

Christian Liberty, Part 11

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Now I would ask you to follow with me as I read two portions of the Word of God that we will come to in the course of the exposition this morning. The first is found in Colossians chapter 2. And I shall read verses 16 through 23.

"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast, or of a new moon, or of a Sabbath day, which are a shadow of the things to come, but the body is Christ's. Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels dwelling in the things which he has seen vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast the head from whom all the body being supplied and knit together through joints and bands increases with the increase of God. If you died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to ordinances, handle not, nor taste, nor touch, all of which things are to perish with the using, after the precepts and doctrines of men, which things, indeed, have a show of wisdom in will-worship, in humility and severity to the body, but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh."

And then back to Galatians chapter 5. And I should begin reading at verse 16 to the end of the chapter.

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. For these are contrary the one to the other, that you may not do the things that you would. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wrath, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revelings, and such like, of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof. If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk. Let us not become vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another."

Well, let us again seek God's face in prayer and ask the help of the Holy Spirit for both the preacher and all who sit before the Word this morning.

Our Father, we have sought You this morning for many things, and yet we believe we have not asked beyond the limits of that which You desire to give us as Your people. So we come again to ask of You that You would give us in this part of our worship service that which we most desperately need, even the presence of the Holy Spirit,

the spirit of anointing and unction upon Your servant as he preaches, the spirit of illumination and understanding upon those who sit before the Word. Lord, come to us in our respective areas of need, and meet with us, we plead, for the good of our souls, and for the honor of Your name we ask it. Amen.

The year is 1536 A.D. The place is Basel in Switzerland. An aged scholar named Erasmus dies in that year. A young scholar, age twenty-seven, produces what he calls his little book. Its title was The Institutes of the Christian Religion. The name of that young 27-year-old scholar was Jean Calvin. And the institutes that were first produced in that form, which he called his little book in 1536, went through a number of editions and amplifications throughout the life of Calvin until he presented to the Christian world in 1557 (I believe it was, or 1559. It was thirteen years later. You do the arithmetic) his final edition, which has become the backbone of evangelical and Reformed theological thought ever since. And in the latter part of that little book by John Calvin, he has a section entitled "Christian Freedom". And this is what Calvin, the 27-year-old scholar, seeking to set before the Christian world the essence of biblical Christianity in contrast to all of the aberrations and the errors of Rome, wrote with respect to Christian freedom, or what I am calling in this series of studies the doctrine of Christian liberty, and I quote,

"We must now discuss Christian freedom. No summary of gospel teaching ought to omit an explanation of this topic. It is a matter of prime necessity, and without a knowledge of it, consciences dare undertake almost nothing without faltering, often hesitate in drawback, constantly waver and are afraid. But we have put off a fuller discussion of it to this place, having lightly touched upon it above. For as soon as Christian freedom is mentioned, either passions boil or wild tumults rise, unless these wanton spirits, who otherwise most wickedly corrupt the best things, are opposed in time. Partly on the pretext of this freedom, men shake off all obedience toward God and break into unbridled license. Partly they disdain it, thinking such freedom cancels all moderation, order, and choice of things. What are we, boxed in by such perplexities, to do here? Shall we say good-bye to Christian freedom, thus cutting off occasion for such dangers? But as we have said, unless this freedom be grasped, neither Christ nor gospel truth is rightly known. Rather, we must take care that so necessary a part of doctrine not be suppressed, yet at the same time that those absurd objections which commonly arise from it be met.

Do you hear anything familiar? Calvin is saying that we do not appreciate the gospel, nor can we live in the light of the gospel unless we understand our freedom in Christ. Yet he was conscious that to preach it was to leave himself vulnerable to dangers on the left hand and the right. There were those who would take that doctrine and run off into license, using their liberty as an occasion to the flesh. And others, so fearful that that would happen, would suppress the doctrine of Christian liberty and not allow the people of God to come into their blood-bought liberty in Christ. So there's no new thing under the sun.

And with that shared conviction that if we're to maintain the reality of what is purchased for us in Christ, we must have a biblical grasp upon the doctrine, or I should say an accurate grasp upon the biblical doctrine of our liberty in Christ. And we must never start with those things that we often associate with the doctrine of Christian liberty, what I shall eat, what I shall not eat, what I shall drink, not drink, what my entertainment should be, my choices of music, etc., etc. Rather, I have asserted We must start with the foundational issues of the reality and nature of our bondage and slavery in Adam, and the reality and nature of our freedom and liberty as secured for us in Christ.

