peace. But the hope is ill-founded. We should have foreseen this, had we considered that the real source of infidelity is always in the pride, self-will, and ungodliness of man's nature. So that, when men are defeated on one line of attack, a part of them, at least, will be certainly prompted by their natural enmity to God's Word to hunt for some other weapon against it. Rational deism, from Bolingbroke to Hume, received a Waterloo defeat at the hands of Bishop Butler and the other Christian apologists, and well-informed enemies surrendered it. But neology raised its head, and for two generations opened a way for virtual infidels. History and biblical criticism in the hands of the Bengels, Delitzschs, and Leuthards, have blocked that way; and Tübingen is silent, or at least discredited. Then came the anti-Mosaic geology and evolution – the one attacking the recent origin of man, the flood, etc., the other presuming to construct a creation without a creator. These two are now passing into the *sere and yellow leaf*. More correct natural science now points with certainty to a deluge, to the recency of the last glacial epoch, the newness of the present face of the continents, and consequently to the late appearance of man upon the earth. Agassiz, M. Paul Janet and Sir William

---

<sup>1</sup> This article was first published in the Presbyterian Quarterly for July, 1888.

<sup>2</sup> In order to maintain Dr. Dabney's force of argument and logical progression the words of this essay have been left unaltered. However, Dr. Dabney appears to have penned his thoughts in a moment of great mental ferocity as the entire paper reads as one consecutive stream of conscious. In order to help the modern reader the numerous Scriptural citations (over 50 in all) have been removed from the text and marked as footnotes, headers have been inserted into the text for the purpose of giving notice to changes of topic, many paragraphs have been broken down into shorter blocks of text, and a few of Dr. Dabney's more parenthetical statements have also been slid into the footnotes. It is hoped that all of this serves to enhance the flow and make the work more readable. Despite difficult sentence and paragraph structure in places this essay is argued with potent logical force and a broad array of Scriptural citation. As always, it was the intent to leave Dabney's words unaltered and his form as true as possible while rendering it more palatable to a modern audience.

Dawson reinstate the doctrines of final cause and fixed genera of organic life upon impregnable basis.

But we may expect no respite in the warfare. Another hostile banner is already unfurled, and has gathered its millions of unbelievers for a new attack upon God's Holy Word. This assault proceeds from the side of the professed social sciences. It appears in those dogmas of social rights which are historically known as the Jacobinical, and which have been transferred from the atheistic French radicals to the free Protestant countries.

## **Scriptural Truth Regarding Man's Rights**

The object of the Scriptures is to teach the way of redemption and sanctification for sinful man; yet incidentally they teach, by precept and implication, those equitable principles on which all constitutional governments are founded. So far as God gave to the chosen people a political form, the one which he preferred was a confederation of little republican bodies represented by their elderships.<sup>3</sup>

When he conceded to them, as it were under protest, a regal form, it was a constitutional and elective monarchy.<sup>4</sup> The rights of each tribe were secured against vital infringement of this constitution by its own veto power. They retained the prerogative of protecting themselves against the usurpations of the elective king by withdrawing at their own sovereign discretion from the confederation.<sup>5</sup>

The history of the secession of the ten tribes under Jeroboam is often misunderstood through gross carelessness. No divine disapprobation is anywhere expressed against the ten tribes for exercising their right of withdrawal from the perverted federation. When Rehoboam began a war of coercion he was sternly forbidden by God to pursue it.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Ex. xviii, 25, 26; Ex. iii. 16; Num. xi. 16, 17; Num. xxxii. 20-27

<sup>4</sup> 1 Sam. x. 24, 25

<sup>5</sup> 1 Kings, xii. 13-16

<sup>6</sup> 1 Kings, xii. 24

The act by which *Jeroboam made Israel to sin against the Lord* was wholly another and subsequent one – his meddling with the divinely appointed constitution of the church to promote merely political ends.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, while the Bible history does not prohibit stronger forms of government as sins *per se*, it indicates God's preference for the representative republic as distinguished from the levelling democracy; and to this theory of human rights all its moral teachings correspond. On the one hand, it constitutes civil society of superiors, inferiors, and equals,<sup>8</sup> making the household represented by the parent and master the integral unit of the social fabric, assigning to each order, higher or lower, its rule of subordination under the distributive equity of the law. On the other hand, it protected each order in its legal privileges, and prohibited oppressions and injustice as to all.

In a word, the maxim of the Scriptural social ethics may be justly expressed in the great words of the British Constitution, *Peer and peasant are equal before the law*, which were the guide of a Pym, a Hampden, a Sydney, a Locke, a Chatham, and equally of Hancock, Adams, Washington, Mason, and Henry. Their theory assigned to the different classes of human beings in the commonwealth different grades of privilege and of function, according to their different natures and qualifications; but it held that the inferior is shielded in his right to his smaller franchise, by the same relation to the common heavenly Father, by the same Golden Rule and the equitable right, which shields the superior in the enjoyment of his larger powers. The functions and privileges of the peer are in some respects very different from those of the peasant; but the same law protects them both in their several rights, and commands them both as to their several duties. This theory thus established between all men a moral, but not a mechanical equality. Higher and lower hold alike the same relation to the supreme ruler and ordainer of the commonwealth, God; yet they hold different relations to each other in society, corresponding to their differing capacities and fitnesses, which equity itself demands. Job understood this maxim of Biblical republicanism, as he shows:

*If I did despise the cause of my man-servant or of my maid-servant, when they contended with me; what, then, shall I do when God riseth up? and when He*

---

<sup>7</sup> 1 Kings, xii. 26-28.

<sup>8</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 64

*visiteth, what shall I answer Him? Did not he that made me in the womb make him? ~ Job 31:13-15*

So Paul, two thousand years later:<sup>9</sup> *Masters*<sup>10</sup> give to your *slaves*<sup>11</sup> those things which are just and equal. The two teach the same doctrine. On the one hand, they assert the relation of superior and inferior, with their unequal franchises; on the other hand, they assert in the same breath the equal moral obligation of both as bearing the common relation to the one divine maker and judge.

