

51-02-02.wpd —Devotional Freedom in Christ
 legalism, culture, rules, regulations, Gnosticism, devotion, worship
 Col 2:16-23
 Christ Himself, and not manmade rules, regulates our life in Him.

INTRODUCTION: Text as Scripture Reading

–Review: in the verses preceding today's **text**, Paul showed how the circumcision required by Jewish legalists was fulfilled through our baptism into Christ, and how our death and resurrection into the life of Christ, symbolized in baptism, brought us into the divine "fullness" that the Greek Gnostics were seeking through "knowledge." These two false teachings were mixed together in a kind of "Gnostic legalism." [New Age Movement, in our time, is a similar conglomeration of ideas coming from astrology, Eastern mysticism and the occult. Each of these viewpoints have their own ideas and rules for humans to succeed in connecting to spiritual power or to devotion to God.]
 –In this part of the passage, Paul is showing how **HOM.idea**.

I. Rules and Regulations Are a Part of Our Humanity

- A. Humans like to have rules for just about everything: (examples)
1. **playing a game** (boundaries, goals, fouls– "You reneged!")
 2. **going to work** (employer's expectations & employee's duties)
 3. **running a home** ["Put your dirty dishes in the sink!" "Don't toss that in the trash—re-cycle it!" "Close the door—were you born in a barn?"].
- B. Almost every area of human life has manmade rules and regulations. [In getting my M.A. in "cross-cultural studies," I learned the meaning of **culture**: it's how humans in groups adapt to a given environment. Rules for living in one culture don't always match those of another, in how people work, in how they marry and raise kids, in how and what they eat, or in how they dress up or go undressed. All this variety in rules and behavior comes from the human mind, based on 2 things: human logic (given by God), and a "knowledge of good and evil" independent of God (received from eating forbidden fruit). It's difficult to achieve cross-cultural understanding, because we tend to think **our way** of eating and dressing and working is better than the way other cultures do it.]
- C. To have leadership in creation, God created us to be rule-makers and rule-keepers, but only under His intimate direction. Without divine guidance in fellowship with God, human logic is crippled and open to error in deciding "right" or "wrong" ways to do things. Culture produces multitudes of differing moralities as a social response to life. Not all are godly, humane, or creation-friendly.

TRANS: Where our rule-making gets really off is when we apply our faulty logic to religion and our "knowledge of good and evil" to trying to get closer to God. Paul goes into detail confronting the attempts of Gnostic legalism to do this. **Our new life in Christ is regulated by Christ alone, not by human authority with its rules and regulations.**

II. Rules Can't Give Us What We Already Have in Christ

- A. **In Christ, we have devotional "reality"**– v.16-17, *Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*
1. OT festivals, Sabbaths, dietary restrictions, in fact, all outward rituals required for good standing with God are only a "shadow."
 2. That shadow was cast from the future reality found in the coming Christ and what He would do on the Cross– Col 2:14, (He) canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.
 3. [When legalists judge our liberty in Christ, it's like a candle salesman going door-to-door telling us we don't get sufficient light from electricity, and that we must supplement light bulbs by burning candles.] Candles are nice for ritual beauty, but for dispelling darkness, I choose something brighter, and *Jesus Christ is the Light that shines brightest of all.*
- B. **In Christ, we have a vitally integrated devotional life**– v.18-19, *Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.*
1. Paul here is again attacking the low Gnostic view of humans as spirit beings defiled by their attachment to physical matter.
 - a. Such a disparaging view of our bodies creates a "false humility" that is forever banished by the physical humanity of Christ.
 - b. Gnosticism looked like a "worship of angels" [messengers]. It relied on divine teachers whose "gnosis [knowledge] from God" could enable man's spirit to rejoin the "fullness of Deity." (These messengers went "into great detail about what" they had "seen" — Gnosticism is known for its elaborate complexity).
 2. Paul warned that embracing these "idle notions" could "disqualify" us from our real goal, our true "prize" found in "connection with [Christ]

the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow."

- a. Paul was describing Christian spiritual life and growth in terms of the integrated physical body, almost as if to rub Gnostic noses in it, because they despised the fleshly body as garbage.
- b. Gnostic teaching eliminated faith in our destiny with the risen Christ, which is to *join Him in resurrected physical life and to reign beside Him forever*— Paul says in **Phil 3:14**, "I press on toward the goal to win **the prize** for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." And what was that "prize"? He had just named it in **v.11**, "... to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

C. In Christ, our devotional life isn't based on worldly rules— v.20-23, *Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*

1. Human legalism seems wise, but it can neither produce spiritual life nor prevent sin. (Christians easily mistake it for holiness):
 - a. "No long hair on men or short hair on women! It's rebellion!"
 - b. "Growing a beard is "bohemian" and ruins your testimony."
 - c. "No dresses above the knee, or girls end up promiscuous."
 - d. "Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch alcohol! It's the devil's brew!" (even if Paul said in **1 Tim 5:23**, "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.")

CONCLUSION:

—Satan tempted Eve with knowledge by saying, "... when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Eve was already like God by being created in His image, and she knew right from wrong behavior by her relationship with Him. God's one rule was, "*Don't become independent from Me.*" *Legalism* offers what we already have in Christ, then cuts us off from it, as the forbidden fruit did.

—Man's rules and regulations, about *what is good* and *what is evil* in our devotion to God, have power to close our eyes, not to open them. They can bring *devotional bondage* rather than *devotional freedom*. **Christ Himself, and not manmade rules, regulates our life in Him.**

Col 2:16-23 (NIV) Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. {17} These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. {18} Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. {19} He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. {20} Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: {21} "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? {22} These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. {23} Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.