

[R2118 : page 74]

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AND SELF-RESTRAINT.

– March 21. – 1 Cor. 9:19-27.–

**"Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things."
– 1 Cor. 9:25.**

DOUBTLESS it was in great measure because of his breadth of learning, as well as the result of his deep consecration, and hence his nearness to the Lord and fellowship in the divine plan, that the Apostle Paul was enabled to grasp the conditions of the New Covenant and the Gospel dispensation more quickly than did the other apostles. Although the Apostle Peter took as broad a view as others of the original twelve, and although in addition the Lord gave him the vision to indicate that the Gentiles were no longer [R2118 : page 75] to be considered unclean by the Jews, and sent him direct to preach the Gospel to Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, and although he witnessed the gifts of the holy spirit communicated to him, yet the Apostle Paul seems to have grasped the whole situation much more comprehensively than did even Peter; so that when Peter was confused on this subject, and stumbling, Paul was both able and willing to help him to clearer views. (Gal. 2:14.) It was Paul who first saw "that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit"; and that amongst those who have come under the new order of things there is no distinction of Jews and Gentiles, male and female, bond or free, because they are all one in Christ Jesus. It was Paul who recognized the fact that those who had accepted Christ were entirely free from the Law of Moses; that to them Moses was dead and they were married to another, even Christ, and were under his law; – the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus which made Israelites free from the law of sin and death. – Rom. 7:4,6.

(19-23) But though realizing his liberties in Christ, his freedom from all bondage, as of holy days, new moons, sabbaths, meats, etc. (Col. 2:16; Rom. 14:5), the Apostle was not anxious to use his liberty

except as between the Lord and himself, and such of the brethren as could appreciate the matter. Those who were weak and bounden by laws and ceremonies and human traditions received from the elders, found in the Apostle one who did not seek to triumph over them by boasting of his liberty and their bondage. On the contrary, if they were in bondage to the Law he waived for the time his own liberties that he might thereby through sympathy and patience help them to the same liberty which he enjoyed at heart. And so we find him advising and urging others. He said: –

You find yourselves free from the law and those restraints which are upon your brethren, the Jews, you now say they are no longer bondages to you. You are thus greatly relieved: nevertheless, use not your **[R2119 : page 75]** liberties for an occasion of the flesh. You may know that an idol is nothing, and that meat offered to an idol (the custom amongst Gentiles) is not thereby injured, and you may feel perfectly free to eat that meat; but if a brother is with you who does not yet realize this freedom and see matters from this loftier standpoint, do not put a barrier between your heart and his by using your liberties, but rather for his sake avoid the use of that liberty that you may have the greater influence with him and bring him to appreciate the still greater liberties which are ours through Christ.

The blessings of the Kingdom of God are not merely these liberties to eat what we please without condemnation, and to be without restraint from fast days, new moons and sabbaths! No, no; the liberties which we have as the incipient Kingdom of God are far better than these, though they include these. The more important things are the freedom from sin, the communion and fellowship with the Lord, and the prospect of a glorious inheritance in the future. Righteousness, peace, joy in the holy spirit, these are the fruits of our new relationship to Christ which are to be specially enjoyed, and in comparison to which our liberty to eat and not to eat what we please and to observe such holy days as we may please are insignificant. – Rom. 14:17-20.

This is the Apostle's meaning in this lesson. He did not mean that he dissembled or deceived or pretended to be a Jew, etc., but that having and realizing his liberties, he did not always choose to exercise his liberties in Christ if he found better opportunities for usefulness by simply neglecting to claim or use liberty. Principles may never be abandoned for any consideration; but liberties and personal rights may be ignored in the interest of others, frequently and to divine pleasing; the Apostle was ready to go any length in defense of principle, and could not be budged an inch (Gal. 2:5,11); but in the sacrifice of his earthly rights and privileges and liberties for the sake of Christ and his Church, the Apostle evidently came next to our Lord Jesus, and is a noble example to all the Church, as shown in this lesson.

An illustration of such a proper ignoring of liberties without abandonment of principle is found in connection with Sunday observance. To our understanding Sunday, the first day of the week, is in no sense of the word the Sabbath Day that was commanded to the Jews, – which was the seventh day. The Christian is not commanded by the Bible to keep any particular day, in any particular manner different from other days; but by his covenant with God he is to keep *every day holy unto the Lord*. He has no more right to do wrong on one day than on another. His *rest* in Christ under the New Covenant is not the physical rest of the Jew under the Law Covenant. It is higher: it is a *rest of faith* that brings joy and refreshment; not only physical, but mental and spiritual.

This rest is not merely for one day in the week; the true Christian is to rest in Christ, and have joy and peace in believing every day. Instead, therefore, of having a seventh day rest in each week the Christian has seven days of rest in each week – a rest and a peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

Not by divine appointment but of their own volition the early Church began to keep as a day of special gathering together the first day of the week, as a Memorial of our Lord's resurrection from the

dead, and the new life and new joy which began with that day. For a time they continued to observe also the seventh day, until they learned through the apostles' instructions that they were dead to the Jewish law and had become "new creatures" in Christ under the law of the spirit of life, – which has but one commandment and that an all comprehensive one, – Love.