## Challenge to the Scriptural View

The radical social theory asserts, under the same name, a totally different doctrine; its maxim is *all men are born free and equal*. It supposes the social fabric constituted of individuals naturally absolute and sovereign as its integers, and this by some sort of social contract, in entering which individual men act with a freedom equally complete as to God and each other. It defines each one's natural liberty as freedom to do whatever he wishes, and his civil liberty, after he optionally enters society, as that remainder of his natural prerogative not surrendered to the social contract. Consequently the theory teaches that exactly the same surrender must be exacted of each one under this social contract, whence each individual is inalienably entitled to all the same franchises and functions in society as well as to his moral equality; so that it is a natural iniquity to withhold from any adult person by law any prerogative which is legally conferred on any other member in society. The equality must be mechanical as well as moral, else that society is charged with natural injustice.

Every fair mind sees that this is not only a different but an opposite social theory. Yet its advocates are accustomed to advance it as the equivalent of the other, to teach it under the same nomenclature, and to assert that the difference between them is purely visionary. So widespread and profound is this confusion of thought, that the majority of the American people and of their teachers practically know

---

<sup>9</sup> Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1

<sup>10</sup> Dabney here puts down the Greek word *Kurioi*; it was translated into English for the reader's convenience.

<sup>11</sup> Greek word *Douloi*

and hold no other theory than the Jacobin one. They assume, as a matter of course, that it is this theory which is the firm legal basis of constitutional government; whereas history and science show that it is a fatal heresy of thought, which uproots every possible foundation of just freedom, and grounds only the most ruthless despotism. But none the less is this the passionate belief of millions, for the sake of which they are willing to assail the Bible itself.

The least reflection points out that this theory involves the following corollaries:

1. There can be no just imputation of the consequences of conduct from one human being to another in society.
2. No adult person can be justly debarred from any privilege allowed to any other person in the order or society, except for conviction of crime.
3. All distinctions of “caste” are essentially and inevitably wicked and oppressive.
4. Of course every adult is equally entitled to the franchise of voting and being voted for, and all restrictions here, except for the conviction of crime, are natural injustice.
5. Equal rights and suffrage ought to be conceded to women in every respect as to men.<sup>12</sup>
6. Last, if the Jacobin theory be true, then slavery in all its forms must be essentially unrighteous; of which institution the essential feature is, that

---

<sup>12</sup> “If any advocate of the Jacobin theory recoils from this corollary, he is absolutely inconsistent, by reason of his bondage to former prejudices and unreasoning habits of thought: so argues John Stuart Mill irrefragably in his treatise on the *Subjection of Women*. If the Jacobin theory be true, then women must be allowed access to every male avocation, including government, and war if she wishes it, to suffrage, to every political office, to as absolute freedom from her husband in the marriage relation as she enjoyed before her union to him, and to as absolute control of her own property and earnings as that claimed by the single gentleman, as against her own husband. That Mill infers correctly from his premises needs no arguing. If it is a just principle that no adult male shall be debarred from suffrage or office by reason of *race, color, or previous condition of bondage*, then indisputably no adult female can be justly debarred from them by reason of sex, or previous legal subjection under the *common Law*. If it is a natural injustice to debar an adult male from these rights because of a black or yellow face, it must be an equal injustice to debar other adults because of a beardless face. If kinky hair should not disfranchise, then by practical reasoning flowing tresses should not disfranchise.” ~~ Robert Dabney

citizens are invested with property in the involuntary labor of adult human beings, and control over their persons.<sup>13</sup>

## Defense of the Scriptural Truth

Now my purpose in this essay is not at all to discuss these two theories of human rights, or to refute the latter and establish the former. Although such discussion would strictly belong to the science of moral philosophy, and is indeed a vital part thereof, the fastidious might perhaps deem it unfit for a theological review in these *piping times of peace*. My sole object is to examine the scriptural question, whether or not the integrity of the Bible can be made to consist with the Jacobin theory and its necessary corollaries; and this inquiry is purely religious and theological. The Christian church as such has no direct didactic concern with it, and no legislative and judicial concern with it, except as it furnishes infidelity weapons to assail God's Word. Our church has always properly held, that whenever any science so-called, whether psychological, moral, or even physical, is used to assail the integrity of the rule of faith, that use at once makes the defensive discussion of that hostile science a theological function, both proper and necessary for the church. I cite from our Confession a notable instance: For centuries the psychological problem concerning the rise of volition has been debated between philosophers, the Scotists approving, and the Thomists denying, the equilibrium and self-determination of the will. The Westminster Assembly perceived that the Scotists' psychology was employed to sophisticate the revealed doctrines of original sin and effectual calling. They, therefore, in Chap. ix., *Of Free Will*, determine and settle so much of this doctrine of psychology as is

---

<sup>13</sup> "The absolute necessity of this corollary is now asserted by all who hold the Jacobin theory intelligently: as, for instance, by Mr. Mill. They invariably deduce their doctrine from those principles, and they say, that since those principles are established, argument on the subject of human bondage is absolutely closed; and history gives this curious illustration of the necessity of this logical connection: that the first application of the doctrine of the theoretical abolitionism ever made was that applied by Robespierre, the master of the French Jacobins, to the French colonies. We are told that he prided himself much on his political philosophy, and that one day when he was expounding it in the national assembly, somebody said: *monsieur, these dogmas, if carried out, would require the emancipation of all the Africans in the colonies, which would, of course, ruin those precious appendages of France*. To which he angrily replied: *Then let the colonies perish, rather than this social philosophy shall be denied*. Of which the result was, in fact, the St. Domingo of today." ~~~ Robert Dabney

needed to substantiate the Scriptures. So, recently, our Assembly, upon perceiving that a doctrine of mere physical science, evolution, was liable to be used for impugning the testimony of Scripture, dealt with that foreign doctrine both didactically and judicially. They were consistent, For, I repeat, whenever any doctrine from any whither is employed to assail that divine testimony which our Lord has committed to the church, there the defensive discussion of that doctrine has become theological, and is an obligatory part of the church's divine testimony.