And then we must secondly have an understanding of the goal of our liberty in Christ, a goal which is beautifully and succinctly summarized in the language of the prophecy of Zechariah, who said in Luke chapter 1, 74 and 75, "God delivers us from the hand of our enemies to this end, that we should render worshipful service to Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, before His face all of our days."

But then I proceeded in the third place to assert that we must recognize that this liberty is indeed, as Calvin recognized, vulnerable to enemies. On the one hand, I have used the analogy of two lawyers, Mr. Libertine or License, seeking to persuade us that our liberty in Christ can be an excuse for carelessness about a life of meticulous holiness, using liberty in the language of Galatians 5:13 as a staging area for the flesh, or in the language of 1 Peter 2:16 as a cover-up for wickedness. And so I sought to expound those two texts that ought to stand at the corners of this congregation, constantly reminding us that our liberty in Christ is never to be a staging area for indulgence of the flesh, never to be made a cover-up for wickedness.

However, there is another lawyer resident in our hearts, seeking to plead his case, and that is Mr. Legalism. And he would seek to keep us from the enjoyment of our liberty in Christ. Mr. Legalism would seek to denigrate the grace of God in Christ and seek to constrict our liberty by his persuasiveness within our own hearts.

And last Lord's Day, I sought to demonstrate from the Scriptures that Mr. Legalism would impinge upon that liberty that is purchased for us by Christ with respect to the issue of the guilt of our sin. When we think of the issue of how sin produces guilt and how that guilt can be resolved, the answer of the Bible to the question, how can my guilt before God be resolved? coming into the Christian faith and standing in the Christian faith. The answer of Scripture is clear. Grace alone, Christ alone, faith alone. And when we embrace Christ, we are brought into that ground of our liberty from the condemning power of the law: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." And yet we must come to grips with the fact that the legalistic tendency of our hearts would continually move us away from that liberty. And therefore Paul had to write the text that I expounded last week, Galatians chapter 5 and verse 1: "For freedom did Christ set us free. Stand fast therefore and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage."

However, the persuasiveness of Mr. Legalism is not only exercised with regard to this matter of the guilt of our sin, but he seeks to persuade us to give up our liberty when it comes to the issue of the ongoing struggle with our sin. In other words, he seeks to speak his message not only in conjunction with justification, but with respect to sanctification. And he is constantly attempting to take us off the ground of our liberty, which is to be maintained not only in the face of the guilt of our sins, but it's to be maintained in the face of the ongoing reality of our indwelling sin and the struggle with that sin and the desire to pursue a life of holiness. He is constantly seeking to destroy our liberty in Christ.

And as I attempt to lay out how he does this and how we are to meet his persuasiveness with biblical thought and biblical action, I want, first of all, to underscore with you two basic principles, and then my second heading is two constant problems. So we start with two basic principles, then we move to two constant problems. Here are the two basic principles. Number one: every true child of God is committed to the diligent pursuit of a life of universal holiness. We saw that in our exposition of Luke chapter 1. We are delivered from our enemies in the liberating power of Christ, to what end? That we might render worshipful service to the God who has delivered us in Christ, without legal fears, in holiness and righteousness before his face all the days of our lives. Or 1 Peter 1:15 and 16: "But like as He who has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of living, because it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy." Be holy in all manner of living. That's what we mean by universal holiness, or Romans 6:22: "Having been made free from sin [that is, the dominion of sin. Remember, one of the aspects of our real liberty and freedom is Christ. We are free from slavery to sin], and become slaves to God, you are having your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life. Paul is not giving an admonition, a command. He's stating a fact.

If I am free in Christ from slavery to sin, the evidence is I'm having fruit unto holiness on my way to the enjoyment of everlasting life. Or 1 John chapter 3: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God. And it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as he is." And verse 4: "Everyone that hath this hope in him goes on purifying himself, even as He is pure." Or, in terms of my preaching last Sunday night, "Every single one who's come through the narrow gate is on the compressed way that leads unto life." So that's principle number one. Every true child of God is committed to the diligent pursuit of a life of universal holiness. Not as the ground of his acceptance. No! No! Christ is the ground of his acceptance. He knows he has standing before God by grace alone, in Christ alone, by faith alone. The degree of diligence in that pursuit varies. Progress in that pursuit is not totally even. It is uneven. All of those things the Bible teaches and every true believer knows, but mark it down. It's sitting here this morning. Age 4, age 8, age 12, age 20, age 90. If you are not committed to a life of universal holiness, you don't have a shred of ground from the Bible to call yourself a Christian. Period. End of discussion. Every true child of God is committed to the diligent pursuit of a life of universal holiness. That's principle number one.

