

***Introduction...Some habits are hard to break and sometimes it's hard to let go***

In 1944, Lt. Hiroo Onoda was sent by the Japanese army to the remote Philippine island of Lubang. His mission was to conduct guerrilla warfare during World War II. Unfortunately, he was never officially told the war had ended; so for 29 years, Onoda continued to live in the jungle, in a state of war-like readiness even though World War II was over. He survived by eating coconuts and bananas and evading search parties that he believed were enemy scouts.

When he was deployed in December of 44 his division commander gave him these orders:

*You are absolutely forbidden to die by your own hand. It may take three years, it may take five, but whatever happens, we'll come back for you. Until then, so long as you have one soldier, you are to continue to lead him. You may have to live on coconuts. If that's the case, live on coconuts! Under no circumstances are you [to] give up your life voluntarily.<sup>1</sup>*

And he obeyed these orders for 29 years.

In the early 1970's, a college dropout named Norio Suzuki decided to travel to the Philippines and He joked to his friends that he was going to search for the long lost Japanese Lt. Onoda and in 1974 Suzuki found him. He made contact with Lt. Onoda and tried to convince him that the war was over. But the old soldier explained that he would only surrender if his commanding officer ordered him to do so. Over the years he had heard rumors that the war was over but he simply would not believe the stories.

Suzuki traveled back to Japan and found Onoda's former commander, Major Taniguchi, who had become a bookseller. On March 9, 1974, Suzuki and Taniguchi met Onoda at a preappointed place and Major Taniguchi read the orders that stated all combat activity was to be ceased. Onoda was shocked and, at first, disbelieving. It took some time for the news to sink in.

After nearly 30 years of fighting in the jungle Hiroo Onoda eased off the pack that he always carried with him and laid the gun on top of it. The time for fighting was passed, now was the time for peace.<sup>1</sup>

***Some things are hard to let go.*** Some things get so embedded in our lives that even when they come to an end it is hard for us to accept that it is time to move on.

***Transition...***

Now imagine that you have an entire nation of people who had lived a certain way for as long as they could remember. Imagine that you have a nation whose identity is tied to their religious practices that go back 1000's of years. Then try to tell these people that because of the death of one man all of that history has been redefined and brought to a practical end...how do you think they would respond?

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<sup>1</sup>The War is Over . . . Please Come Out By [Jennifer Rosenberg](#),

The gospel of Jesus Christ has changed the world but it also fundamentally changed the way of life for the Jews and they had a very hard time letting go. Like Lt. Onada they simply could not believe that their battle was over, that their debt of sin was cancelled by the cross of Christ. They couldn't

accept that through one man they were now free. And so rather than lay down their arms and accept that the war was over, some of them have decided to continue the fight. And the way they're fighting is to insist that new Christians must obey the law of Moses in order to be saved.

Their weapon is legalism and Paul is fighting back! Here in our text this morning the Apostle Paul wants to help us as a church embrace the freedom we have in Christ, to embrace our freedom from the burden of the law. He wants us to embrace the freedom that comes from God Himself.

**Col 2:16** Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. <sup>17</sup>These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. <sup>18</sup>Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, <sup>19</sup>and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

### ***Sermon Focus...***

There are two ways that Paul wants us to take action when it comes to legalism but neither one of them call on us to really do anything. Instead, he wants us to make sure that we don't let someone else do something to us. And the first thing he says is, **"Don't let anyone pass judgement on you."**

### **I. Let no one pass judgment on you (Vv. 16-17)**

**Col 2:16** Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

Our passage this morning is linked to what we studied last week by the term *therefore*. Last week we learned that Jesus and His gospel are better than OT religious rituals because those rituals were powerless to save us from our sin, but where they failed Jesus succeeded. The OT rituals were incomplete symbols that pointed to the deep spiritual need of our hearts. Jesus came to complete those symbols and meet the deep need of our hearts. He came to fulfill what the OT rituals were pointing us to. **And now, because of Christ's victory we are free from the guilt, penalty and burden of the law.**

Jesus gives us true circumcision of the heart, He gives us true spiritual life, He accomplished complete forgiveness for all our sins, and He has triumphed over every authority to make us free. And Paul starts the very next verse with the word ***Therefore***. Because all of this is true for the believer there is no reason for us to allow someone to ***pass judgment on us*** in regard to the fact that we don't follow the law of Moses.

If you are a believer in Christ, then you need to understand that the law of God has been fulfilled ***not by us but for us***. Jesus kept the law perfectly, He earned the perfect righteousness that God requires and ***by faith*** we receive His righteousness.

**Rom 3:20** For by works of the law no human being will be ***justified (declared righteous)*** in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

<sup>21</sup> **But now** the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law... <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God **through faith** in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

That is why we sing the song, ***“My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.”*** The Apostle Paul wants us to understand how amazing God’s grace truly is and as a result he wants us to be free from the judgment of others. He says, “Let no one rule over you. or oppress you, or become your judge with regard to these things.”

But what do I mean by these things?