But my purpose does not go so far as even this. My object is merely to point out the coming contest, and to warn the defenders of the faith of its certainty. My wish is to make all Christians face this plain question: *Will you surrender the inspiration of the Scriptures to these assaults of a social science so-called?* If not, what? That the issue has been made and must be met, I shall show by laying two sets of facts alongside of each other. One is, that the Jacobin theory, already held by millions and confidently claiming for itself all the honors of republicanism and liberty, does assert, and must assert, all the corollaries above stated. The other set of facts is, that the Scriptures deny every one of them, and that with a fatal distinctness which no honest exposition can evade. Doubtless, during this long and tremendous conflict we shall see the same thing repeated which we have seen in recent decades: timid and uncandid minds, anxious still to *ride a fence* after it is totally blown away by the hurricane of anti-Christian attack, attempting to reconcile opposites by various exegetical wriggings. But we shall again see it end in futility, and candid assailant and candid defender will both agree that the Bible means what it says, and must either fall squarely or must stand by the overthrow of all attacking parties. The rest of our work will therefore be little more than the examination of the actual teachings of Scripture.

## **Six Points of Conflict**

1. The Jacobin theory totally repudiates all imputation of the consequences of moral conduct from one person to another as irrational and essentially unjust. It declares that *imputed guilt is Imputed nonsense*. From its

premises it must declare thus, for it asserts that each individual enters social existence as an independent integer, possessed of complete natural liberty and full equality. But the Bible scheme of social existence is full of this imputation. I shall not dwell upon the first grand case, the sin and fall of the race in Adam, although it is still determining, in a tremendous manner, the conditions of each individual's entrance into social existence. I add other instances, some of which are equally extensive. *The woman was first in transgression*, for which God laid upon Eve two penalties,<sup>14</sup> subordination to her husband and the sorrows peculiar to motherhood. The New Testament declares<sup>15</sup> that it is right her daughters shall continue to endure these penalties to the end of the world.<sup>16</sup> In Genesis 9:25-27 Ham, the son of Noah, is guilty of an unfilial crime. His posterity are condemned with him and share the penalty to this day. In Exodus 20:5 God declares that he will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations. Amalek met Israel in the time of his flight and distress with robbery and murder, instead of hospitality. Not only were the immediate actors punished by Joshua, but the descendants of Amalek are excluded forever from the house of the Lord, for the crime of their fathers.<sup>17</sup> It is needless to multiply instances, except one more, which shall refute the favorite dream of the rationalists that Jesus substituted a milder and more just law. For this Jesus said to the Jews of his own day:

*Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers: ... That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation.*<sup>18</sup>

We thus find this principle of imputation extended into the New Testament, by the authority of Jesus himself, as a just principle.

---

<sup>14</sup> Gen. 3:16

<sup>15</sup> 1 Tim. 2:11ff

<sup>16</sup> See also 1 Peter 3:1-6

<sup>17</sup> Deut. 25:19

<sup>18</sup> Matt. 23:32-36



2. Whereas Jacobinism asserts that no privilege or franchise enjoyed by some adults in the state can be justly withheld from any other order of adults, God's word entirely discards this rule. Not to speak of the subordination of women and domestic bondage (of which more anon), God distributed the franchises unequally in the Hebrew commonwealth. The priestly family possessed, by inheritance, certain teaching and ruling functions which the descendants of no other tribe could share. There was a certain law of primogeniture, entitled the right of the firstborn, which the younger sons did not share equally, and which the father himself could not alienate.<sup>19</sup> The fathers of houses,<sup>20</sup> in virtue of their patriarchal authority, held a senatorial dignity, and this evidently for life.<sup>21</sup>

In the New Testament, the apostle Peter enjoins Christians to submit themselves *to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers and for the praise of them that do well.*<sup>22</sup> Here a distribution of powers between different ranks, emperor, proconsuls, and subjects, is distinctly recognized. *Render, therefore, to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.*<sup>23</sup> Likewise, also, *these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.*<sup>24</sup>

3. Nothing is more obnoxious to the principles of Jacobinism than what it denounces as "caste." It delights to use this word because it is freighted with bad associations derived from the stories we hear of the oppressive hereditary distinctions of the people in Hindostan. Of course there is a sense in which every just conscience reprehends inequalities of caste. This is where they are made pretext for depriving an order or class of citizens of privileges which belong to them by right, and for whose exercise they are morally and intellectually qualified. But this is entirely a different thing from saying that all the different orders of persons in a state are naturally and

---

<sup>19</sup>Deut. 21:15-16

<sup>20</sup> Ex. 18:21; Josh. 22:14

<sup>21</sup> See also the history of Barzillai

<sup>22</sup> 1 Pet. 2:13

<sup>23</sup> Rom. 13:7

<sup>24</sup> Jude 8

morally entitled to all the same privileges, whether qualified or not, simply because they are men and adults. The Jacobin trick of sophistry is to confound these different propositions together; and when they denounce “wicked caste,” the application they make of their denunciation includes not only oppressive inequalities, but every difference in the distribution of powers and privileges. Now, the Scriptures recognize and ordain such distribution; or, if the reader pleases, such distinctions of caste in the latter sense. Such is the stubborn fact. Thus, in the Hebrew commonwealth, the descendants of Levi were disenfranchised of one privilege which belonged to all their brethren of the other tribes; and enfranchised with another privilege from which all their brethren were excluded. A Levite could not hold an inch of land in severalty.<sup>25</sup> No member of another tribe, not even of the princely tribe of Judah, could perform even the lowest function in the tabernacle.<sup>26</sup> These differences are nowhere grounded in any statement that the children of Levi were more or less intelligent and religious than their fellow-citizens. Another “caste distinction” appears amongst the descendants of Levi himself. The sons of Aaron alone could offer sacrifices or incense in the sanctuary. The Levites could only be underlings or assistants to their brethren the priests. Among the sons of Aaron another hereditary distinction presented itself. The individual who had the right of the first born took the high priesthood, with its superior prerogatives. He alone could go into the Holy of Holies. He alone could offer the sacrifice on the great annual day of the atonement. But this privilege was limited by a certain hereditary disqualification. He could only marry a virgin,<sup>27</sup> and was forbidden to marry a widow (as his fellow-citizens might legally do), however virtuous and religious. A “caste distinction” is also found among the bondmen, whose subjection was legalized by the constitution. A person of Hebrew blood could only be enslaved for six years. A person of foreign blood could be held in hereditary slavery, although born within the land of Israel as much as the other. It was also provided that the treatment of bondmen of Hebrew blood should be more lenient.<sup>28</sup> A “caste distinction”

---

<sup>25</sup> Num. 18:22-23

<sup>26</sup> Heb. 7:13-14

<sup>27</sup> Lev. 21:13-14

<sup>28</sup> Lev. 25:42-47

was also provided concerning the entrance of persons of foreign blood into the Hebrew state and church.<sup>29</sup> The descendants of Ammon and Moab were debarred to the tenth generation. The Egyptians and Edomites could be admitted at the third generation; the one, because their patriarch Esau was brother to Jacob, the other, because the Israelites had once lived in Egypt.