Second principle is this: the all-sufficient provisions to secure success in that pursuit are the Word of Christ and the Spirit of Christ. Now let me explain and expand those two concepts. The Word of Christ is the all-sufficient standard to define and describe the universal holiness which we are pursuing. Alright, you got it? Every true Christian committed to universal holiness. Who defines what constitutes that holiness? The Word of Christ does. Remember Jesus' words in the Great Commission, Matthew 28, 20, back up to verse 19? "All authority has been given unto Me in heaven and earth, go ye therefore, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name [singular name] of that God Who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe whatsoever all things whatsoever I have commanded you." "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded." It is the Word of Christ that defines and describes what a life of universal holiness looks like. Or again, Jesus said in John 14, 21, "He that has My commandments and keeps them He it is that loves Me, and he that loves Me [in the context, 'and manifests it by obedience to My word'] I will love him and will manifest Myself to him." Or John 10.27: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they are following Me." So that it is the Word of Christ that is the all-sufficient definer of what universal holiness should look like.

Now, not just the Word of Christ in terms of a red-letter edition of the Bible, where the actual words of Christ are in red, but remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14 and verse 37? He was giving all kinds of practical details about how to manage those various gifts in their public exercise in the church at Corinth, and he says this very interesting thing, "If any man thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things that I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord." If some of you are tempted to say, "Ah, that's just Paul's idea of how we should run the show around here, but we're having a grand time with everybody prophesying and everybody speaking in tongues, and we want to maintain our liberty." Paul says, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. You say you're spiritual? You say you're a prophet? You're in touch with God in the power of the Spirit? Recognize my words to you are the very commandments of God." Apostolic writings are the word of Jesus. They are the words of God. So then, when I lay before you this fundamental concept that the all-sufficient provision to secure success in the pursuit of universal holiness are the Word of Christ and the Spirit of Christ, the Word of Christ is indeed the all-sufficient standard to define and to describe what universal holiness looks like. What does it mean to be holy in the way I dress? What does it mean to be holy in the way I think about my job? What does it mean to be holy in the way I relate to my wife, to my husband, to my children, to my neighbors? It's the Word of Christ that defines that holiness.

And then, secondly, the Spirit of Christ is the all-sufficient power to enable us to have success in our pursuit of universal holiness. Follow where we're going. Are you keeping it all together? We've seen this basic principle: every true child of God is committed to a life of universal holiness. The all-sufficient standard for that holiness is the Word of Christ. Now I'm saying, add to that the all-sufficient power to enable us to

have success in the pursuit of that universal holiness, as defined by the Word of Christ, is the very Spirit of Christ.

Now in pursuit of that universal holiness, there will be putting to death certain patterns that are sinful. How do we do it? Romans 8:13: "If you by the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live." You are engaged; you are involved, but you are not engaged and involved on your own steam. "If you by the Spirit do put to death the deeds of the body." Pursuing universal holiness is not only putting certain sins to death, but being more and more like Jesus. The old Puritans called holiness and sanctification having two tracks: mortification of sin and conformation to Christ. 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into that image from one stage of glory to another, even by the Lord the Spirit." The Spirit is the all-sufficient power to enable us to make progress in universal holiness. Or the language of Paul in Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Christ's word to Paul in the midst of his struggling with his thorn in the flesh. 2 Corinthians 12:9: "My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness." Or the passage I read from Galatians this morning. Very clear statement in verse 16 of Galatians 5: "Walk by the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

Is universal holiness a life in which I do not indulge my flesh? I do not use my liberty as a staging area for my flesh? How do I do that? I walk by the Spirit. The Spirit of Christ is the enabling power. Now, you got those things in your head. You're holding them together, the two basic principles. Every true child of God is committed to the diligent pursuit of a life of universal holiness, and the all-sufficient provision to secure success in that pursuit is the Word of Christ as the standard, and the Spirit of Christ as the power. Have you got it? I don't know how to make it any simpler. I said, Lord, help me. How do I structure it? How do I lay it out? Unless I went to a PowerPoint presentation, and I ain't about to do that in my preaching.

