

LIVING YOUR LIBERTY

Galatians 5:13-15

The Christian is a free man! The calling of the Christian life is a calling to liberty. The objective of God in redemption was nothing less than setting man free. He desires for man to be free from the condemnation of law and free from the bondage of the law.

The freedom from the condemnation of the law involves forgiveness. Because Christ Jesus died for our sins on the cross, God calls us to a freedom from the penalty which the law would impose. Apart from the atoning death of Christ, we would never know such freedom.

As we have also learned in Galatians, God also calls us to freedom from the bondage of the law. He wants us to be free from the terrible obligation to keep the law. Before Christ came, man felt himself bound to the law. He felt that his only hope of ever gaining the favor of God was in carefully observing the law of God. But God called us to freedom. From Christ we have received freedom from the law. We are no longer under any obligation to the law of Moses. Does this sound radical? It sounded even more radical upon first century Jewish ears. Since it was such a radical view, it was open to misunderstanding and misuse. It was this which called for the insights set forth in our text. There are really two basic things here about living in liberty. These two insights are so important!

I. LIVING IN LIBERTY IS NOT LIVING WITH A LICENSE

"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." The admonition is "only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh." This may have been prompted by an abuse that some were then making of spiritual freedom. The gospel view of grace and freedom is surely open to such abuse. Or it may be that Paul's knowledge of sinful human nature prompted the warning. Man has a tendency to abuse everything good that God gives to him.

Let's just look in some detail at this statement. "Occasion" translates an interesting word. The word refers to a "spring board"; it was used in military language of a base of operations. The word indicates "a point of departure, a bridgehead, an occasion". "Flesh" is our sinful human nature, that element within us "which is opposed to goodness, and makes for evil". In the view of the apostle, we are still the possessions of "flesh" even after we came to know the liberty in Christ. This freedom in Christ does not include freedom from temptation, from desires that are evil, or from an inward inclination toward the wrong.

Do you understand the warning? Let me see if I can illustrate. Here is a man that we will call Bill. He has come to know the freedom of the Lord through faith in

the finished work of Jesus Christ. He knows that he is accepted before God on the basis of what Christ accomplished upon the cross, and that His righteousness is imputed righteousness, gift righteousness. So he begins to reason, "Since my salvation is dependent upon Christ, and I am free from the law, this means that I am free to do whatever I please." Operating on this principle, he finds himself drawn toward a young lady who works in the office. The law would regulate his behavior with those of the opposite sex and would prohibit any immoral behavior. But Bill is free from the law, so he uses his freedom in Christ as a basis for an immoral relationship with the young woman. He feels perfectly all right about it because of the understanding he has of Christian freedom.

Does that sound far-fetched? It is not! It happens every day still. I have known Christians who did not pay their debts because they were free from the law. Such is a gross misunderstanding of the liberty that is ours in Christ. Being free from the law does not give me a license to violate the great moral principles of the law. All such violations are committed by a saved man or an unsaved man. Lying is still lying. Adultery is still adultery! Stealing is still stealing. None of this is changed. My freedom from the law means simply that I am not dependent upon my obedience to the law to gain acceptance before God.

II. LIVING IN LIBERTY IS LIVING WITH LOVE

"But by love serve one another". This is what our liberty leads to! It does not give us liberty to do what we please, but rather sets us free to do what we ought.

"To serve" translates the verbal form of the word "bond slave", so literally the apostle declares that we are free to serve one another by love as slaves. This points us to the form of our service. We are to serve each other in the manner that a slave would serve his master. I am to regard you as being worthy of my best service. The motivation for this service is to be "agape love". My service that renders to you is not to be out of a sense of duty. I am not to do it because I believe that it will create merit for me before God. Rather I am to be moved by agape love. This love is so much more than emotional response to you; it is rather that I view you as being worthy of my sacrifice, and your good becomes the chief concern of my life.

Then Paul does a very paradoxical thing---he turns to the law for support. "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." He points us to the most legal book of the Old Testament, and to the most legal sections of that book for a grand statement. It is the same statement that Jesus selected as a summary of all that the law requires. Indeed, with reference to your fellowman, if you truly have agape love for him, you will fulfill everything the law requires of such relationships. He who truly loves will fulfill the law.

If you love your neighbor as yourself, you will not commit adultery with his wife or daughter. If you love her as you love yourself, you will seek her good --- not

her body. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you will not steal your neighbor's property, but will rather protect it. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you will not destroy his life, but will rather protect it. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you will not bear false witness against him, but will rather seek to protect his good name. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you will not covet his possessions, but will rather rejoice in his prosperity. Do you see how love is the fulfilling of the law? Yet, the motivation in all of this is not a legal sense of duty, but rather a deep concern and care for your fellowman.

So the liberty that we have in Christ enables us to relate to our fellowman. Foul warns that the bad relations that have been developing among the people are a contradiction., "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." Their turn to the law had produced a selfish attitude toward their fellowman. There was a real danger of the whole fellowship being destroyed. The point is that though I am free from the law, I am not free to do anything that will harm or hinder any other person. The freedom I know is a freedom to love and be helpful in every way possible.

CONCLUSION:

Would you look around you tonight. Who is sitting in front of you? Who is on either side? Who is behind you? Do you love them? Have you done anything recently to serve them? Is there any person in this room with a need that you could meet? Why have you not met that need? Is there anyone in this room, or in our church, or in our community with whom you have a bad relationship? I am going to ask you to do something with me tonight. I am going to ask you to commit yourself to do something this week that will be an expression of love to three people: to a member of your family, to a member of this church, to a member of this community.

I want us to take a moment for you to become definite in your mind about it. This will be a great week for you as you learn the joy of serving your fellowman in love.