Let the inference from these histories be clearly understood. It is not claimed that these caste distinctions established by God himself obligate us positively to establish similar distinctions in our day. But the fact that God once saw fit to establish them does prove that they cannot be essentially sinful. To assert that they are, impugns the righteousness of God. Whence it follows, in direct opposition to the Jacobin theory, that should suitable circumstances again arise such "caste distinctions" may be righteous. It will be exclaimed that the New Testament reversed all this. We shall be reminded of Paul's famous declaration: *Where there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all;*<sup>30</sup> or this: *There is neither Jew or Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*<sup>31</sup> But before a literal and mechanical equality can be inferred from these, it must be settled what the Holy Spirit meant by being *one in Christ*, and whether the parts which are combined to construct a component unity are not always unequal instead of equal. The latter is certainly the apostle's teaching when he compares the spiritual body to the animal body, with many members of dissimilar honor. The apostle himself demonstrates that he never designed the levelling sense to be put upon his words by proceeding after he had uttered them to subject women in one sense to an inequality by imposing upon them ecclesiastical subordination, and even a different dress, in the church. The Scriptures thus teach that all distinctions of caste are not unjust in the sense charged by the current theory.

---

<sup>29</sup> Ex. 17:16; Deut. 23:3-8

<sup>30</sup> Col. 3:11

<sup>31</sup> Gal. 3:28

4. God's commonwealth was not founded on universal suffrage. That he rejected the Jacobinical principle is plain from the history of the Gibeonites. They were exempted by covenant with Joshua from the doom of extinction, and retained a title to homes for many generations upon the soil of Palestine, and, as we see from 2 Samuel 21:6, they were very carefully protected in certain rights by the government. They were not domestic slaves, neither were they fully enfranchised citizens. From the higher franchises of that rank they were shut out by a hereditary disqualification, and this was done by God's express enactment.<sup>32</sup> This instance impinges against the Jacobin theory in two other ways, indicated in our second and third heads. Individual descendants of the Gibeonites, however law-abiding and gifted with natural capacity, did not enjoy *la carrier ouverte aux talents* equally with the young Israelites, which the Jacobin theory demands indiscriminately as the inalienable right of all. And to make the matter worse, the Scripture declares that this disqualification descended by imputation from the guilt of the first generation's paganism and fraud upon Joshua.
  
5. We have shown that the claim known as that of women's rights is an inevitable corollary of the radical theory. Our purpose here is not to debate the wisdom or equity of that claim, but to show what God thinks of it. In Genesis 3:16 He legislates for Eve as the representative of all her daughters, putting her in subordination to the authority of her husband: *Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee*. If a Hebrew landholder had male descendants when he died, his daughters inherited no share in his land. They could inherit land in cases where there was no male heir. And this was the legislation, not of Moses, but of God himself.<sup>33</sup> It is more decisive to add, that the New Testament continues to assign subordination to women:
  - a. *The head of the woman is the man. ~ 1 Corinthians 11:3*
  - b. *Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. ~ 1 Corinthians 14:34*

---

<sup>32</sup>Josh. 9:27

<sup>33</sup> Numbers 27:8

- c. *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church... Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. ~~ Ephesians 5:22-24*
- d. *Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. ~~ 1 Timothy 2:11-12*
- e. *I will, therefore, that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. ~~ 1 Timothy 5:14*
- f. *That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. ~~ Titus 2:4-5*
- g. *Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the word they also without the word may be won by the conversation of the wives... for after this manner in old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands, even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord. ~~ 1 Peter 3:1, 5-6*

Thus, explicit and repeated, are the precepts of the Scripture on this head. In the new dispensation they are even plainer than in the old. How many thousands of women are there, professed members of Christ's church, who rid themselves of all these precepts with a disdainful toss, saying: *Oh! Paul was but a crusty old bachelor. It was the men who legislated thus in their pride of se. Had women written, all would have been different.* I would request such fair reasoners to look this question steadily in the face. Is this the legislation of men, or of God speaking by men? If they say the former, is not this virtual infidelity? If the latter, had they not better take care, *lest haply they be found even fighting against God.* Instead of against a *crusty old bachelor?*

One of the weak evasions attempted is to plea that this subordination of the women of Peter's and Paul's day was enjoined only because of their

low grade of intelligence and morality, these female Christians being supposed to be but sorry creatures, recently converted from paganism. The apostles refute this, as does church history, both of which give the highest praise to the Christian women of the primitive church. Especially does the apostle Peter ruin this sophism when he illustrates the duty of obedience by the godly example of the noblest princesses of Israel's heroic age.