The majority of Christians to-day seem to have drifted away in part from the liberties and appreciations of the New Covenant and to be attempting to mix the Jewish Covenant with the Christian Covenant, the Jewish law of ten commandments with the Christian law of one commandment – love. Accordingly Sunday, the first day of the week, is by many regarded as the Sabbath day of the Jews; and they mentally attach to it all the requirements of the Jewish law, and yet they continually feel a heart-condemnation in respect to it, as did the Jews, because they rarely or never live up to the requirements of the Law for that day. The law demanded that no work of any kind should be done by parents, children, servants or cattle; and as exemplifying [R2119 : page 76] the rigor of that law there is a record in the Scriptures that a man was stoned to death because he gathered sticks for a fire on the Sabbath day. By reason of this false conception that the first day is the Sabbath day or that somehow or other (they know not how or when or where) the authorities and ordinances respecting the Jewish Sabbath Day were transferred to Sunday, the first day, many are continually under condemnation to conscience – a consciousness of sin.

With some of those who learn the truth on this subject there is a combative disposition which leads them to wish to display their *liberties* by doing on the first day of the week that which their fellow Christians regard as improper – sinful. Such a combative spirit is a sign that the spirit of Christ is not dwelling richly within – that more knowledge has reached the individual than he has been able to wisely use. It indicates that such have need to grow in grace, in love, proportionately as they grow in knowledge.

The Apostle's declaration, in the lesson before us, is an illustration of the right spirit concerning every such question. If our neighbors meet in worship on the first day of the week, because they believe it to be the command of God, our liberty can be just as fully exercised meeting on the same day; not from a sense of obligation, not under law, but in the full enjoyment of the liberty wherewith Christ makes free. Indeed, we can enjoy the day very much more when we realize it as a liberty and privilege rather than as a duty and command. Yet there are trifling liberties which we should yield; for instance, our neighbor, thinking that he is under the Jewish law, might consider the driving of a tack to be a violation of the day of rest. We who know that we are not under the law but under grace, realize that no sin would be committed in driving a tack; but nevertheless we can well and properly set aside our liberties in that matter and conform and cooperate in the maintenance of the peace and quiet of the day. Indeed, we realize that the mistake of our friends is in many respects a blessing and a mercy to us. For if many appreciated the matter as we do, as a liberty and privilege and not as a law of God, quite probably a majority would pay no respect whatever to the day, and very soon it might be as other days. We are very glad, therefore, that a day for rest and quiet and study and meditation on holy things is set aside by the laws of the land in which we live. But even if we saw no reason whatever for observing the day, the fact of its legal secular appointment is a sufficient ground for abstinence from earthly labors. But on the contrary we see the wisdom of having a day for special fellowship in spiritual things and the day adopted by early Christians is eminently proper. The opening day of a new week symbolizes our *new* rest, *new* hopes and *new* life – all of which spring from the resurrection of our Lord.

We advise those who are seeking to walk in the "narrow way" to follow the Apostle's counsel and example closely, and while realizing themselves free in Christ to make themselves servants unto all – "doing good unto all men as we have opportunity, especially to the household of faith."

The Apostle was not moved to this abrogation of his own liberties from any selfish motives, but by his love of the gospel and his desire to supply to others its blessed healing balm, which had come to his own spirit. Wherever the spirit of Christ is, this spirit is received; and if developed it will manifest itself sooner or later by this disposition of self-negation in the interest of other – especially in spiritual interests and affairs.

(24-27) The Apostle would have us see that while we are granted liberties in Christ, nevertheless the essence of Christian teaching is to deny ourselves the use of those very liberties. As slaves of sin we were set free in order that we might become the *voluntary* bond-servants of righteousness – serving with self-sacrifice "even unto death." The Jews, as a house of servants under Moses, were bound as servants by rigorous laws, the meaning and object of which were not even explained to them. But the house of sons, of which Christ is the Head, is left free from any law, except the one – to love God with every power of being and our neighbor as ourself. But this very liberty, which is granted to us on the one hand, is the greater trial on the other hand. It leaves with us each the responsibility of proving our love to God and to his cause and to his people, and our sympathy for the world, by the extent to which we are willing to abandon our liberties for these – as their servants.

The Apostle illustrates this by the Olympic games of his day, prominent amongst which was foot-racing. Racers were set free to run, so we as Christians are set free from the law that we may run our race and win the great prize; but he that complies with certain recognized conditions, and "so runs," shall be crowned an overcomer.

Consecrated Christians have entered the lists, to run the great race for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus – the prize of joint-heirship with him in the kingdom of glory, to be established at his second coming. We start on our race course not aimlessly, not hopelessly, not simply for the sake of denying ourselves, not to do

penance for sins, nor simply for the sake of developing character; but the Lord has graciously arranged the matter so that we will have a grand and noble incentive to self-denial. The prize at [R2120 : page 76] the end of the race is his "Well done, good and faithful servant;" and to the faithful little flock "the crown of life" and the glory of the Kingdom. Therefore we are not running uncertainly, doubtfully, not knowing what the prize will be, for we are instructed by the Lord's own words.

The Apostle points out in this connection that if we hope to be overcomers and approved of the Lord we must be moderate, temperate, self-denying in all things. This he emphasizes in verse twenty-seven. It is not only necessary that our whole being should be consecrated to the Lord at the beginning of the race, but it continues necessary all along the way, that it shall be continually subject to the new mind, the mind of Christ, which is to dwell in us richly and abound. Otherwise, if we allow the old, fallen nature to rise up and hinder the new mind, the mind of Christ in us – if we permit the will of the flesh thus to come into control again, we may count the race as ignominiously terminated and ourselves as "castaways;" because the mind of the flesh leads to death, but the mind of the new spirit of life in Christ, by which we are begotten through the Word of truth, leads to life everlasting, and through faithfulness to eternal glory.
