

## Overture regarding Christ's headship and the Church's worship

Esteemed brethren

The Covid 19 pandemic and government responses have posed considerable challenges to the churches of Jesus Christ including the *Free Reformed Churches*. Specifically, we have seen over the past year challenges to the headship of Christ over the church and an erosion of the essential nature of Christian worship both from within and without the church including various levels of civil government.

It is our conviction that churches need to stand united on this matter.

The following overture (adapted for our use) was approved by the Presbytery of the Southeast (OPC) at its stated meeting on April 2-3, 2021. The Chilliwack Free Reformed Church overtures synod to:

1. Adopt this statement concerning the rule of Christ over his church and the essential nature of the corporate worship of our God.
2. Encourage churches to distribute this document to their members, other churches, organizations and institutions including our civil authorities so that the truth can be maintained and promoted which is the calling of the church as the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3: 15).

**Recognizing** that the Lord Jesus Christ, is King and Head of His church, has divinely appointed a government of church-office-bearers distinct from the civil authorities (BC 36, WCF 30:1), and that there is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 1:18, Eph. 1:22, BC 31, WCF 25:6);

**Recognizing** that the headship of Christ over the churches means that it is our Savior's sole prerogative to establish the doctrine, worship, and practice of the church for when, where, and how she should meet, conduct her services, and carry out her prophetic message and witness in the world; that Christ has given the duty to exercise His spiritual authority in the church to the ministers and elders (1 Pet. 5:1-4, Heb. 13:7,17, BC 30), and they exercise this authority solely on the basis of scripture;

**Recognizing** that the civil magistrate has no God-given authority to interfere in the spiritual affairs of the church, and in particular to forbid the church to gather for worship or fellowship, to forbid her to sing God's praises in her worship, to forbid her to proclaim His authority over men and nations, nor to forbid her to testify to all civil magistrates His rule over them in His exalted position as "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15, Rev. 19:16); and that all men in all places of authority be earnestly exhorted to "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way," (Ps. 2:12); and that the Biblical teaching of the Belgic Confession specifically requires that everyone *join themselves to the true church even if the civil magistrate forbids it with threats of punishment* (BC 28);

**Therefore**, we reject the following as contrary to Scripture and offensive to our Savior's kingship over the church of Jesus Christ.

1. Applications of God's Word maintaining that the civil government may dictate rules and regulations for the church or her pastors that infringe upon her worship, doctrine, and God-given ministry in the world to urge men to turn from their sins and idols to serve the living and true God (Acts 20:28, Eph. 4:11-12, BC 30).

2. Applications of God's Word maintaining that God gives civil government unlimited or exclusive authority in the areas of health and safety beyond what pertains directly to upholding public justice according to the standard of God's moral law, by means of punishing of evil, rewarding those who do good, and collecting taxation (Rom. 13:1-7, BC 36).
3. Applications of God's Word maintaining that the office-bearers of the church must submit or answer to the authority of civil government, not merely as individual Christians in matters common to all citizens, but also in the carrying out of their official ecclesiastical responsibilities and prerogatives instead of performing their calling only on the basis of the spiritual and Divine authority received immediately from Christ (Mat 16:19, Luke 22:29)
4. Applications of God's Word maintaining that the civil government may for reasons of public health or safety create laws or requirements which bind or compel the conscience of the individual Christian concerning the manner, timing or frequency with which he or she may partake of the means of grace in sacred worship assemblies (Col. 2:20-23, BC 32).
5. Applications of God's Word maintaining that the will of Christ concerning His worship is revealed to the church through the commands of the civil government rather than the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments alone (Mat. 28:20).

**And whereas**, although we are commanded to submit "to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Pet. 2:13) and to "give honour to whom honour is due" (Rom. 13:7, 1 Pet. 2:17), this does not warrant the state or its agencies to intrude into other jurisdictions that God has ordained, namely, the church and the family, but calls us to obey and honor God-given authority in its proper sphere. These commands in Scripture do not legitimize tyranny or statist overreach, for "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His word, or beside it in matters of faith and worship" (WCF 20:2). We ought always to "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

**Be It Therefore Resolved** that Christ's ministers and elders should be encouraged to resume/continue all the stated worship services and ministries that He has commanded in His word in whatever location tends most to the safety and edification of the entire congregation. Wherever such services take place, they must be conducted with humble obedience to God and respect to civil government authority (Acts 4:19-20). However, there is nothing intrinsically disrespectful about public opposition to unjust abuses of civil authority through the loving exercise of our Biblical callings and constitutional rights (Acts 16:37, 25:10)

**Be it Further Resolved** that her members be encouraged to obey His command to assemble together and not to forsake His worship (Heb. 10:25), and to honor Him even at the peril of their liberties and lives; thereby upholding His honor in the world and His exclusive authority in His church (BC 28, WCF 25:2).

**Be it Further Resolved** that while providential circumstances may prevent the office-bearers of the church from calling a public worship gathering, whenever and wherever such a gathering is officially

called this is performed on behalf of the King of the Church who welcomes all sinners to come to Him without qualification (Mat. 11:28, John 6:37) and therefore neither the civil magistrate nor the elders of the church may compel anyone to stay away without clear Biblical warrant.

**Be it Further Resolved** that the entire church be encouraged to humble herself under God's evident chastening of us, setting aside days of prayer and fasting to entreat the Head of the church to have mercy upon us, with the following emphases:

1. That He might preserve us in the liberty and unity that He has purchased for us with His own blood, and that liberty for which our forefathers and mothers in the faith gave their lives to hand down to us (Acts 20:28).
2. That He might send seasons of refreshment from His exalted position at the right hand of the Father, pour His Spirit of wisdom, counsel, and might upon us, and draw multitudes to the hope of the gospel and everlasting glory by granting faith and repentance unto life (Acts 3:19-21).
3. That He might preserve and promote the unity of the church around the truth of the gospel so that the church might be a unified witness to the world being known by her love (John 17:17-23, 1 Cor. 1:10, Eph. 4:1-6).

**Humbly and Prayerfully Offered** for the glory of Jesus Christ over all men and nations, the maintenance of His exclusive authority in the church, and in solemn recognition that Satan and those led captive by him are doing all in their power to diminish His honor in the world (Ps. 2:2-3). The enemies of Christ continue to make war against His gospel, infringe upon His worship, persecute His people, and therefore erect again the old Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-7). Against this monument of human pride and rebellion, God has forever declared His warfare (Rev. 19:15). We bless His name that He has repeatedly delivered His people, and humbly encourage all brothers and sisters in Christ that we are called again in our times to oppose the kingdom of darkness with the sword of the Spirit, in defense of our Savior's church and kingdom (Eph. 6:11-13). This we must do even with our lives, should He call and bless us to suffer shame for His name or seal His truth with our blood (Acts 5:41), being strengthened by His promise, "be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10).

May the Lord bless your deliberations of this matter and give clarity and light.

The consistory of the Chilliwack Free Reformed Church