6. The sixth and last issue between Jacobinism and the inspiration of Scripture is concerning the lawfulness of domestic slavery. The two sides of this issue are defined with perfect sharpness. The political theory says the subjection of one human being in bondage to another, except for conviction of crime, is essentially and always unrighteous. The Scriptures indisputably declare, in both Testaments, that it is not always essentially unrighteous, since they legitimate it under suitable circumstances, and declare that godly masters may so hold the relation as to make it equitable and righteous. I shall not now go fully into the Scriptural argument on this point, because my whole object is gained by showing that the contradiction exists, without discussing which side has the right, and because I have so fully discussed the whole question in my Defense of Virginia and the South. It is only necessary to name the leading facts:
  - a. That God predicted the rise of the institution of domestic bondage as the penalty and remedy for the bad morals of those subjected to it.<sup>34</sup>
  - b. That God protects property in slaves, exactly as any other kind of property, in the sacred Decalogue itself.<sup>35</sup>
  - c. That numerous slaves were bestowed on Abraham, the *friend of God*, as marks of the favor of divine providence.<sup>36</sup>
  - d. That the relation of master and bondman was sanctified by the administration of a divine sacrament, which the bondman received on the ground of the master's faith.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Gen. 9:25

<sup>35</sup> Ex. 20:17

<sup>36</sup> Gen. 24:35

<sup>37</sup> Gen. 17:27

- e. That the angel of the covenant himself remanded a fugitive slave, Hagar, to her mistress, but afterwards assisted her in the same journey when legally manumitted.<sup>38</sup>
- f. That the civil laws of Moses expressly allowed Hebrew citizens to purchase pagans as life-long and hereditary slaves.<sup>39</sup>
- g. That the law declares such slaves (that is, their involuntary labor) to be property.<sup>40</sup>

## New Testament Material Regarding Slavery<sup>41</sup>

But let us see what the New Testament says concerning the relation of master and bondman. It does indeed command all, if they assume this relation, to fulfill it in a Christian spirit, in the fear of an impartial God.<sup>42</sup> It also prohibits all unrighteous abuses of the relation, whether by masters<sup>43</sup> or by bondmen.<sup>44</sup> Slave-

---

<sup>38</sup>Gen. 21:17-21

<sup>39</sup> Lev. 25:44-46

<sup>40</sup> "The reader is advised to consult here the irrefragable exegesis of Dr. Moses Stuart of Andover. He will see that this argument is no construction of sectional prejudice. The New Testament left the institution with precisely the same sanction as the Old. Were there any ground for the plea that the Old Testament also legalized polygamy and capricious divorce, which we now regard as immoral, this fact would utterly refute it. For while the New Testament prohibited these wrongs, it left slavery untouched. But I also deny that the Old Testament anywhere legalized polygamy and capricious divorce. To charge it in the sense of this evasive plea impugns the inspiration of Moses and the prophets. That is to say, it is virtual infidelity. And this infidel assault upon Moses and the prophets equally attacks Christ and His apostles. It is vain to advance the theory (which is but the old Socinian theory) that the New Testament corrected and amended whatever was harsh or barbarous in the Old. For, in the first place, I utterly deny the assertion. The New Testament left the relation of master and bondman just where Moses placed it. And, in the second place, Jesus and His apostles expressly guarantee the inspiration of Moses, without any reservation, so that they have embarked their credit as divine and infallible teachers along with that of Moses. Both must stand or fall together. Whenever a person declares that whatsoever he speaks is given to him to speak from God, and then assures us that another person has spoken infallibly and divinely, upon ascertaining that the latter has in fact spoken erroneously and immorally, we can only condemn the former as both mistaken and dishonest. (The blasphemy is not mine!) This stubborn corollary every clear mind must draw sooner or later, and not all the rationalistic glazings of deceitful exegesis can prevent it. He who attacks the inspiration of Moses attacks also the inspiration and the moral character of Jesus. *No man can serve two masters*. Let everyone make up his mind honestly either to reject the Bible as a fable, and thus preserve his Jacobin humanitarianism, or frankly to surrender the latter in order to retain the gospel." ~~ Robert Dabney

<sup>41</sup> Although extremely important this short segment is best read as parenthetically inserted into the main argument.

<sup>42</sup>Eph. 6:9

<sup>43</sup>Col. 4:1

<sup>44</sup> Col. 3:22-25

holders, like the godly centurion<sup>45</sup> and Cornelius,<sup>46</sup> are commended for their Christian consistency, without a word of caution or exception on account of this relation. The Redeemer, in Luke 17:7-10, grounds His argument to prove that not even the truest Christian obedience can bring God in our debt, upon a logical analogy, whose very point is that the master is legally invested with a prior title to, and property in, the labor of his bondman. In the beautiful parable of the prodigal son,<sup>47</sup> when Christ would illustrate the thoroughness of his contrition, he does it by using the acknowledged fact that the condition of the hired servant in the slave-holder's household was the lowest and least privileged, i.e. the *slave*<sup>48</sup> was above the hired *servant*<sup>49</sup>. The apostles enjoin on bondmen conscientious service to their masters, even when unjust;<sup>50</sup> but so much the more willing and conscientious when those masters are brother members in the Christian church.<sup>51</sup> The Apostle Paul holds that, if masters do their duty, the relation may be lawfully continued, and is just and equitable. The Apostle Paul remands a fugitive slave to his master Philemon, after that slave's conversion, and that although he is at the time in great need of the assistance of such a servant. And so distinctly does he recognize Philemon's lawful property in the involuntary labor of his fugitive slave that he actually binds himself, in writing, to pay its pecuniary value himself, that thereby he may gain the forgiveness of Onesimus. In 1 Timothy 6:3-5, the apostle condemns such as would dare to dispute the righteous obligation of even Christian bondmen, as proud, ignorant, perverse, contentious, untruthful, corrupt in mind and mercenary; and he requires believers to separate themselves from such teachers.

The glosses which attempt to evade these clear declarations are well known. They assert that, though Christ and his apostles knew that the relation was intrinsically wicked, they forbore to condemn it expressly, on account of its wide prevalence, the jealousy of owners, the dangers of popular convulsions and politic caution; while they secretly provided for its extinction by inculcating gospel principles in general. Such is the most decent reconciliation, which even the pious and

---

<sup>45</sup>Luke 7:2-9

<sup>46</sup>Acts 10:34-35

<sup>47</sup> Luke 15:19

<sup>48</sup> Greek word *doulos*

<sup>49</sup> Greek word *misthotos*

<sup>50</sup> 1 Pet. 2:18-19

<sup>51</sup>1 Tim. 6:1-2



evangelical Scott can find between his Bible and his politics. Every perspicacious mind sees that it is false to all the facts of the history, dishonorable to Christ, and inconsistent with all true conceptions of his inspiration and Messiahship. He and his apostles absolutely deny that they keep back any precept from any consideration of policy or caution.<sup>52</sup> They expressly repudiate this theory of their mission, as though they had this deceitful theory then before their eyes. They invariably attack other evils, such as idolatry, polygamy, and impurity, which were far more prevalent and more strongly entrenched in prejudice than domestic slavery. They ground the spread and protection of their gospel on the omnipotence of God, not on the policy of men, and reject with a lofty and holy disdain all this species of paltering to sin which this gloss imputes to them.<sup>53</sup>

The honest student, then, of the New Testament can make nothing less of its teachings on this point than that domestic slavery, as defined in God's Word and practiced in the manner enjoined in the Epistles, is still a lawful relation under the new dispensation as well as under the old.