**We can break these down into two categories; food and drink, and the observance of special religious days.** Both categories were instrumental in the life of the Jews and served to set them apart from their pagan neighbors. These things were part of their identity and identity markers aren’t easily set aside. To make matters more intense we need to remember that God commanded the observance of these dietary laws and special religious days as part of the Old Covenant.

**So the questions we need to ask are, “What exactly are these false teachers trying to impose? And how has the gospel changed our views on these things?”**

**What are they trying to impose?** The phrase *food and drink* is most likely referring to the dietary laws of the Old Testament (**Lev 11**) and certain restrictions on wine that were common in 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism. I say **most likely** because the truth is we don’t know. Paul doesn’t tell us what specific food or drink is being prohibited here.

It could be the same type of thing that was taking place in **Romans 14** where the issue is meat and wine that was commonly used in pagan rituals. Or it could be that a group of Jews are trying to force these Gentile believers to follow the dietary laws in Leviticus (Moses).

**But either way, we need to know that God has spoken to this issue and has declared all foods to be clean.**

Last week we talked about Peter’s vision in **Acts 10**. In this vision God showed him a collection of animals that were declared unclean in Leviticus, but God told Peter to “rise, kill and eat.” Peter wasn’t comfortable with this but God kept giving him this vision until he realized that in some way Jesus death, burial and resurrection had brought an end to these dietary restrictions. What once served to mark God’s people as distinct from the rest of the world was no longer the mark of God’s new covenant people. In Christ we are free from the burden of the OT dietary laws.

The OT dietary laws were meant to distinguish God’s people from the other nations. They were meant to communicate that God’s people were those who followed God’s Word. It’s not that eating shellfish is necessarily sinful, but that God’s people were to follow His instruction, His Word.

But now, in this gospel age the invitation to become the people of God is extended not just to one nation but to all and the distinguishing mark of the New Covenant people is that we follow the Word of Christ. And the Word of Christ is one of freedom and rest. We are free from the burden of the law and able to rest secure in the gospel of Jesus.

It’s not that Christianity wants nothing to do with Judaism, but rather it’s that Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism. **Those OT dietary laws were a shadow; Christ is the substance.**

The second issue has to do with the observance of special religious days (***festivals, new moons and the Sabbath***). The Jews observed quite a few festivals including Passover, the Feast of First fruits, the feast of Weeks and the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement (**Lev 23**). New moons were celebrated at the first of the month and involved making sacrifices as a sin offering (**Numbers 28:11-14**). The Sabbath day was a weekly day of rest that also included a holy convocation or gathering for worship (**Lev 23:3**).

All of these elements were part of the Old Covenant Jewish religious life. The festivals were important in that they reminded the people of how God saved them, protected them and brought them into the Promised Land. The new moon sacrifices served as regular reminders of the people's sin and need of forgiveness. The Sabbath taught that God wanted His people to rest from their works and rely completely on Him to meet their needs. **All of these things were vitally important in the religious life and to the theological understanding of the Jews; but all of these things were mere shadows of what was to come.**

<sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

That's what Paul says here. He says these things are "*merely a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.*" **Now what does this mean.**

(**Illus...**Imagine that you are standing in the middle of the desert in the heat of the day and you have to shield your eyes from the intensity of the sun. Even with your hand up to shield your eyes you find it difficult to focus on anything. You can only get small momentary glimpses of your surroundings as you blink due to the intensity of the sun.

But finally you spot an image on the ground nearby. It is indistinct but it is clearly a shadow. You begin to move toward it and the closer you get the more distinct the outline becomes. You can't dare look up at the solid object casting the shadow because the sun is simply too powerful, but as you move close and blink your eyes the object begins to take shape in your mind.

Then finally the object steps into the sun's path and shields the intensity from your eyes. You look up and your eyes begin to adjust and what you see standing before you is a man.

This is what life has been like for the Jews. Their entire religious existence has been occupied by getting glimpses of the shadow but now Jesus Christ has come and He is the one who has been casting that shadow all along.

**In other words, Jesus is the point and the fulfillment of all the Old Covenant law and our standing with God is not determined by our adherence to that law but by our faith in Christ. Don't put your hope in the shadow to save you, put your hope in the man Himself.** Let your heart and mind rest secure in the fact that Jesus alone saves you and reconciles you to God.

***I. Let no one pass judgment on you...***

***II. Let no one disqualify you (Vv. 18-19)***

<sup>18</sup> Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, <sup>19</sup> and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

First, it was don't not anyone **judge you** but here the command is don't let anyone **disqualify you**. Don't let false teachers **condemn you** or rob you of **your prize**. Your salvation is secure because of Jesus so don't allow these men to steal away your hope and freedom in Christ.

This time the problem is not related to Old Covenant laws but rather to certain **spiritual experiences**. These false teachers are **insisting** that in order to be fully integrated into the Kingdom of God you and I must practice asceticism or in some translations *humility*. I think the NIV gets this one right when it translates it as *false humility* and it may be best understood in its connection to the next phrase *and the worship of angels*.

