

Discussion Questions – Freedom, Unity, & Responsibility in Covenant Life & Mission

1. As you experience “the challenges of our present times” what do you consider to be the most pressing, and why? Which of these are at work in your own ministry environment?
2. How do you rank the relative importance of these values in the Covenant?
 - Our unity of fellowship in Jesus Christ our Lord
 - Our confession of the Bible as the word of God written
 - Our freedom in Christ
 - Our fidelity to Christ
3. What has been your experience and exposure to the Covenant’s historic aspiration to unite Covenant freedom in Christ with Covenant fidelity to the Scriptures as the word of God? How has this informed your practice of life together?
4. Where, in measuring Gospel imperatives, do you place the call and prayer of Jesus (John 17) for the visible and practical unity of the Church? Which is foremost for you – Unity? Purity? Orthodoxy? Freedom? Why? How do you include Paul’s counsel from Romans 12:18 in your understanding of this?
5. The Covenant has historically emphasized and upheld two truths are parallel: Unity in Christ (*Conjuncti in Christo*, our founding motto), and Freedom in Christ (the 6th *Covenant Affirmation*). Discuss this statement from the paper:

While the Covenant both emerges from and adheres to historic Christianity, we have given extra emphasis in our movement to the unity of the redeemed in Christ in the community of faith. Our name “Covenant” references the commitment we make to one another and to cooperate in the work of the gospel as mission friends. This commitment to freedom in Christ ensures that Christian unity is neither the suppression of diversity nor its denial; it is neither legislated uniformity nor tepid compromise to a lowest common denominator. Rather, Christian unity preserves distinction, drawing diverse expressions into an overarching relationship of love and mutual participation. This is one way we may reflect the unity in diversity of the Triune God. Both diversity and unity are preserved by faithful love. (p. 3)

6. What examples of sinful divisiveness, misuse of influence, position, over emphasis or neglect within the Covenant within our time concern you the most? Which are you guilty of? How will you repent of these sins and encourage others to do the same?
7. Discuss this proposition together: *“The Covenant’s historical commitment to freedom in Christ is not limitless nor an end in itself but rather exists to preserve the unity, clarify the orthodoxy and extend the faithfulness of the church. It exists to enable the church’s hearing and obeying of God’s will in Scripture, and to guard our responsibility to cling to Christ and to one another in community. The Preamble to the Covenant Constitution describes this freedom “as a gift that preserves personal conviction yet guards against an individualism that disregards the centrality of the Word of God and the mutual responsibilities and disciplines of the spiritual community.”* (p, 5) How would you apply this understanding to how these topics are considered in the Covenant?
 - a. The use of limited violence in self-defense vs. non-retaliation in self-defense

- b. Understanding divine justice as retributive or restorative in purpose
 - c. The call to entertain strangers and aliens hospitably and to love your enemies
 - d. Sexual fidelity for married Christians and celibacy for unmarried Christians
8. What practices or perspectives, alongside unrepentant sin, immorality, idolatry, greed, dishonesty, lack of love, false teaching, and fomenting of ungodly dissension should be grounds for church discipline and potential exclusion from fellowship, and which may be allowed within godly dissent and freedom? How do you determine what practices of freedom remain within the bounds of biblical authority and the law of love? What responsibility do these freedoms have to promote unity in fellowship rather than the promotion of self-indulgence (Gal. 5:13)?
 9. Part of the ongoing debate about freedom and responsibility involves the claimed distinctions between primary matters and secondary matters in Christian faith. Is this a helpful distinction? What matters are primary to being faithful in Christ, and what matters are secondary in being free in Christ?
 10. Consider this statement: *“Both freedom and responsibility derive their necessity and purpose from the unity of the word of God and the royal law of love (James 2:8). Endowed with these gifts, we are responsible to build up the unity of the Church in the knowledge and love of God.”* (p. 8) How do these gifts work best together as dual expressions of our common life in Christ?
 11. Reflect together on this statement: *“The pursuit of unity does not circumvent disagreement or conflict. Yet it is imperative that if we disagree, we do so in love. No degree of conviction or perceived rightness excuses us from the command to love, not only our neighbor but also those whom we perceive as enemies (1 Cor. 13:1-3)”* (p. 11). What are the predominant temptations present when we engage in disagreement or conflict within the church? How can we avoid giving in to these shortcomings?
 12. While this resource paper is not primarily focused on human sexuality, it was commissioned in view of this as a present and pressing concern. How does this paper help you to engage in respectful and constructive dialogue within the church regarding human sexuality in biblical theology and Christian practice?
 13. What further resources on *Freedom, Unity, and Responsibility in Covenant Life & Mission* might you suggest for others?