---

<sup>52</sup> John 17:8; Acts 20:20, 27

<sup>53</sup> "Let me be allowed to pause here, and add a few more words in explanation of the relation which the orthodox Presbyterian Church in America has always held to this subject. Since domestic bondage is a civic and secular relation, which God has declared may be lawfully held under suitable conditions, the church may not prohibit it categorically to her members, nor may she interfere with the commonwealth by her spiritual authority, wither to institute it or to abolish it. Had her Lord declared it to be intrinsically sinful, then it would have been her duty to prohibit it to her members, and to enforce this prohibition by her spiritual discipline, in spite of the commonwealth's allowance, or even positive injunction. The church and her presbyters, then, have no concern to favor or oppose this civic relation, but only to protect the integrity of her divine rule of faith as involved in the debate concerning it. Her only other concern with it is to evangelize masters and bondmen as to make the relation a blessing to both, and to retrench all its sinful abuses. Now, then, if the opponents of this relation object to it and urge its overthrow on the ground that it is economically less profitable or less promotive of economic advantage than the hireling systems of labor, we, as presbyters, have nothing whatever to say, although fully aware that the testimony of facts and the government itself have repeatedly contradicted that position. Had its opponents claimed any legal or constitutional arguments entitling them to meddle with it or restrict it in States other than their own, we, as presbyters, should have been absolutely silent. Had its opponents asserted that we were grievously neglecting the duties of the relation and permitting abuses of it so as to impair the happiness of our dependent fellow-creatures, and to displease the God of the poor, we, as Christians, should have bowed meekly, as to the faithful rebuke of friends, and should have been thankful for their aid and instruction to teach us how to use the relation more righteously and mercifully. It is when they assert that the relation is intrinsically wicked, and that even its maintenance without abuses is to be condemned by the spiritual authority of the church and prevented by her discipline, that they obtrude the issue, and the one issue, which we, as presbyters, are entitled and bound to meet; for they thereby assail the morality, and thus the truth, of those Scriptures which God has given to the church as her testimony, which, if she does not uphold, she ceases to be a church, and *they teach for doctrines the commandments of men*, which Christ prohibits His church either to do or to endure." ~ Robert Dabney

## **Return to the Six Points of Conflict and Their Consequences**

What I thus declare concerning this last point of domestic bondage I now also assert concerning the five previous ones. The church has no commission to advocate or to oppose any political doctrines, logical or illogical, Jacobinical, republican, or royalist, as such. It is only when they are so advanced as to taint the integrity of her divine rule of faith that they concern her, and then her concern is only to defend the testimony her Lord has committed to her, which she must do against "all comers," be their pretext what it is.

It is from this point of view that I say it behooves the watchmen upon the walls of Zion to consider and estimate the extent of the danger now arising from this source. If they observe intelligently they will see that peril is portentous. They will detect this radical theory of human rights and equality, born of atheism but masquerading in the garb of true Bible republicanism, everywhere teaching corollaries – which they teach inevitably because they follow necessarily from their first principles – which contradict the express teachings of Scripture.

We see this theory passionately held by millions of nominal Christians in the most Protestant lands, perhaps by the great majority of such, with the blind and passionate devotion of partisanship as one of the most difficult things in the world to overcome, by either truth or conscience. Hence, we have no right to be surprised that this collision between the popular political theory, so flattering to the self-will and pride of the human heart, and so clad in the raiment of pretended philanthropy on the one part, and the Holy Scriptures on the other part, requiring men, as they do, to bow their pride and self-will to a divine authority, as become the occasion of tens of thousands making themselves blatant infidels, and of millions becoming virtual unbelievers.

Those who wish to hold both the contradictories have indeed been busy for two generations weaving veils of special pleadings and deceitful expositions of Scripture wherewith to conceal the inevitable contradiction. But these veils are continually wearing too thin to hide it, and the bolder minds rend them one after another and cast them away. The only permanent effect of these sophisms is to damage the respectability of the Christian bodies and scholars who employ them, and to debauch their own intellectual honesty. Meantime, the authority of Holy Scripture as an infallible rule of faith sinks lower and lower with the masses of Protestant Christendom. Is it not now a rarity to find a Christian of culture who reads his Bible with the full faith which his grandparents were wont to exercise; and when an educated man now-a-days avows that he still does so, does he not excite a stare from other Christians?

The recent history of the church presents startling instances of this departure of her spiritual power and glory. When the fashion of the day betrayed the excellent Dr. Thomas Scott into the insertion of the wretched sophism exposed above in his commentary on the Epistles, the "Evangelical party" in the Anglican Church was powerful, respectable, and useful. It stood in the forefront of English Christianity, boasting a galaxy of the greatest British divines, statesmen, and scholars. Now who so poor as to do it reverence? Romanizers, Ritualists, Broad Churchmen, in the Anglican body, speak of it as a dead donkey, and glory over its impotency. So the great evangelical Baptist body was a glorious bulwark of the gospel in the days of Robert Hall, Ryland, and Andrew Fuller. Today we see it so honeycombed with rationalism that Mr. Spurgeon can no longer give the Baptist Union the countenance of his orthodoxy; and he testifies that attacks may be heard from its pulpits upon every distinctively evangelical point.

What is it that has so woefully tainted these once excellent bodies? Is not a part of the answer to be found here: that the Quaker Clarkson, with his pretended inner light, his preferred guide rather than God's written word, and his Socinianizing theory of inspiration in attacking the British and New England slave trade (which deserved his attack), also attacked the relation of domestic servitude with indiscriminate rage, and supported his rationalism with arguments of human invention, piously borrowed even from French atheism? British Christianity, awakened at last to tardy remorse for the bad eminence of their race as the leading slave catchers of the world, was seized with a colic-spasm of virtue on

that subject, and very naturally sought to atone for its iniquities in the one extreme by rushing into the other.

