

LIBERTY OR LEGALISM

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 2:11-23

As long as there are churches and religious organizations, there will be individuals who will come along to tell us that our salvation experience needs “something more.” These individuals aren’t just talking about a close walk with God or a better prayer life; they’ve always got some new requirement, some extra do’s and don’ts. Should you and I not live up to their ideas, well then, according to them we’re just not saved.

But notice that Paul has previously stated in verse 10 that we “are complete in Him (Jesus Christ).” If you have Jesus, you have salvation! Now some might be mature and some immature; some babes in Christ and some well-seasoned veterans. But the fact remains that if someone is saved, there is no amount of works that can make one any more saved. In short, this was the problem Paul was facing at Colosse. There were those who wanted to add their “two-cents” to God’s salvation plan.

■ Oswald Chambers writes, “Always keep your life measured by the standards of Jesus. Bow your neck to His yoke alone, and to no other yoke whatever; and be careful to see that you never bind a yoke on others that is not placed by Jesus Christ. It takes God a long time to get us Out of the way of thinking that unless everyone sees as we do, they must be wrong. That is never God’s view. There is only one liberty, the liberty of Jesus at work in our conscience enabling us to do what is right.” (91-92)

Paul offers several *admonitions* to those who were being hounded by these false teachers.

I. DO NOT GIVE UP YOUR SECURITY IN CHRIST (vv. 11-15).

A. Christ has done for us what the law never could (v. 11).

The cross of Christ has cut away our old sinful nature.

B. Christ has shared with us the victory of His death and resurrection (vv. 12-13).

Notice the phrases “buried with Him,” “raised with Him,” and “alive together with Him.”

C. Christ has freed us from the indictment of our sin (v. 14).

Paul states that the “handwriting of requirements,” or the Mosaic Law, was “against us” and “contrary to us.” But the blessing is that it has been taken away. We are no longer indicted by its requirements.

On the cross, Jesus disarmed or literally “stripped” His enemies as a conquering soldier would strip his captive of all his weapons and armor. He exposed all the principalities and powers of Satan and the arrogance of man to open shame before the whole universe, like a great general dragging a captive army behind his chariot.

■ Curtis Vaughn writes, “To the casual observer the cross appears to be only an instrument of death, the symbol of Christ’s defeat; Paul sees it as Christ’s chariot of victory.” (Barker and Kohlenberger, 83)

II. DO NOT TRADE THE TRUE FAITH FOR THE ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS (vv. 16-17).

A. In Christ, we cannot be judged by another or literally “excluded” from fellowship because of something that has been taken away (v. 16).

B. Spirituality cannot be measured by uniformity (v. 17).

Blind uniformity produces legalism. And there are 3 things we must always remember about legalism:

- 1. Legalism is intrinsically joyless.
- 2. Legalism demands uniformity.
- 3. Legalism produces a surface faith.

(Hughes, 83)

III. DO NOT BE CHEATED BY FOLLOWING ANOTHER (vv. 18-19).

A. To follow the self-righteous is to be led into spiritual slavery (v. 18).

In this instance, there were individuals who had evidently exalted themselves in men's eyes by public displays of fasting and talk of praying to angels.

B. To follow the head or Christ is to be led into spiritual growth (v. 19).

Anyone who does not have a Christ-centered salvation has no salvation at all. The false teacher always cuts himself off from Christ either by ignoring Him or making himself equal to Christ.

IV. DON'T BE BOUND BY RELIGION (vv. 20-23).

Ask yourself two questions:

A. Why would a free man go back into slavery (vv. 20-21)?

Paul reasons with them, "Why do you subject yourselves to regulations?"

B. Why be concerned with things that cannot benefit our souls (vv. 22-23)?

These things mentioned only have the appearance of wisdom and humility, but in reality they have nothing to do with real devotion to God. Christianity cannot be imposed upon from the outside; it must come from within and affect the outward.

CONCLUSION

■ Richard Dunagin writes, “At their school carnival our kids won four free goldfish (lucky us!), so out I went Saturday morning to find an aquarium. The first few I priced ranged from forty to seventy dollars. Then I spotted it -- right in the aisle: a discarded tank, complete with gravel and filter -- for a mere five bucks. Sold! Of course, it was nasty dirty, but the savings made the two hours of cleanup a breeze. Those four new fish looked great in their new home, at least for the first day. But by Sunday one had died. Too bad, but three remained. Monday morning revealed a second casualty, and by Monday night a third goldfish had gone belly up. We called in an expert member of our church who has a thirty-gallon tank. It didn't take him long to discover the problem: I had washed the tank with soap, an absolute no-no. My uninformed efforts had destroyed the very lives I was trying to protect. Sometimes in our zeal to clean up our own lives or the lives of others, we unfortunately use ‘killer soaps’ -- condemnation, criticism, nagging, fits of temper.

We think we're doing right, but our harsh, self-righteous treatment is more than others can bear.” (Larson, 173)

Clearly Paul offers the previous *admonitions* to lead the impressionable Christians in the right direction and toward the enjoyment their newfound liberty in Christ.

References

Barker, Kenneth L. and John Kohlenberger III (Ed.). (1994). *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary. Volume 2: New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing.

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