

Christian Liberty – (and particularly, drinking and smoking and French fries)

Introduction – We are considered, among the modern evangelical world, as a bit ‘quirky’ in our beliefs and practices. The doctrines of grace are not well received in these days. Neither is our distancing from the ‘temperance movements’ of the 19th century which still play a strong role in certain fundamentalists movements. This could be misunderstood as simply caving in to the church’s general increased tolerance to all kinds of sins. We do not want to be unprincipled in our beliefs or practices. What does the Word teach us about our liberty in Christ? What is the nature of Christian liberty, and where are its boundaries?

Replacing Christ (Col 2:6-23) – Jesus Christ is sufficient for our salvation and our sanctification. His Word, and not the words of men, is sufficient for directing us as to how we are to live.

Walking in Faith (vv 6-7) – Jesus Christ, by faith, is our access to God, to holiness, to sanctification, and to our worship. We are to abound in this teaching with great thanksgiving. It is our liberty.

Captivity from Christ (vv8-10) – Some would tempt to plunder this treasure by imposing steps or intermediaries other than Christ Himself as ways to continue our spiritual journey. But our fullness, our completeness is all in Christ.

The Work of God, Not Works of Men (vv11-14) – The works of our flesh have been put away with a work of God made without hands. The credit of our righteousness is completely the work of God in Christ to us.

Disarmed Enemies (v15) – In principle, the death blow was dealt to the prince of this age and all of his principalities at the cross.

Fleshly Pursuits of Spirituality (vv16-19) – Misapplying the Jewish calendar of feasts and sacrifices won’t bring you closer to the Lord, nor will other mystical pursuits including false humility, which would be denying yourself of lawful pleasures.

Fleshly Pursuits of Purity (vv20-23) – You do not become more pure by keeping substances out of your body. Jesus made this clear (Matt 15:17-20) and lived this way, even when it hampered his reputation (Matt 11:19) because “...wisdom is justified by her children”.

Liberty From (Gal 5:1) – In God’s providence, there were more burdensome regulations in serving God in the times under the Old Testament. We no longer have to bear with these shadows, for they have been fulfilled in Christ. In fact, to do so now denies the reality of Christ’s perfect purification of His people. We are also free from the laws of men and we must not add to the gospel (Gal 1:6-8).

Contemporary Applications – We do not follow any form of dietary sanctification laws – crabs and pork are completely acceptable. In addition, drinking, smoking, dancing, and fatty foods are not sins because the scripture never calls them unlawful.

Liberty To (Gal 5:13) – It is important that we also learn the purpose of our liberty. It is not to provide an opportunity for the flesh, but to serve one another. In Rom 6:18-23 we find that the liberty we have can also be described as ‘slavery to righteousness’. And so true liberty results in bearing fruit to holiness. Everything we do is to be done unto the Lord, with thankfulness to Him and with the intent to serve Him in it. Liberty is not granted so that we can offer some libation up to the altar of ‘self’.

Contemporary Applications – Having a glass of wine or beer (or even strong drink) is lawful and good. Drunkenness is a heinous sin. Enjoying a good cigar or a pipe can be a blessing. Addiction to nicotine is foolishness and a curse (1 Cor 6:12). Enjoying the ‘fat things’ is welcomed. Gluttony is condemned.

Learning How to Apply This – We must learn to stop listening to the foolishness of carnal man’s traditions. We must not fall into the trap of slavery to man’s desires. But this includes our own personal desires. We must learn wisdom.

Pursuit of Holiness – Our liberty is given to us to pursue holiness, as defined by scripture. It may be lawful to smoke a pipe to the glory of God, but is this consistent with the rest of your life? Does your life reverberate with the pursuit of God or the pursuit of your own pleasures?

Love for One Another – Our liberty was given to us to serve one another. Again, the opportunity to enjoy the things of the earth are not given to simply serve ‘self’. Foolish men are warned not to use their ‘...liberty for a cloak of maliciousness’ (1 Pet 2:16).

No Apologies for Wine – We are convinced that fermented wine was the drink of choice for Jesus as He instituted the Lord’s Supper. And to this end, we would exhort all of the families to turn to using wine in communion. Because this is so opposed to the ways many of you may have grown up, we are freely offering both wine and juice at the present. But we are praying for unity in our practice here one day.

Wisdom to Know – Heb 5:14 teaches us that solid food (greater wisdom) comes to those who practice well what they know. We must learn the wisdom of when to abstain and when to partake – both can be done to the glory of God.

Growing our Children Up in Wisdom – 2 Pet 2:19 warns us of a false liberty that often sucks young men and women into sin. Boys and girls, you would do well to always submit to your parents in these things. Too often, the cries for freedom

from young men do not come because they want so desperately to be more like Christ (Luke 1:74-75), but rather, so they can look 'cool'.

Conclusion - Feasting, thanksgiving, hospitality, toasting, resting, and wine. These should be some of the words that describe the life of those celebrating another Lord's Day. We have been set free. Let us use such freedom to enjoy, proclaim, and live the gospel of holiness and joy to which we were called.

Dave Hatcher - October

13, 2002