Thus it not only aimed to seize the glory of suppressors of the African slave trade – a glory which belonged to Virginia, first of all commonwealths of the world, by a prior title of forty years – but became fanatically abolitionist. Then the problem for evangelical fanatics was how to reconcile their anti-scriptural dogma with the Scriptures. With this problem Exeter Hall Christianity has been wrestling for fifty years by the deplorable methods above described, and while they have not made the reconciliation, they have succeeded by those methods in making the world skeptical of their sincerity, and in sowing broadcast the seeds of a licentious rationalism. Their pupils, when taught to interpret the unpalatable political truth out of the declarations of Jesus, Moses, and Paul, continue to use the same slippery methods to interpret the unpalatable theological truth also out of the Bible, as depravity, predestination, gratuitous justification, inability, eternal retribution.

The most sorrowful aspect of the matter is that, as fast as the candor of these Christians forces them to recognize the contradiction as real, they usually elect to throw their faith overboard rather than their politics. This election they not seldom carry out openly, but more often covertly and gradually, giving up first their faith in plenary inspiration, then in the Mosaic inspiration, at last in the Bible itself, and employing progressive form of exegetical jugglery, to ease themselves down from the lower position to the lowest.

Perhaps the most melancholy and notorious of such election is that seen in the great American divine and expositor, who has done more than any other Presbyterian to spread the humanitarian theology through the bulk of his denomination, whose doctrines, indeed, overflowing the earlier and safer teachings of the senior Alexander and Hodge, have covered them out of sight in the present current of religious thought. This great man declares deliberately and solemnly in his published works, that were he shut up to the alternative between accepting the sense of Scripture so obvious to the old interpreters, which recognizes domestic servitude as a relation which may be lawful under suitable conditions, or of surrendering his political opinions on that subject, he should throw away his Bible in order to retain those opinions; and he solemnly warns

that class of expositors represented by Drs. Hodge, Thornwell, and N. L. Rice, that they had better stop their efforts to substantiate that exposition of Scripture, because if they succeeded the only effect would be, not to defend old institutions, but to drive all right-minded Christians like himself into infidelity.

Let the reader look also at the case of Bishop Colenso, who, when he had expended the whole learning and labor of his latter years in attacking the inspiration of the Old Testament, which in his ordination vows he had sworn to defend, expressly accounted for and justified his course by the fact that he had adapted the new humanitarian politics. The reader may see a more flagrant instance nearer home. Ingersoll, the son of an Old School Presbyterian minister, glories in trampling his father's Bible in the mire of foulest abuse. He tells the public that his abolitionism is a prime moving cause with him to spurn Christianity.

## **An Exhortation to Scripture's Defenders**

Such is the outlook. On the other side, adverse circumstances virtually paralyze all the human powers which should be arrayed in defense of the Bible. Doubtless, many divines remain in the countries and communions infected who see the truth and believe it. They are called conservative, and wish to be considered so. But the only element of conservatism which they call into actions at this critical juncture is caution, a caution which prevents their jeopardizing their own quiet and prosperity by coming to the front and meeting the insolent aggression of the new opinions. They dissent, but practically they acquiesce.

They commit the same mistake in tactics which General Charles Lee committed one hundred and ten years ago at the battle of Monmouth, and which he himself expressed so pungently in his impertinent reply to his commanding general. When Washington met him retiring instead of attacking, as he had been ordered, he asked him, with stern dignity:

*General Lee, what does this mean?*

To which the witty Englishman replied:

*I suppose it means that I am imbued with rather too much of that rascally virtue, caution, in which your excellency is known to excel.*

Washington was cautious, but he knew when to be cautious and when over-caution became the most fearful rashness, and vigorous audacity the only true prudence. There seems no encouragement to expect that those more enlightened friends of Scripture inspiration will employ the Washingtonian tactics in the impending conflicts. History teaches us that thus far in its preliminary stages, while still possessed of the superior weight of character, position, and even numbers, they have in every instance so misplaced their caution as to give the victory to which they were entitled to the insolent and aggressive minority. How will such men act now that that minority has become a majority flushed with triumph?

Thus circumstances make it, humanly speaking, certain that there is but one small quarter of Protestant Christendom from which frank opposition to the new opinions is to be expected. The current sweeps too strongly, the error is too popular. Such determined opposition as would be adequate to stem it would be too inconvenient. Now the circumstance which is so untoward for the cause of truth is thus, that the conquering section in America, in order to carry out its purposes, found it desirable to load that obscure district of Christendom with mountains of obloquy, heaped on it with a systematic and gigantic diligence for more than a generation, and they have succeeded to their heart's content in making that district odious and contemptible throughout the Protestant world.

Thus, whatever of hard-earned experience, whatever of true insight, whatever of faithful and generous zeal the good men of that section may desire to bring to the defense of the common Christianity, the world is determined beforehand to be rejected. *Can any good come out of Nazareth?* The world has been told, that of course warnings and declarations coming from that quarter have a perverse source. This will be believed. All that the enemies of the Bible need do to neutralize our honest efforts in the great defense will be to say,

*Oh, those are the extravagances of a sour pessimist!*

or,

*These are but the grumbings of defeated malice and spite against the righteous conquerors!*

Now, that an individual servant of God and truth should be subjected to such taunts is of exceedingly little moment. The momentous result against the interest of the truth is, that the only part of the king's army which is in condition to do staunch battle for his truth is to be discounted in the tug of war. Thus the enemy of the truth has adroitly succeeded in so arranging, beforehand, the conditions of the campaign, as to neutralize the powers of resistance, and, humanly speaking, to insure the victory for himself, because the professed friends of the truth will be cursed for want of that sturdy assistance which they themselves had previously disabled by slanders, prompted by their own interested purposes. There will be seen in the result the most grim "poetic justice" of divine providence. But the Lord still has faithful servants, and the truth still has steadfast witnesses, who will recognize no duty as superior to that of maintaining Christ's testimony against all odds.

