

From Human Regulations Through Life With Christ

Freedom!

- I recall one of the most moving experiences of my life:
 - as a student, saw the film, "Cry Freedom"; I knew little of Apartheid, one man's fight for freedom for his people, freedom to be people, of the dignity of Steve Biko, and the hatred he engendered, of the injustice of his murder at the hands of the security forces, the very ones supposed to protect freedom!
 - but what got to me was the litany of those killed by the security forces, instead of final credits;
 - I remember coming out onto the busy Edinburgh streets (round Tollcross) and walking back home - "how can everyone else here be going about their normal business when such injustice, when such captivity is going on in the world!?"
- The aching desire for freedom that drove Steve Biko is something that lies deep within us, woven into the fabric of our being.
- It permeates vast swathes of what we think is important:
 - POW films;
 - the teenager's desire to make their own life, have the freedom to choose;
 - the value (however exaggerated at times) that our society on tolerance, the freedom to make lifestyle choices free of fear of what others might think;
 - the value that we place on democracy, and the freedom to express an opinion and influence the way our country is run...
- We could go on! Freedom is important to us!

(v.6-7) So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

- Coming to Christ is coming to freedom - set free from sin.
- Paul says: live that freedom, don't allow self to be bound back into old ways!
 - cf POW; set free, but can live with fears, with hatreds from the past
- How? In Christ!
 - in relationship with him, and always thankful for what he has done

(v.8) See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

- Danger for Colossians was false teaching that a particular group of people were peddling:
 - sounded good, but when you looked closely it was built on merely human teaching, not Christ;
 - in particular, built on assumption of earning salvation, not free gift!
 - and to try and earn salvation is to enter into slavery again, to become captive!

(v.9-10) For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

- Christ is far superior to any human teaching!

(v.11-12) In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

- Your spiritual life is in him, remember!
 - your "circumcision" (starting point) in faith was in Christ, not by men;
 - you have a new life - the old buried is with Christ, the new is the new life Christ brings after resurrection!
- So you are new, with the sinful nature behind you, not as you were before.

(v.13-14) When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having 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.

- We are now alive, where once we were dead!
- That came about as Christ forgave us:
 - and that happened when the old written code was replaced;
 - old way was: "here is the standard - live up to that and you'll be OK!" (10 Cs!)
 - but it is an impossible target, way too high!
 - all it ended up doing was opposing us, leading to despair, because we couldn't live up to God's holiness expressed in the written code;
- So, Paul says, Christ replaced that with something else:
 - picture Paul uses is that in his death Jesus nailed the written law to the Cross, killing its power over us stone dead!
 - rather, our new life is dependent on his gift!
 - our freedom is given, not earned!

(v.15) And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

- Use a POW camp image again:
 - prisoners in the camp are powerless to overwhelm the guards;
 - but freedom comes when the liberating army arrives, defeats the powers and authorities holding the captives, and sets them free!
- That's what Christ did for us - and the cross was the decisive battle.

(v.16) 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.

- So...
 - our new life isn't earned, by what we do or don't eat (or drink!);
 - by how we celebrate any religious festivals (what we wear at communion, how we celebrate it?);
 - it isn't even earned by what moral code we subscribe to!
- For it is a gift of Christ.
- And what Paul is saying to the Colossians is, don't let these other teachers put pressure on you to conform, don't let them judge you by these external things.

(v.17) These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

- What Paul is not saying is that such observances are completely unimportant!
- He uses a Greek thought form to explain things:
 - things spiritual are the true reality; earthly things are shadows or reflections, which can tell us something about ultimate reality!
- So our moral behaviour, worship on Sundays, communion, what we eat, drink or smoke, how we decide to live in each of these areas should reflect the deepest reality of our lives:
 - if Christ has won our freedom and our hearts, we will want to please him, and enjoy the freedom he has granted!

(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.

- Important thing is connection with Christ!
 - picture Paul uses is of a body - Christ as head, the church (us) his body, useless without connection to the head!

(v.20-21) 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!"?

- Why are you behaving as if the commandant of the POW camp still has power over your life, when Christ has set you free?

(v.22-23) 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.

- The trouble with such regulations, such sets of acceptable behaviour, is that they appear to make sense!
 - do the right thing and things will work out....
 - work hard, self-discipline....
- BUT they don't work and they won't last!
 - while here on earth, work hard and reap the reward works as a general rule....
 - ...but with an eternal perspective, how hard we work at being good doesn't make the blindest bit of difference if we haven't entered into a living relationship with Christ, and if we don't continue to live in that relationship, in the freedom he has given us!
 - what's more, even here on earth, such self-discipline on its own will ultimately crack under the pressure, and the failure will be spectacular (think TV evangelists...) - we need something stronger to sustain us: Christ
- POW camp again:
 - we could be on the escape committee, dedicated to the impossible task of getting over/under/through the barbed wire, working hard, self-discipline...
 - daft, if the gate is open and the liberator has come!

Conclusion

- Not a license to sin - but a call to freedom!
- And a call to live in constant and living relationship with our liberator, for the call to return to captivity is strong, and often attractive.
- The Christian slavery of a bygone age might have been:
 - hats, clothes at worship, cinema, smoking, tee-total, etc.
 - what is it today?