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True Liberty

Scripture, Galatians 5:13-18

- 13 *For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*
- 14 *For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."*
- 15 *But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.*
- 16 *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.*
- 17 *For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.*
- 18 *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.*

Introduction

There are three ways we can attempt to incorporate the gospel of Christ into our daily lives. First, we can practice legalism which attempts to reduce the gospel to rules and regulations to live by. This approach may become a works oriented righteousness that ultimately destroys the gospel.

Second, Paul understood there is an opposite error which sees freedom as license to ignore rules. The technical term is antinomianism. This wrong-headed thinking suggests that we can do whatever we please because Jesus died for our sins and we are forgiven. It is a perverted thought to suggest we may as well sin with impunity because in the end the sins are absolved. Those who practice antinomianism talk about Jesus being love and thereby He allows all kinds of behavior. But, Jesus spoke of judgment and regarded Hell as a real place where real sins would meet their "just reward."

This study will suggest a third way. The gospel gives us liberty which is neither legalism nor license.

Verse 13. *For you were called to freedom, brethren...*

Freedom is granted because we no longer fear nor face the penalty of the Law if we are in Christ. This freedom releases our minds from worry about what happens when we face eternity. There are no worries for those in Christ.

...only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh...

Freedom is living by the Spirit that God has given to His people. If we live through Him who saves us we will not use our freedom to satisfy the flesh. Here Paul uses the idea of "flesh" as base instincts and sinful pursuits. True freedom does not enslave itself to earthly desires that are in conflict with God's will for our lives.

...but through love serve one another.

Remember Paul spoke of love in verse 5:6. Love is not in conflict with keeping the law because the law is a reflection of everything good about God and by faith we can know His love and love His law.

Verse 14. *For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."*

The phrase "one word" above is *logos* in the original language. *Logos* literally means "word" but it is also used in the sense of a principle. This can be expressed as, "What is the relationship between the law and loving one's neighbor?"

Paul is reflecting on the second table of the Ten Commandments which are the final six of the ten. The first four describe our relationship to God and the final six describe our relationship to others.

You love your parents by honoring them, you love people by not harming them, you love others by not sexually using them, you love by not stealing, you love by not lying about or to others, you love by not coveting your neighbor's possessions.

Verse 15 . *But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.*

This is a graphic warning to the Galatians. Paul is saying if you continue to eat each other you may end up totally consuming each other.

The Judaizers had introduced a critical spirit into the church, and this attitude centered around the inappropriate use of the law.

The Judaizers were pushing their brand of law keeping, but their instruction was outside the bounds of nurturing and loving each other. It was merely a dead symbol of a former age. When the law is operating as it should it will encourage love and fellowship.

Verse 16. *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.*

Paul uses the phrase "walk by the Spirit." The idea here is to have a Spirit filled lifestyle. All points of our lives should be guided by the Spirit. In the practical sense this means all of our endeavors should be covered in prayer, should be held to Scriptural standards, and should be compatible with the orthodox teachings of the church.

The independence of the self-ruling individual is not a biblical pattern for culture or our own particular lives.

Verse 17. *For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.*

If we focus on Spirit-led living then we will minimize our tendency to live by the flesh. The Spirit and the flesh are antithetical. One moves against the other.

The good news for the Christian is we can live a winsome and positive life. Christ does not call us to merely avoid a series of pitfalls and restrictions. The Spirit calls us to live by faith, to exercise love, and to have God's standards and His Law as our guide.

Paul includes a purpose clause ("so that") that says we may not do the things we please. Paul is saying there are certain classes of activities that are out of bounds. In the case of the Galatian church it was poisoning the gospel with ceremonial laws that only can lead to death.

We should not do as we please (in the sense of the world), but we should do as the Lord pleases. It encumbers us to know when doing what we please is in conformity to God's will, or is at odds with His purposes and His nature.

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

If we are led by the Spirit we will, of course, conduct ourselves in a way that is consistent with the love and purposes of God. This is true because the Spirit is of God. The Spirit of God cannot provoke us to live against the law as it is God's law. Jeremiah 31:31-34 tells us about living in the New Covenant which was mediated by Christ. We are in the New Covenant time and the prophet tells us that the law is written on the hearts of believers. It is internalized so we are more inclined to follow it.

Christ paid the penalty for our sins which Jeremiah says will be remembered no more. Paul is agreeing—we are not under the Law but we are under the Spirit and living New Covenant lives if we are in Christ.