The facts just stated show that the struggle cannot but be long and arduous. The friends of truth must therefore *with good advice make war*. While never shirking ecclesiastical discussion when the aggressiveness of error challenges them to it, their chief reliance for victory must be upon the faithful preaching of the old-fashioned gospel and upon godly living. Like the martyr church of Revelation they must *conquer by the blood of the Lamb and by the testimony of Jesus, and by not loving their lives unto the death*. Divisions in the ranks of the defenders of the truth, professedly united up to a recent date, are a discouraging sign; but the general decline in the standard of Christian living which these have imbibed as an infection from the rationalistic side is a far more ominous sign; *the battle is the Lord's, not man's*. He will not deem it worth His while to work a victory for the sake of a mere dead ecclesiastical orthodoxy, which is to be as barren of the fruits of holy living as the code of its assailants. If the communions which profess to stand up for the integrity of Scripture have the nerve to resume strict church discipline, to enforce on their professing members a strict separation from the world, and thus to present to it a Christian life beautiful and awful for its purity as of old, they will conquer. If they lack this nerve and shirk this purification of themselves, they will be defeated; they will also be corrupted; and after a deceitful season of bustle and pretended Christian progress, having the form of

godliness but denying the power thereof, a wide and long eclipse will come over Protestant Christendom, the righteous judgment of a holy God. His true people, perhaps for dreary generations, will be His despised and scattered ones mourning in secret places; and when His times of revival shall return again He will raise up new instruments of His own.

The friends of truth must contend in the spirit of humility. *God resisted the proud, but giveth strength unto the lowly.* They will, of course, recognize themselves as still possessed of the honorable trust, God's truth; they must, of course, believe those who assail them as less honored with this noble truth than themselves; for else what cause have they to contend? But they must always remember the apostle's word, *What have ye that ye did not receive? Now then, why do ye glory in it as though ye had not received it?* If we really have this loyalty to Scripture and to Him who gave it, it is of grace. It is God's in-working, not our personal credit. Had He not wrought it in us, *the natural mind*, which is just as native to us as to the other sons of Adam, would doubtless be prompting us, like other rationalists, to treat the old gospel claims as *foolishness*.

And there is a special reason for such Christian modesty in the case of Southern Christians. The fact that we are now standing on the side of Christ is due in part to a train of secular circumstances with reference to which we had no free agency, and therefore no personal credit. Providence ordained that the modern rationalism should select as its concrete object of attack our form of society and our rights. God thus shut us up to the study and clear apprehension of the religious issue, and decided the side we should take in the contest. But on the other hand, the sophism is obtruded at this point which is just as silly and absurd as pride in us would be misplaced. This asserts that our claim of a mission to testify for God's truth against any professed Christians is necessarily the sinful vainglory in us. According to this absurdity the purest church on earth could not dare to testify that any other professed communion of Christians, even prelatists, papists, Greeks, Socinians, were any less orthodox than themselves. And if these are no less orthodox, what right has this purest church to contend against any of them? *God resisteth the proud*, but we apprehend also that he does not like sham charity and contemptible logical dishonesties.



Since the opinions and practices hostile to the Scriptures are so protean, so subtle, and so widely diffused, there is no chance for a successful defense of the truth except in the uncompromising resistance to the beginnings of error; to parley is to be defeated. The steps in the “down-grade” progress are gentle, and slide easily one into the other, but the sure end of the descent is none the less fatal. He who yields the first step so complicates his subsequent resistance as to insure his defeat. There is but one safe position for the sacramental host: to stand on the whole Scripture, and refuse to concede a single point.

## **The Church’s Interest in the Conflict**

As to the secular and political doctrines which involve points of assault upon the rule of faith, the church’s true position is wholly defensive. She has no secular institutions, good or bad, to advocate as her ecclesiastical mission. That is simply and solely to deliver the whole revealed will of God for man’s salvation. She has no spiritual power to make anything sin, or anything duty, which the Bible has not made such. But if she would not walk into the fatal ambushes of the enemies of Scripture, she must have a clear and exact perception of the extent of this defensive duty. When encroachers usurp spiritual authority to lay upon the consciences of Christians any extra-Scriptural doctrine or requirement, they thereby make that encroachment a part of their ecclesiastical code. And they thus make it the right and duty of the friends of truth, in the exercise of their spiritual and ecclesiastical power, to examine and reject such new doctrine claiming to be spiritual and ecclesiastical. The friends of truth are to do this, not in order to encroach upon, but to protect, liberty of conscience in God’s children. Failing to understand this part of their defensive duty, they betray the cause entrusted to them to the cunning aggression.

It is the fashion to say that the metes and bounds between the kingdoms of Christ and of Caesar have always been, and must continue to be, very undefined and vague. This I utterly deny. They have, indeed, been constantly overstepped, but this is because there have always been churchmen greedy of power, worldly-minded and dictatorial. Men demand of us that we shall draw an exact dividing

line between the two jurisdictions, defining everywhere the points at which they meet. The demand is preposterous, because the two kingdoms are not spread upon one plane, but occupy different spheres. There is no zigzag mathematical line to be drawn in such a case, but the clear space separating the two spheres is all the more easy to be seen by honest eyes. It is pretended that there is great room for debate between fair constructions of the famous rule that church synods must handle and determine nothing except what is ecclesiastical. I am sure the wise men who stated it saw no room at all for such debate. I remember that when they selected these words for their rule, they had also declared that Holy Scripture was the sufficient and sole statute-book of Christ's ecclesia. Hence, their rule means plainly that church synods must handle and determine just what Holy Scripture determines, and nothing else; and they must determine what they handle precisely as Scripture does. Is not that distinct enough? Or, if any one seek further definition, it may be found very simply in this direction. Let us premise first, that whatever is expressly set down in Scripture, and whatever follows therefrom by good and necessary consequence, are binding on the Christian conscience. Now, all possible human actions must fall in one of these three classes:

1. Actions which Scripture positively enjoins
2. Actions which Scripture positively forbids
3. Actions which Scripture leaves indifferent

In the first case, church courts are to enjoin all that God enjoins, and nothing else, and because He enjoins it. In the second case, they are to prohibit what He prohibits, and on the ground of His authority. In the third case, they are to leave the actions of His people free to be determined by each one's own prudence and liberty, and this because God has left them free.