

WCF, The Sum and Use of Saving Knowledge: the evidences of true faith (339-342)

1.6 Obedience to the law running in the right channel

Introduction

The Westminster formulators give some helpful analysis to the matter of evidence of true faith in relation to the law. They develop four things that demonstrate genuine trust in Christ; we can put them in the form of personal questions:

- 1) Am I convinced that I have the obligation to keep the whole law because of Christ's saving work?
- 2) Do I keep on working at growth in how I practice godliness?
- 3) Is my obedience "running in the right channel"?
- 4) Am I diligently abiding in Christ looking in this way to Him for the fruits of good works in my conduct?

How the framers develop each of these points has merit. I want to stress # 3 (341-342), Is my obedience "running in the right channel"? A key passage is 1 Timothy 1.5, **The aim [end, goal] of our charge [order, command, instruction] is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith** in the context of the difficult text, 1.9, **the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners**. Their treatment of 1.5 helps us better understand 1.9.

If we organize the doctrines they give, we can come up with three:

- 1A. The broad principle
- 2A. Good conscience
- 3A. Steadfast purpose

1A. The broad principle

1) Overview

Obedience to the law must flow from love, love from a pure heart, a pure heart from a good conscience, and a good conscience from unfeigned faith.

2) What it is not

It is not for justification by law-obedience: "For the end of the law is (not as the Jewish doctors taught, but) love, out of a pure heart..."

3) What it is

The law comes to an end in its misuse for justification when you see your deserved condemnation and flee to Christ unfeignedly (sincerely, honestly, open to all the heavy claims of the law and not minimizing them, suppressing them, or reducing the range of their applicability)

2A. Good conscience

1) A good conscience is necessary to take up the law with love

They state, "No man can set himself in love to obey the law, excepting as far as his conscience is quieted by faith." Why is it helpful that they add, "or is seeking to be quieted in Christ"?

2) It involves a sincere faith and a pure heart

That is, feigned faith (insincere faith) approaches the law with an impure heart (not open to its claims unflinchingly). Then, with a bad conscience, insincerity, and impurity some people take up the law (law works, good works) with out "reckoning with the law."

If you approach the law with a good conscience, sincerely, and purely, it will force you to flee to Christ for refuge.

3A. Steadfast purpose

For love to manifest itself in particular fruitful actions two basics are necessary: hatred and resolve (hatred toward sin and resolve/determination toward holiness).

Loving obedience to the law arises from a good conscience, sincerity, and purity before God's holy standard. Why is this? It is so because when by faith in Christ you know that justice is quieted, then the conscience is quieted and this "will not suffer the heart to entertain the love of sin, but sets the man on work to fear God for his mercy, and to obey all his commandments, out of love for God, for his free gift of justification" (342).

Q: why do fear and love surface in this way in the last quote?