

Galatians 5:13-18 – You Are Free, but Freedom is not Absolute!

TSK, GreekLexicon, Rienecker, Gaebelin, Bezuyen, Trapp, Robertson, Poole, PNT, JFB, Geneva, Family, Henry, Calvin,
Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

“*It’s my life, I can do whatever I want with it,*” is a common phrase, especially among young people—though it is not limited to them.

Others say: *I will dress how I want. I will do what I want with my body. I will spend my money how I want. I will go to church when I want. In short, I will live how I want.*”

“I will live how I want” was a very Greek and a very Roman thing to do - a very pagan thing to do. But, beloved, absolute freedom leads to death, absolutely.

Today you will hear Apostle Paul’s warning to the Galatian Christians, that **though they were free in Christ and didn’t have to be circumcised to be saved, they were not free to live however they wanted.**

Our headings are:

Liberty Guided by Love

Liberty Guided by the Spirit

Our goals: **That you will thank God for your liberty in Jesus, that you will not misuse your liberty to be self-indulgent, and that you will use your liberty to love and serve others, for the glory of the Savior.**

Liberty Guided by Love

13 For you, **brethren, have been called to liberty;** only do not use liberty as an **opportunity for the flesh,** but through **love serve one another.**

1. Apostle Paul declared the Galatians were called to live in liberty and not be burdened with keeping the ceremonies of the law – things like circumcisions, feasts, ceremonies, and holding special days.

More, they **were not to go back to those things.**...taking those heavy burdens on their backs.

And notice how he changes...after using such strong language before...**he calls them “brothers.”**

2. Instead, Apostle Paul demanded they use their freedom to love and serve each other. Love leads to service. This was far better than being burdened with ritual duties.

Liberty leads to service. Liberty is not a license to sin and become self-indulgent. “Opportunity” refers to a place which is the **base of operations**...as in a place where the military gathers to launch an attack.

So they were not to use liberty to hurt others but to help them.

The ones who were set free from slavery were to become slaves of God and their brothers.

Isn't that contradictory? It is not contradictory at all. Man was given freedom to serve. There is no such thing as absolute freedom.

Man was a slave to sin (Psalm 51:5) and he shows he cherishes his freedom from sin – a freedom secured by Jesus Christ – by serving others. He freely chooses to do this. Slavery to others is a choice – a voluntary choice – and it is not burdensome. Serving others brings great joy to each other.

Yes, you are called to take Jesus' yoke upon you! (Matthew 11:29) **But it is not a painful yoke...like marriage is not a yoke!**

14 For all the **law is fulfilled in one word**, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

3. To make this even stronger, Apostle Paul reminded the Galatians they were, in fact, keeping the law, the moral law, with its last 6 commands summarized as: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

“As yourself” was not a command to love yourself. “Loving yourself” is opposed to the 10 laws. “Loving yourself” was used as a standard, knowing how much man loves himself because of his sin. (The foundation of the law (Law 1-4) is shown in law 5-10. 1John 4:20 reminds you that **you can't say you love God (Law 1-4) unless you love your brother (Law 5-10).**

Romans 13:10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

John 13:35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

Here is the main point: **Liberty, which Christians were given when they were freed from the law, was not liberty to live however they wanted...but liberty to live to serve – to serve out of love.**

15 But **if you bite and devour one another**, beware lest you be **consumed by one another!**

4. Then Apostle Paul warned the Galatians not to destroy each other.

To bite and devour are very strong words. This is a picture of wild animals trying to destroy each other in a deadly struggle.

The result of biting and devouring each other would consume the whole church.

Everyone is destroyed in the process. (So “serve your brother rather than sacrifice him.”)

1Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 **for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?**

If they did not serve each other and instead tried to live with absolute freedom, they would starve and become cannibalistic.

5. Lessons:

a. You are not to use your freedom in Christ to be selfish. That’s how the world defines freedom. A man might long to work hard so he could retire at 55 and have nothing to do, but if he does that, he does not understand freedom.

He is called to use his freedom for the good of others – to work-to serve!

b. You are not to use your freedom as an excuse to live sinfully. 1 Peter 2:16 “as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.”