It seems that the false teachers were employing these **ascetic practices** as a way to induce heavenly visions. It may even be the case that they were insisting that by **fasting** from certain food and drink that they could stimulate the experience of visions and because of this they were boasting (**puffed up**) of their unique spirituality.

But what does Paul say about all of this? He says the problem is that you have lost sight of what matters most...Jesus. He accuses them of "*not holding fast to the head*." Spiritual experiences are not the goal, Christ is. If your spiritual experience is more important to you than the gospel, more important than the salvation that Christ has accomplished for you, then your experience hasn't elevated your spirituality but diminished it.

Christ is the head, supplying life and growth to the whole body. Growth in the Kingdom of God comes from keeping our focus on Jesus, from understanding his function as the fulfiller of the law on our behalf. Spiritual maturity comes when we embrace the cross of Christ as the standard of our freedom and we embrace Jesus and His Word as the fountain of all spiritual life.

The true test of whether or not one belongs to God's people is neither the observance of dietary laws and Jewish festivals, nor the cultivation of super-spiritual experiences, but whether one **belongs to Christ** and is alive with His life. <sup>2</sup>

**So why does all of this matter?** The bottom line is that a group of people have come into the church and they are seeking to impose their **convictions** about food and drink, about certain religious days and about spiritual experiences upon these new believers. They are saying, "If you don't follow these laws and do these things then you can't truly consider yourself part of the covenant community of God's people."

And Paul is saying to the church, "Don't let them come in here and bind your conscience with their convictions. You put your trust in Christ alone. Christ has set you free from the burden of the law and He calls you to follow His Word alone and to live for His glory alone."

### III. Live in the freedom Christ has purchased for you

I've been serving as the pastor of Cornerstone for more than 7 years now and I have never had to address someone trying to force circumcision on the church. I have never felt the need to actively defend the church against 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish legalism, but that does not mean that we are free from all types of legalism. Unfortunately, there are still those who seek to bind the conscience of Christians and you may not even realize it.

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<sup>2</sup> N. T. Wright Colossians and Philemon (TDNT) pgs. 128-29.

This type of legalistic judgment and disqualifying is still going on in the church. We have people in our lives who hold really strong convictions about things such as politics, education, entertainment, alcohol, etc. **They hold these convictions so passionately that they become evangelists for their position and directly or indirectly begin to demand that others fall in line with their way of thinking.**

You hear it in statements like this, “I don’t see how someone could hold that view, do that, say such things and be a Christian.” **Now, when we do this we are making a judgment call on someone’s salvation based on what they do or don’t do.** And in those moments we need to remember that our political views aren’t the measure of our salvation. Our views on education aren’t either. Our right-standing with God is determined by our faith in Christ. Yes, our faith will guide our thinking and our actions, but just because someone holds a different view than yourself doesn’t mean that you’re right and they’re wrong. Nor does it mean that they don’t love Jesus.

**And let’s be careful that we don’t sit back and think that this is only a problem for them, this is a problem for us as well.** We do this too. We hold our convictions so strongly that we often leave little room for others to hold a different position. It is right for us to study, it is right for us to think deeply and develop convictions on certain subjects that the Bible doesn’t clearly address. But when we take our convictions and impose them on others that’s when we’ve become part of the problem.

### ***Conclusion...***

Ray Ortlund posted an article this week about the one another commands that we don’t see in Scripture but that we do often see in the church.

The beautiful “one another” commands of the New Testament are famous. But it is also striking to notice the “one anothers” that do *not* appear there.

For example, sanctify one another, humble one another, scrutinize one another, pressure one another, embarrass one another, corner one another, interrupt one another, defeat one another, sacrifice one another, shame one another, marginalize one another, exclude one another, judge one another, run one another’s lives, confess one another’s sins . . .

The kind of God we really believe in is revealed in how we treat one another. The lovely gospel of Jesus positions us to treat one another like royalty, and every non-gospel positions us to treat one another like dirt.

Our relationships with one another reveal to us what we really believe as opposed to what we *think* we believe, our convictions as opposed to our opinions. It is possible for the gospel to remain at the shallow level of opinion, even sincere opinion, without penetrating to the deeper level of conviction. But when the gospel grips us down in our convictions, we embrace its implications wholeheartedly. Therefore, when we mistreat one another, our problem is not a lack of surface niceness but a lack of gospel depth. What we need is not only better manners but, far more, true faith.

*If this gets a hold of our church, then the watching world might start feeling that Jesus himself has come to town:*

Where the Scriptures are clear let us all hold fast to the Word of Christ but when it comes to our personal convictions let's not be those who pass judgment on others who don't think the same way we do. Let's not be those who disqualify others who don't do the same things we do. Let's allow Christ to be the Lord of their Conscience and learn to love one another as Jesus has loved us.

Let's be those who champion the glorious truth that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone and for God's glory alone. Let's also be those who strive to let that glorious gospel bear its fruit in the way we love another.