Now then, we've got two constant problems, and they're problems arising from that lawyer called Mr. Legalism. He doesn't like those principles, and he's going to act against them. Part of the flesh lusting against the Spirit (Galatians 5:17) is Mr. Legalism presenting his case, a case that would undermine those two realities of our all-sufficient provision to make progress in holiness. So we're now going to look at two constant problems, problems that come from Mr. Legalism presenting his case when we would pursue diligently a life of universal holiness. Convinced sitting here this morning, yes, the Word of Christ alone is sufficient to define what that holiness is, and the Spirit of Christ alone is sufficient to give power to enable me to pursue it, what's the problem?

Problem number one is Mr. Legalism's attempt to rob us of our liberty in Christ by convincing us we must add to the Word of Christ in order to have an adequate standard for universal holiness. That's problem number one. And I want you to look with me at two clear examples of this happening in the New Testament. There are

more than two, but I want you to look at two. The first is in the case of the Pharisees, and the second is in the case of the false teachers plaguing the church at Colossae.

First of all, the scribes and the Pharisees--who were they? They were the separated ones, the holy ones. And you know what they did? They looked at God's law. They looked at the Ten Commandments. And they said, "You know, they're not an adequate revelation of a moral standard of perfection. And we've got to put hedges around each one of those commandments to make sure that God's people know what it means, 'You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. You shall not steal...'" And so they came up with what they called their hedges around the law. And they literally came up with hundreds of their laws which were intended to prop up and make more adequate God's law. You see, they didn't come up with all of their nitpicky laws around God's law in order to do anything other than to uphold God's law, to make it easier for people to know. What does it mean, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. In it you shall do no work, neither you nor your servants...?" "Well", they said, "we've got to help people to know. So work means this, this, this, and this. Work means traveling, so forth." And they came up with all of these dozens and hundreds of laws.

Now what happened with those laws that they made to be a hedge and a prop to God's law? What happened? Well, with the passing of time, their rules began to share an equal authority with God's law. Look at Mark chapter 2. In the passing of time, their man-made laws began to share an equal authority with God's law, so that if you broke one of their laws, they assumed you were breaking God's law. Look at Mark chapter 2, and we start reading at verse 23. "And it came to pass that He [Jesus] was going on the Sabbath day through the grain fields, and His disciples began as they went to pluck the ears. Now there weren't big ears of corn. There were just little ears of grain.

I can remember at the Midwestern Conference years ago, there were these beautiful grain fields, and in July, some of them became ripe, and I used to go out jogging on the back roads, and I said, "I want to see what that's like." I just plucked off a couple little heads of grain, rubbed them in my hands, and all the husks fell off, and then I put the raw wheat grains in my mouth, and I felt very biblical. It wasn't the Sabbath day, but I felt at least I understand what they were doing.

Well, that's what they were doing. They cut off a few of the gleanings, which was perfectly proper. You were not to take down every single last stalk in your field. You were to leave some gleanings for the stranger and the foreigner, etc. And so here they were, rubbing these things between their hands. And the Pharisees heard! And they said unto Him, "Behold! Why do they do on the Sabbath day that which is not lawful?"

See what they did? They elevated their rules about what the fourth commandment meant to the place of equal authority with the commandment itself. "They are doing

what is unlawful. They are breaking the law of God." Wait a minute. No, they weren't. They were breaking one of your silly hedges around the law. You see that? So after time, their rules that were meant to help God's rules had equal authority, and then, with the passing of more time, you know what happened? Their rules superseded God's rules in authority. Turn to Matthew 15. From sharing equal authority, It had a superseding authority. Verse 1 of Matthew 15:

"There came to Jesus from Jerusalem Pharisees and scribes saying, Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders [our hedges around the law], for they don't wash their hands when they eat bread. And he answered and said unto them, Why do you transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God said, Honor your father and your mother, and he that speaks evil of father or mother, let him die the death. But you say, Whoever shall say to his father or mother, That wherewith you mightest be men profited by me as given to God, he shall not honor his father. You have made void the word of God because of your tradition."

