

“CHRISTIAN LIBERTY”

COLOSSIANS 2:16-17

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

INTRODUCTION

“Therefore” connects these verses with what precedes—esp. vv. 14-15.

We must not allow our Christian liberty to be compromised by those who would put us under a “yoke of bondage.”

There are many “judges” when it comes to issues of eating and drinking, and in regard to festivals, and Sabbath days.

It is amazing how believers allow their freedoms bought for them by Christ to be compromised because they have not understood or adhered to the clear teachings of the apostles—especially to that of Paul in this passage.

Let me give you an example written by 18 year old Keith Gephart for Composition class at Transylvania Bible College in Freeport Pennsylvania:

Now in asserting Christian liberty the believer must remember that even though not under **The Law** of Moses he is **under the law of Christ**. In fact, the Christian must hold to the principle of I Cor. 10:31:

“Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

Christian liberty has nothing to do with doing what I want; it has everything to do with doing what God wants as He enlightens and guides our conscience through the Word of God.

The key is, we must not allow any **man** apart from the authority of God’s Word to act as our **judge** when it comes to such issues as Paul discusses here.

YOU ARE FREE FROM THE LAW, BUT YOU ARE CHRIST’S BONDSLAVE.

Christ through the Scriptures is your judge—not man, especially false teachers!

Colossae also had them, and Paul deals with them here.

*Evidently they were condoning a teaching that maintained that we must either **NOT DO** certain things or **DO** certain other things in order to be fully acceptable to God. The two areas are Asceticism—denying some things that God has not forbidden, and Ritualism—adding some things God has not required.*

- I. GOD IS YOUR JUDGE—NOT MAN
- II. DON’T FALL INTO BONDAGE TO MATTERS OF EATING AND DRINKING
 - A. Eating:
 1. Meat is wrong and bad; the believer must avoid. **Does man know better than God?**
 2. One must deny himself enjoyable food and fast intensively in order to draw closer to God.
 - B. Drinking:
 1. Avoid Coffee, tea, soft drinks—Mormons and others.
 2. What about Alcohol? Where does this fit into the picture here?
 - a. Forbidding as a ceremonial ritualistic abstinence due to some concern about corruption due to heathen contact would be the issue Paul condemns.
 - b. However, avoiding as an important means to avoid causing one’s brother to stumble is correct according to I Cor. 8, 10; Rom. 14.

- c. There are many reasons why it is wise and best to abstain from alcohol—however, we must stop short of an absolute prohibition based of some perceived verse or command in Scripture.

III. DON'T LET SOMEONE JUDGE YOU ON KEEPING RELIGIOUS RITUAL OBSERVANCES

- A. Holy day—festivals—**annual** celebrations.
1. Paul thinks mainly of Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, etc.
 2. Today the issues most believers face concern Christmas, Easter, etc. [See Rom. 14:4-8]
- B. New Moons—**monthly** celebrations.
- C. Sabbath.—**Weekly** celebrations.
1. Paul cannot mean anything other than the **7th Day Sabbath**.
 2. Although no one may command and stand in judgment of someone regarding the observance of The Lord's Day, The early church did initiate the practice of meeting on the First Day of the week and the change did not happen in the 4th century by the Catholic Church.

IV. SUCH THINGS ARE A MERE SHADOW/SKETCH

- A. The shadow is thrown backward from the reality in NT fulfillment to OT typology.
- B. The Fulfillment is much fuller and complete than the sketch.
- C. The shadow has some value in that it guarantees “the imminent arrival of the visitor” and also gives a somewhat “dim outline, describing him.”

V. THE SUBSTANCE/BODY BELONGS TO CHRIST

- A. His Person and Work have provided all the real substance.
- B. Now, the fact that Paul places value on the shadows in their proper place gives support to the view that he primarily thinks here of OT ritual and ceremonies and not pagan ones. The shadow is valuable and corresponds with the substance—though only an adumbration and a miniature.
- C. This verse does not teach that the Church is the body of Christ that fulfills the types. An allusion to the church is possible but not clearly established. To introduce the church at this point is wholly arbitrary. It is spoken of in v. 19 in a different context.

CONCLUSION

When it comes to such legal and ritual elements as put away by Paul in this text, Eadie notes that Christianity “is too free and exuberant to be trained down to ‘times and seasons’.... Its feast is daily, for every day is holy; its moon never wanes, and its serene tranquility is an unbroken Sabbath” (p. 177).

Yet, Moule cautions that “in past generations this verse might...have been gently shown to Sabbatarians. Now **they are harder to find**. It is not that we have learnt its lesson, but that **we care less about worship**” (p. 40).

Moreover, we must remember that the liberty promoted by Paul in a passage like this “is the very opposite of license and has nothing in the world akin to the **miserable individualism** whose highest ambition is to do just what it likes. The whole aim of St. Paul is for the fullest, deepest, and most watchful holiness” (Ibid, 171).

Paul desires his readers to submit fully to their Lord and Master Christ.

YOU ARE FREE FROM THE LAW, BUT YOU ARE CHRIST'S BONDSLAVE.