My sins are forgiven...so I could get drunk and just confess my sins...I could ignore the Sabbath and just ask God to forgive me.

c. Freedom is only enjoyed when you become a servant of God! Think about it! Do you see why people don’t want to submit to Christ? It goes against all they promote. They want freedom to be selfish! They don’t want freedom to serve.

d. Strife always leads to ruin. So eat up quarrels and not people.

Liberty Guided by the Spirit

16 I say then: **Walk in the Spirit**, and **you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh**.

1. In order to combat the misuse of liberty from the law and not fall into the trap of misusing their freedom, Apostle Paul warned the Galatians to let the Spirit of God guide them.

(Better: Continue to walk in the Spirit.)

“Flesh” is used to mean *the evil man is and is capable of doing apart from God stopping him*.

Apostle Paul did not say, “**In order to get along you must be willing to make compromises**.” That would have been the polite thing to do, but it was not the right thing to do.

What an indictment this was of the Judaizers who urged people to walk according to rituals!

2. Those who were guided by the Spirit would not fulfill the “lust of the flesh.”

“Lust of the flesh was not speaking of sexual sins or gluttony, but it refers to a desire to have people under their control. This was the issue here.

This is the strongest negative Greek: *You will **absolutely not** fulfill the lusts of the flesh...you will **absolutely not** try to control people if you are guided by God’s Spirit.* God’s Spirit changes man’s desires.

Romans 8:1 There is **therefore now no condemnation** to those who are in Christ Jesus, **who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit**.

17 **For the flesh lusts against the Spirit**, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, **so that you do not do the things that you wish**.

3. Those who are not guided by the Holy Spirit of God but by their own spirit, which results in a serious internal struggle, will never end-up well.

They will always be overwhelmed by sin. They will always do what they desire.

There is a kind of tug of war within them. Read Romans 7 and see the struggle of the Apostle Paul against his own flesh.

18 But **if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.**

4. To put it all together, Apostle Paul reminded the Galatians if they are led by the Spirit, doing what was right and pleasing to the Lord, sacrificing themselves for the good of others, and in reality, following the 10 moral laws, they showed they were no longer under the bondage to the ceremonial laws.

They would not crush others.

Romans 8:3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

This does not mean the Christian is passive. Rather, the Christian is allowing himself to be led. He can fight the Spirit of God. He can “quench” the Spirit of God. But he would submit because of love.

5. Lesson:

a. Freedom leads to holiness, not licentiousness. Don't say: “*I live in a dorm at university or in another city, therefore, I can live however I want, I don't have to go to church. My parents can't see me. I am single, so I can sleep around. And neither must you use your freedom from sin to live however you want.*”

Romans 6:12 *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.*

b. There is a struggle in every Christian with sin. The things you want to do you don't do, and the things you don't want to do, you do. Don't deny the reality of this. **Be wary of people who don't seem to struggle with sin.** They are probably fakes.

c. Don't feel the need or pressure to compromise-set aside- what the Scripture teaches to “just get along with everyone.” You are called to honor God. To try to steal honor from God in order to keep the peace is a theft for which you will have to give account.

You praise God when you stand up for truth.

d. You must be led by the Spirit of God. The best antidote for sin is to walk in the Spirit...listening to him...following him...talking to him...

Conclusion:

Liberty is guided by love—love for God and man. You don't have liberty to live however you want. Your freedom is enjoyed when it stays on the 2 tracks of God's law. That is where the Spirit of God leads you.

So brothers and sisters in the Lord:

1. You were set free from ceremonies that could not save you. You had a Savior who gave his life for you! Say, "Hallelujah."

2. You are now to set your heart on following God's Holy Spirit so you can enjoy freedom and serve God and his people. This is not some theoretical thing...but active. Will there be a fight between your selfish spirit and the Holy Spirit of God? Absolutely. Everyday! But you will win if you learn to die to your will and submit to the Lord's will.

You will find his will liberating! I repeat...

3. You are to proclaim this liberation to the world so those who are trapped with trying to earn their salvation by their own efforts or their religious ceremonies will be liberated.

Isn't that what you would want for your family and friends?

Finally: If you are not a Christian, you are still trapped in sin and misery and you can't pay your way out. Only with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross can you be made free. Ask God for the freedom today. He will remove your sins and let you'll live in freedom forever.