

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

There are a few preliminary things that need to be said.

1. Liberty in an absolute sense never is, and never will be, the final goal at which the child of God aims—either for himself or for another. It was absolute liberty that Adam hoped to achieve when he ate the fruit in the midst of the garden. It is this kind of liberty that is one of the major idolatries of our nation and which ultimately will bring us to ruin, if God does not send us His spirit of renewal and repentance. This ideal, if consistently followed, would overthrow all morality and religion of whatever sort, and would ultimately reduce us to anarchy, with every man’s hand set against his neighbor.
2. Because man is in the image of God, he is never an original no matter how hard he tries. Those who seek individuality for its own sake become grotesque and hollow shadows of men—for there is nothing behind the mask. They are hollow men, whose rebellion becomes more and more complete until they become suicidal or homicidal psychopaths, for their rebellion is ultimately against the God who created them in His own image.
3. Paul never advocates this type of liberty, an undefined liberty in which every man does as he pleases. This cannot be the standard for society, nor can it be the standard for the church. The reason this must be said is that the power of sin holds men in bondage and perverts the message of the Gospel. The gospel does not set men free to indulge the lusts and desires of the flesh, for that is a contradiction in terms. To be under the power of the flesh is to be in bondage to sin and death. Paul would write in another place, “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die, but if ye, through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” Romans 8:13.

Having said this, let us now look at the passage.

I. Christ has “freed us with freedom.”

- A. A Hebraic device. Freed us with freedom is contrasted with the yoke of bondage. What is the “yoke” of bondage? It is that which circumcision represented to the Jew: the righteousness of the law. In calling it a yoke, Paul is here agreeing with Peter, who used this same word at the Council of Jerusalem, saying that the law was a yoke, which neither they nor their Fathers could bear. In saying this, Peter is not saying that the holy fathers did not obtain salvation, but that they did not obtain it by carrying the burden of the law. In this he agrees with Paul, that the righteous obtained salvation by faith in the Promise and not by deeds of righteousness.
- B. In this, Paul and Peter do not just refer to ceremonies, but to the whole law, the moral requirements of the law. It is here that we most fail and in which the holiest of the fathers failed. The ceremonies are a piece of cake, compared to the holy requirements of the Ten Commandments. As our HC says in question Q114: Can those who are converted to God keep these Commandments perfectly? A114: No, but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of such obedience, yet so that with earnest purpose they begin to live not only according to some, but according to all the Commandments of God.
- C. The reason we cannot keep the Moral Law is because the inward character of the law is summarized in the Tenth Commandment: Thou shalt not covet—that not even the thought of sin is to enter our hearts. This is what the HC expresses in Q113: What does the tenth Commandment require? A113: That not even the least inclination or thought against any commandment of God ever enter our heart, but that with our whole heart we continually hate all sin and take pleasure in all righteousness.[1]
- D. This is because the moral law requires us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our minds.

II. How do the Ten Commandments become a “Yoke of Bondage”?

- A. There are many places in the Old Testament where the law is called a law of liberty and a delight and joy. How can they be a yoke of bondage?
 1. Psalms 119:45 And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.
 2. Psalms 1:2 But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.
 3. Psalms 40:8 I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law *is* within my heart.
 4. Psalms 119:47 And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.
 5. Psalms 119:77 Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law *is* my delight.
 6. Psalms 119:174 I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law *is* my delight.
- B. Let us unlock this puzzle—Is Paul himself against the law of God in its perfection and beauty. And I speak of the law in its summary: HC 4, 5

Q4: What does the Law of God require of us?

A4: Christ teaches us in sum, Matthew 22: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.[1]

Q5: Can you keep all this perfectly?

A5: No,[1] for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor.[2]

C. In order to understand this very important principle, we need to look at a couple of passages:

1. The first is the latter part of Romans 9 and the first part of Romans 10, which we read a moment ago in the Scripture reading.

31 But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.
 32 Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;
 33 As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.
 1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.
 2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.
 3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.
 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.
 5 For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.
 6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:)
 7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)
 8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;
 9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
 10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
 11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

2. Did the holy fathers know this? Yes they did, those who were justified by faith in the promise of the coming Redeemer.. The elect in the Old Testament did not seek salvation by works, but by faith. We saw that Abraham did, in chapter 4 of Galatians. Look at these other passages:
 - a. Psalms 119:77 Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law *is* my delight.
 - b. Psalms 32:2 Blessed *is* the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit *there is* no guile. Paul uses this passage in Romans 4 as an illustration of the righteousness of faith.
 - c. Psalms 34:18 The LORD *is* nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.
 - d. Psalms 51:17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

D. How was the law a yoke of bondage to the Galatians, that they could be “entangled” again? They were never under the law of Moses. This would be true if the “elements of the world” is the law of nature, which kept both Jews and Gentiles under bondage, the law which is written in the consciences of all men, and bind the consciences of all men, from which they are freed only by the blood of Christ.

This law says to the natural man: Do good things and you will live—the good things to the Jew was the love of God demonstrated and defined by the law of Moses; to the Gentile it is the love of God demonstrated in each man’s conscience—but both were a law of bondage, because of the power of sin in the flesh. It is only by the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that we are delivered from the law of sin and death to begin to truly love God and His people, because it is by the gospel that we are born again by the Spirit of God and renewed in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

May God bless you.