

THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

“Judging Christian Liberty”

Colossians 2:16, 17

Introduction

1. Let’s understand the early church. It was promised by our Lord (Mt. 16) and then started at Pentecost (Acts 2). It was the “body of Christ” as opposed to the national Israel of the O.T.

2. Aspects of the church demonstrated an outward unity of purpose and practice, e.g. baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and assemblies.

3. Regretfully, there was an undercurrent of schism and factions. Paul referred to this (1 Cor. 1:10, 11). Chief among the warring parties were the Judaizers. They tried to take newly converted believers and turn them into Jewish proselytes. Being sincere believers, they nonetheless wanted to extend their national privileges. They opposed Paul’s “one body” truth (cf. Rom. 16; Eph. 3; Col. 1). To Paul, this was an attack on Christian liberty (Gal. 5:1).

4. Now, just how does Paul deal with this problem in writing to the Colossians? Study the four responses recorded in Scripture.

1. Response #1 -- CONCLUSION

This is clearly indicated by the particle “therefore.” It is not a mere conundrum to state when finding a “therefore” to ask why it is “there for.” The answer is patent. What follows in the text (v. 16) rests on what precedes, both immediately and distantly.

a. Distantly The believer’s position is bluntly stated:

- 1) Complete (perfect) in Christ (2:10).
- 2) Circumcised (aorist passive) in Christ (2:11).
- 3) Buried (aorist passive) in Christ (2:12).
- 4) Made alive (aorist passive) in Christ (2:13).

b. Immediately The Lord’s work is forcefully recorded:

- 1) He wiped out (aorist) the law (2:14).
- 2) He took away (perfect) the law (2:14).
- 3) He put off (aorist) spiritual powers (2:15).

NOTE: To disconnect the “therefore” from the context is to deal inordinately with the Word of God. The logic of the Holy Spirit (true Author of the Bible) is exacting and tight.

2. Response #2 PROHIBITION

This is:

a. Negative “No” means just that. The injunction of Scripture does not allow for any action in the prescribed areas.

b. Personal People are meant by the indefinite pronoun “man.” Thus, whether Judaizers, Gentiles, weak or strong believers -- none should be involved in the action prohibited.

c. Verbal The present tense imperative (command) is employed here. No one,

therefore, is to employ himself/herself in an activity of judging or taking one to task.

NOTE: With this very firm prohibition, it might be concluded that there is to be no restriction at all. On the contrary, the context points that ritual and ceremony have no part in our salvation. Conduct restrictions are surely not the issue here, but are clearly the concern of the Holy spirit (cf. 2:5, 6:11; Eph. 4:17-31). They should be by us!

1) Food

a) Meat The Mosaic law has a long list of clean and unclean edibles (Lev. 11). The Jews extrapolated this to be kashrut i.e. laws relating to kosher food. But, the text affirms: don’t let anyone judge you about the meat you eat.

b) Drink There is nothing in the Mosaic law about “drink” except in the case of the Nazarites (Num. 6:3) and priests (Lev. 10:9). But, the text affirms: don’t let anyone judge you about the beverage you drink.

2) Festivals

a) Holy day This probably has reference to the annual greater feasts mentioned in the O.T. (Lev. 23) including Passover, Unleavened bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of Atonement., Tabernacles. The text affirms: don’t let anyone judge you about the annual feast days.

b) New Moon This probably refers to the monthly festivals, particularly the one referred to in the Mosaic Law (Num. 10:10; 28:11). The text affirms: don’t let anyone judge you about a monthly religious activity.

c) Sabbaths While the noun is plural, the reference is probably to the weekly Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11). The text affirms: don’t let anyone judge you about a weekly Sabbath observance.

3. Response #3 EXPLANATION

The relative pronoun “which” is a reference to the five specifics. They are but shadows as opposed to substance. They are types, representations, and illustrations. They have no independent existence and are totally futile to accomplish in themselves what God purposed for them. None of these are to be allowed to encroach upon Christian liberty. As the Bible states -- they are a shadow of the spiritual reality. Everything the Mosaic Law set out was a shadow of good things to come (Heb. 10:1). No wonder Paul, under direct divine inspiration wrote, don’t let anyone judge you about the shadow!

4. Response #4 COMPLETION

Here is the apex of the whole matter. The real substantive aspect of liberty belongs to Christ, is derived from Christ, and can only be realized by union with Him. Believers make up the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:24) of which He is the Head. We are subject to Him in all our ways. He is all in all!

Conclusion The Judaizers are in error. So are all who focus on the ceremonial, the ritual, rather than on the peerless Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christian liberty is not to be a stumbling block (1 Cor. 8:9), an occasion for the flesh (Gal. 5:13), or a cloak of evil (1 Pet. 2:16). Exalt Christ as your pardon, peace, power, and purity. This is Christian liberty.