See what they did? They went from making their hedges around the law equal in authority to God's law to having their hedges supersede and cancel the authority of God's law. Now you say, what in the world does that have to do with the doctrine of Christian liberty and with me? What's that have to do with legalism? Hold on and you'll see. Just hold on. I want us to go to the Colossians passage and then I'll come to application into the current set situation.

Second example of this work of Mr. Legalism, persuading people that the Word of Christ is not an adequate standard for what the life of holiness looks like. The false teachers at Colossae. Now, few scholars agree on exactly who these false teachers were. Unlike the Judaizers that are relatively easy to identify, the false teachers that were plaguing the church at Colossae, they're not so easy to identify. They're sort of a mixture of different pagan and some Judaizing tendencies, etc. But this much is clear, that they believe the Word of Christ was not a sufficient standard for a life of holiness. For we read in chapter 2 in verse 16,

"Let no man therefore judge you in meat or drink or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a Sabbath day [not referring necessarily to the weekly Sabbath, but to a special Sabbath, a special day of celebration] which are a shadow of the things to come, but the body is of Christ. Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels [there is another strand], dwelling on things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, not holding fast the head... If you died with Christ, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourself to ordinances, handle not, nor taste, nor touch (all which things are to perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men?."

You see what had happened? They had come to embrace the Pauline gospel that in Jesus Christ, the One Who fulfilled all of the types and shadows of Old Testament ceremonies. In Christ, they are fulfilled. When you have embraced Christ, you have the substance. Those are all shadows. You no longer need to keep those days, either

as part of proof of your covenant obedience, certainly not to have acceptance with God, and he's saying not in order to have a successful Christian life.

These false teachers were saying, if you want fullness [that's one of the great themes of Colossians], then you've got to now keep these days and keep these ceremonies. And furthermore, if you're really going to live a life of holiness, you must subject yourself to our rules, don't touch this, don't taste that, don't handle this. And Paul is saying these are commandments of men. These are a reversal to types and shadows. These have nothing to do with real progress in holiness. He goes on to say in verse 23, "These things have a show of wisdom in will-worship, humility, severity to the body. They are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh." They don't help you one iota of a step in the direction of progress in real holiness. So with the Pharisees and with the false teachers at Colossae, what was the problem? They taught that the Word of Christ was not sufficient to define a life of holiness. You needed man-made rules. You needed man-made regulations. And without these, your liberty in Christ would lead you into sin. And therefore, we're going to protect the doctrine of our liberty by our man-made rules. And dear people of God, that didn't die with the Pharisees and with the false teachers at Colossae.

We come back to the reality and nature of our freedom and liberty in Christ. He's made us free from the rules and regulations of men, where men would say, this constitutes a life of holiness and that constitutes a life of holiness. We say, what does the Word of God say?

Now let me get down to current application. Ephesians 5 and verse 18 is very clear. What does it say? It says, "Do not be drunk with wine wherein is riot." God's Word forbids drunkenness, imbibing sufficient amounts of alcoholic beverages to in any way impair the full rational, responsible exercise of mental and physical faculties. Drunkenness is never warranted. It is a sin in any setting whatsoever. That's what God forbids. Would you live a life of universal holiness? Don't ever get drunk. That's plain. Now, along come modern Pharisees and modern Colossian teachers who say,

"Ah, but now listen. If you're going to be certain that you never get drunk, then let's make a rule that you never, under any circumstances, for whatever reason, imbibe any form of alcoholic beverage. Right? You don't get drunk drinking Welch's grape juice. You may drink too much of that to burp and puke, but you won't get drunk. So if we're really going to be safe that no one will ever get drunk with wine, let's make a rule that no Christian in our church is permitted to drink wine under any circumstances, in any amount."

What are we doing?

"We're going to put a hedge around God's law. Ephesians 5:18: 'Be not drunk with wine.' That's God's law. But it needs a hedge. I mean, if we don't put a hedge around it, can we say that Christians are free to imbibe alcoholic beverages in moderation to the glory of God, with the grace of God keeping them from drunkenness? God's law is in danger of toppling. We've got to prop it up. Prop it up. So we're going to prop it

up with a rule of teetotaling. If you're going to be a member of this church, we're never going to have anyone drunk. [I have people go to sleep on me when I'm preaching, like one young man is right now. I'm not looking in his direction. I hope this got him awake.] We've got to prop it up, and we're going to make a rule to be a teetotaler."

What are we doing? We're saying the Word of Christ is not sufficient to define a life of holiness.

