

In the verses leading up to vs.23,24 Paul has been describing his ministry to the Corinthians. How that with a good conscience he served them, and with their good in mind he changed his travel plans regarding a ministry visit with them. Paul's enemies took his change of plans as an opportunity to slander him and to cast doubt on his trustworthiness.

Paul had been appealing to the nature of the gospel that he preached and how that message formed its ministers, **him especially**, into its own likeness; faithful, reliable, true: 1:19-22. He mentions three experiences: anointing, sealing, and receiving the earnest measure of the Holy Spirit. The first, anointing, refers to separation and commissioning for service. The second, sealing, refers to recognition and safe-keeping. The third, receiving the earnest of the Holy Spirit refers to the authentic guarantee of the full inheritance yet to be revealed.

True as all this was, the situation he was in constrained him to take an oath<sup>1</sup> before God—He says *under oath*--The reason I changed plans **was mainly for your sake**. The visit I was planning could only end up being a painful visit again.

The explanation for changing plans was so plain that Paul seemed to anticipate a touchy spirit in some who probably thought-- “spare us”? Who does he think he is? Therefore he hastens to address their criticism:<sup>2</sup> “Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy...” This is a striking statement. It sets forth, among other things, **The Freedom of the Christian Faith**

Paul gloried in the liberty with which Christ made men free. For him the days of bondage were over; there was no subjection for the Christian to any custom or tradition of men, no enslavement of his conscience to the judgment or the will of others.... He had great confidence in this gospel of the glory of Christ and its power to produce beautiful character in people.

That it was capable also of perversion he knew very well. Corrupt self-will lurks in many forms. “Nevertheless, the principle of freedom was too sacred to be tampered with: it was necessary both for the education of the conscience and the enrichment of the spiritual life... the apostle took all the risks, and **all the inconveniences**, rather than limit Christian freedom in the least”<sup>3</sup>

#### I. Personal freedom is a sacred principle that is often given away or stolen.

A. “not that we have dominion over your faith” is a statement that appears in the context of disagreement. Not about what the Christian faith consisted of (vs. 21 “us with you”), but how it was to be practiced.

B. “not that we have dominion over your faith” means that you as an individual believer have a right to choose *how, where, when, and with whom* you practice your beliefs. Hear it in a more academic form:

“Every man by nature possesses the right of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures, and in all religious concerns; it is his privilege to read and explain the Bible for himself, w/o dictation from, or dependence on, anyone, being responsible to God alone for his use of the sacred truth.”<sup>4</sup>

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1 Hodge on oaths: “all the bands of society are loosened, and all security of life and property is lost, if men are not to be believed upon their oaths.” Alarming in view of so much obvious lying under oath in the Senate and congressional hearings. Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians p.26 see also P.E. Hughes p. 46 in his commentary on II Corinthians.

2 James Denney Second Corinthians p. 732 vol. 5 Expositor's Bible

3 Ibid. p.733

4 Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches Edward T. Hiscox p.11,12

C. “not that we have dominion over your faith” means that even Paul the apostle does not claim authority over the people themselves in their character as believers—as a master has over his slaves.

Paul lived in the days of the Roman emperor who could and did order his soldiers to do this or do that—because he said so—period. Paul could not and would not do with believers what the Roman emperor did with his soldiers. Paul appealed to believers on spiritual grounds, he enlightened believers by interpreting the scriptures to them, he reached out to them with praise and he reached out to them with blame, but simple compulsion was not in his apostolic toolbox.

D. This is not true of the Roman Catholic religion: Rome does lord over people's faith; its legislates for the people both in faith and in practice w/o their co-operation, or even their consent. All this is called “apostolic succession” which is actually not only anti-apostolic but anti-Christian altogether.

- I. Personal freedom is a sacred principle that is often given away or stolen.
- II. You must make your own free choices—About

**Money:** Acts 5:4 ...was it not thine own...?

**Modesty:** I Timothy 2:9 ...that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel...

**Meats (food):** Romans 14:14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself (food is the subject); but to him that considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Are bacon cheeseburgers unclean? Should I offer one to my vegan neighbor, Herbert Young?

**Meetings:** Hebrews 10:24,25 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching. Which meetings? Where? How long should they be? Monologue or dialogue? Men & women mixed or separate? How many do I need to attend to be well?

**Marriage:** Matthew 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was *betrothed* to Joseph.... Doug Phillips former leader of Vision Forum said, It is so urgent that Christians recover the practice of betrothal along with bunches of other baggage of little or no value.

**Music:** Ephesians 5:19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Music does matter, your music choices are going to affect you and those around you.

III. Wise choice making is a major feature in joyful living.

This passage not only illustrates the freedom of Christian faith, it presents us with an ideal of the Christian ministry. 'We are not lords over your faith,' says Paul, 'but we are helpers of your joy.' it is implied in this that joy is the very goal and element of the Christian life, and that it is the minister's duty to be at war with all that hinders it....

And he is our best friend, the truest minister of God to us, who helps us to the place where the love of God is poured out in our hearts in its omnipotence, and we renew our joy in it. In doing so, it may be necessary for the minister to cause pain by the way. There is no joy, nor any possibility of it, where evil is tolerated: Ephesians 5:3-6.

Hodge: If inspired apostles recognized not only their subjection to the word of God, but also the right of the people to judge whether their teachings were in accordance with the supreme standard, it is most evident...that the ultimate right to decide whether ecclesiastical decisions are in accordance with the word of God, rests with the people.