Hollywood. 99.99% of what comes out of Hollywood is wicked, sinful, sordid, humanistic, atheistic. I could pull out a lot of words. You don't need to be a PhD to know that. Hollywood is the cutting edge of political liberalism, of moral relativism, of aggressive feminism, and all the other isms that are eating at the foundations of a nation. That's a fact. Whether you like it or not, it's a fact. Yes, even Disney's so-called innocent films, they are filled with New Age-ism. Lion King, Pocahontas, the whole shootin' match! It's anti-God to the core. Some more crass than others. Now, therefore, doesn't the Bible say, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world"? Now, the Bible says, my Bible says that.

"1 John 2.50: 'Love not the world.' Hollywood is of the world. Therefore, no Christian at any time, under any circumstances, should ever go to a moving picture theater, should under no circumstances watch a video produced in Hollywood. That's the safest way to make sure we love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. No movies. No alcohol. We've got to make a hedge around the law. If we say that a Christian should before God exercise discernment, and seek to ascertain whether he or she can watch a given film for this or that given purpose, with a good conscience so much at ease that should Jesus come while they're watching it, they could say, Lord Jesus, I welcome you while I'm watching this. Boy, if you do that, I mean, people are going to abuse that, and they're going to..."

What are you doing? "Gotta put a hedge around the law."

I came out of a background where the Bible taught modesty. The first thing God says about women when it comes to public worship in 1 Timothy 2 is "likewise, your women dress modestly". That's what it says. That's God's law. Women are to have a conscience about modesty at all times, but particularly in the public gathering of God's people. Therefore, if you don't define hemlines, necklines, amount of paint, you're going to have some women who are going to push it to the limits. Therefore, you see what happens? Then we have dress codes.

You may laugh. But my eyes saw in a letter or two a pastor writing about a former member of this church who wanted to start a church. Not because they had any different doctrinal standard from the church they were going to leave to start it, but they wanted to have a wear the hat, down over the knee--they had a whole dress code. And that was going to be the basis on which they constituted the church. What'd they do? Putting hedges around the law. Hedges around the law.

If I've given enough examples, you get an idea of what I'm talking about. And what is that doing? That is saying the Word of Christ is not adequate to define a life of holiness. And when you bind your conscience to any man-made rules like that, you are giving up your liberty in Jesus Christ. Listen to our confession of faith. It's eloquent on this.

"God alone is Lord of the conscience, left it free from doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to the Word or not contained in it. So to believe such doctrines or obey such commands out of conscience is to betray true liberty of conscience. And the requiring of an implicit faith and absolute and blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also."

Now this is altogether different, and we're going to come to this when we come to the principles to guide us in things where God has not said yes or no. If a man says, "Look, the evidence that's coming in from the medical community is quite compelling, that there may well be a genetic predisposition to alcoholism, to abuse alcohol. I have an uncle who's a drunk. He had a father who was a drunk. And in my family history, there seems to be a pattern of drunkenness. Given that fact, it may well be that I am predisposed to become quickly addicted to alcohol. And therefore, since my alcohol is not a necessity out of personal choice, though I am free in Christ to imbibe, I choose not to imbibe, lest I put myself in a place of unnecessary danger. That's not legalism. That's true Christian liberty. In my conscience, I know I am free. And I prove my freedom by abstaining. But I am abstaining voluntarily from that which I am free in Christ to partake of. And because I am, I am not going to make my abstaining a rule for anyone else.

The same way, you may know from the way you are put together, you are a very visual person. Visual images just seem to burn themselves into your brain like a laser burns a CD. And you say, "For me, just one scene of a voluptuous woman and her bosom half-hanging out of her dress will haunt me for weeks. Therefore, for me, no TV, no videos, no movies. Though I am free in Christ, I prove my freedom for the benefit of my soul, to be a total abstainer from anything that comes out of Hollywood."

You see the difference? My abstinence is not a hedge around the law. It's an expression of a heart that recognizes part of the Word of Christ is "If your eye offend you, gouge it out, cast it from you. If your hand offend you, cut it off and cast it from you." "Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." That's the Word of Christ in 1 Peter 2:11. And for me, my fleshly lusts will be different from yours and yours from mine. Each of us must be committed in the pursuit of universal holiness to abstain from any fleshly lust that wars against the soul. But we don't make hedges around the law and make them rules for the people of God and rules for one another, because we believe that in the pursuit of holiness an all sufficient provision has been made for us in the Word of Christ. You got me? You're following me? Is it getting inside here?

It's the most liberating thing in all the world. Then you see, if I know someone's a Pharisee and they got their rules, and they want to impose their rule on me, and I can break their rule with a good conscience. I may sip my wine. Jesus did that. He had no scruples about offending Pharisees. But he says, you and I must be prepared to relinquish any liberty if we know it will unnecessarily offend, cause grief, or stumbling to a true child of God. You see, this is no simple issue. And when we get into it, it's almost impossible not to anticipate some of it.

But now, very quickly, let's come to the second dimension. Mr. Legalist is not only trying to persuade us to give up the sufficiency of the Word of Christ as the standard for universal holiness, but he's constantly seeking to take us away from believing that the Spirit of Christ is the sufficient power to make progress in the life of universal holiness. And if you go back to this Colossian passage, you will see that in addition to their man-made rules that are a slap at the sufficiency of the Word of Christ as a standard, there is also a slap at the sufficiency of the power of Christ as the enabling dynamic for a life of holiness. Notice in verse 19, when He says, "You're going back to these things that are shadows...let no man rob you." Now look at verse 19: "Not holding fast the head from whom all the body being supplied and knit together through joints and bands increases with the increase of God." You've given up holding Christ in the death grip as the source of your life. He's the head. All the life flows out of Him and down from Him and through the body, it nourishes and it increases. Then he says,

"If you died with Christ, you have given up the reality of one of the aspects of your union with Christ. In union with Christ, you died to the rudiments of the world. Why then are you subjecting yourself as though you were yet alive to men's rules and regulations? When you embraced Christ, in union with Christ, you died with Christ. And part of that to which you died was rules and regulations of men."

Then he goes on in verse 1 of chapter 3: "If then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things upon earth, for you died and your life is hid with Christ in God." Now notice, when Christ, who is our life, Christ is our life, not men's rules and regulations, which somehow these people tell you will give you a power and a grace and a strength to come to new levels of attainment in holiness. No. All of your grace and all of your strength is in Christ. And don't allow these legalists to take you away from Him.

Similarly, in Galatians chapter 5, Paul says in verse 16, "Walk by the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." What do I need to make progress in dealing with my remaining sin and the lust of my flesh? What do I need? A bunch of rules and regulations of man? No! I need to walk by the Spirit. I need to believe that the Spirit of Christ is sufficient to help me make progress in the life of universal holiness. And the very essence of legalism, as it is with justification, is to say, "Christ, yes, but Christ plus." And the whole emphasis of the book of Colossians is, no, fullness is not in Christ plus angels as your mediators, Christ plus rules and regulations as your

standard, Christ plus asceticism as your enabling grace and power. He says, "No, fullness is in Christ."

And so, my dear brothers and sisters in this place, as we have been wrestling with this doctrine and as I have come to it, entitled this series, "A Fresh Look at the Doctrine of Christian Liberty", I think I see more clearly than I have ever seen before that this naughty legal firm, these two naughty legal firms, are there in my heart, constantly pleading their case, that I should go beyond the Word of Christ as the standard for holiness and beyond the power and grace of Christ as the enabling strength to make progress in holiness. Calvin--and I'll whet your appetite here again later on in this section on Christian freedom--as he's seeking to help people to see why they've got to come to grips with this at the level of their sanctification in Christian life, he writes,

"The third part of Christian freedom is that we are bound before God by no religious obligation to outward things of themselves, indifferent. [That is, God has neither commanded nor forbidden them], but we are permitted sometimes to use them, sometimes to lead them, with indifference. And the knowledge of this freedom is necessary for us. For if it is lacking, our consciences will have no repose and there'll be no end to superstition."

Rarely will you find humor in Calvin, but here's some humor. Here it is:

"Today, we seem to many to be unreasonable because we stir up discussion over the unrestricted eating of meat, the use of holidays, and of vestments, and similar vain frivolities as it seems to them. But these matters are more important than is commonly believed. For when consciences have once ensnared themselves. [In other words, he says, once you go beyond the Word of Christ as the standard for holiness, and the power of Christ as the enabling dynamic for a holy life, once you go beyond that, he says, there's no stopping. Now here's where the humor comes in:] When consciences have once ensnared themselves, they enter a long and inextricable maze, not easy to get out of. If a man begins to doubt whether he may use linen for sheets, shirts, handkerchiefs, and napkins, he will afterward be uncertain also about hemp. And finally, doubt will even arise over toe. [And you know what toe is? That's the hemp before it's even been woven into thread. It's just in the bare strings as you've torn it from the plant.]

He says,

"If you begin to scruple, 'Well, the Bible commands me to live a frugal, disciplined self-denying life. Well, if that's so, then maybe I shouldn't use linen for sheets. And if I shouldn't use linen for sheets, maybe I shouldn't use it for a shirt. And if I shouldn't use it for a shirt, maybe I shouldn't use it for a napkin. And if I shouldn't use linen, maybe I shouldn't use hemp. And if I shouldn't use hemp, maybe I shouldn't even use...' [You see what he's saying? Once your conscience gets on that treadmill, where you're not determined your conscience shall be bound by the Word of God, not by the rules, not by the regulations, not by the traditions of men.] He will turn over

his mind whether he can sup without napkins or go without handkerchiefs. If any man thinks daintier food unlawful, in the end he'll not be at peace before God when he eats either black bread or common vittles. While it occurs to him he could sustain his body or even coarser foods. If he boggles at sweet wine, he will not with clear conscience drink even flat wine. And finally, he'll not even dare touch water if it's sweeter or cleaner than other water. To sum up, he'll come to the point of considering it wrong to step upon a straw across his path as the saying goes."

You see what he's saying? Once out of an earnest desire to live a life of universal holiness, you let any voice intrude and tell you what's involved in that holiness but the voice of Christ, and you are on a slippery slope into miserable bondage. And Christ did not save you for that bondage. For freedom did Christ set you free.

I'll never forget the day I was able with a good conscience. Now, we're going back many, many years. We're going back to early 60s or late 50s. Being brought up borderline poor through the depression years, through the war years, I never ate in a restaurant until I was 19 years old. And the first time someone took me out and bought me at that time, I think it was \$11.99, a New York strip steak, I mean, every slice and every bite, my conscience was screaming, "How is this consistent with living a life of self-denial and frugality?" It was horrible. I bloodied my conscience with every bite of that semi-bloody steak. Until I read in my Bible: "If you go into a house to eat, and a brother sets meat before you, ask no question for conscience sake." I said, "Lord, if this brother wants to show his love for me by this extravagant expense of his money, you'll hold him accountable if that's extravagant. You'll hold me accountable if I don't eat it with no trouble of conscience to your praise and to your glory."

It was liberating, folks. And that's why I feel this so deeply. If you've never been so earnest to please God right down to the kind of steak you eat, you'll think this ludicrous. But if you're in earnest to have a life of universal holiness that touches every facet of your life, you need what I'm preaching. You need it desperately. I need it. I need to keep preaching it to myself so that when we come to wrestle with things indifferent, things concerning which the Word of God is silent as to whether or not I shall or shall not, that I can know I stand on this twin plot of blood-bought liberty.

I stand before God not on the basis of what I do, but on the basis of what He did, in living that perfect life under the law and dying under the curse of the law. And I walk before my God not on the basis of man-made rules, but on the basis of my Bible. And in Jesus Christ there is strength walking in the Spirit, that I shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Dear people of God, is the doctrine of Christian liberty vulnerable to abuse? Yes. But the Word of Christ and the spirit of Christ are sufficient to keep us pleasing Christ in our exercise of our liberty. Never forget it. The only certain preservation for grace is grace, not law, not rules. Grace can preserve grace. And if grace doesn't preserve it, nothing else will. It'll just destroy it. See, the Pharisees thought, we've got to preserve

the grace of the law with our rules. They ended up destroying the law. The false teachers at Colossae ended up replacing Christ under the guise of adding to Christ. Dear children of God, dare to believe that grace can preserve grace.

You unconverted men and women, boys and girls, you probably thought this stuff is a bunch of nonsense. Why? Because you don't love Christ. Pleasing Christ is the farthest thing from your mind. But I pray that God will yet show you the depth of your sin and the depth of your need of the Savior, and by the Holy Spirit show you the loveliness of Christ. And then you'll say, "Ah, now I understand why those people want to please Christ in terms of what they eat and don't eat and where they go and don't go and what they watch and don't watch." Why? Because with all their hearts they've been set free from their enemies. They now want to render worshipful service unto Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before His face all the days of their life.

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