

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **What is Christian Liberty?**

Scripture: Galatians 5:13-16

Code: 1667

The title of our discussion is the Christians' Liberation. Recently, I don't know if it's happened to you, but recently I have been subjected to one of the greatest definitions of freedom ever given. And I'm sure you've heard it if you've listened carefully. Freedom's just another word for datsun. Have you heard that? My that's astute. Aside from the fact that such a definition is so inane that words fail me to express it. The idea of the Madison Avenue Company that ever thought that up is pretty sharp. Because that slogan hits our world dead center.

We live in a day and age when men are seeking liberation and so are women. And there's a new one. I don't know if you've seen it. Children's lib. Freedom is the word today. Liberation is the cry. Do you own thing is the manifesto of the freedom movement. All authority is flaunted, torn down. Everybody is supposed to be able to respond only to one thing and that's the desire of his own heart. Everybody should be able to do exactly what he wants to do and self-centered is, as always, the motivating factor.

But I mean, let's be honest, this is not really freedom not in terms of a biblical definition, because Jesus said in John 8:34, "The man who does wrong is a slave to sin." And datsun doesn't set you free. And women's lib and children's lib and whatever other lib doesn't do it, but Jesus said this. "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free for real." Freedom comes in Jesus Christ. This is the manifesto of Christianity.

And Christianity is freedom. Christianity is liberation. I supposed that the reason that it's so very difficult for Christians to understand current liberation movements is because we can't really relate to bondage. Not if we're truly expressing our liberty in Christ. Now in the book of Galatians, we have already been told several times that we're free. And of course, what Paul is showing here is that there's no need to be circumscribed any more to the codes and rituals and ceremonies of legalistic Judaism. We have been set free from all of that in Christ.

And in Chapter 2 of Galatians and in verse 4 he talks about the fact that false brethren came into spy secretly on our liberty, which we have in Christ Jesus. That they might bring us in to bondage. The Christians in Galatia had been set free in Christ and some were trying to take them back into a legalistic kind of bondage. Then in Galatians 4, verse 21-33, you have entire allegory given over to define the Christian life as freedom. And it closes in verse 31, "So then brethren we are not children of the bond woman," that is of Hagar, "but of the free." So Paul has taken great pains to present the

fact that Christians are liberated people. We are free people. We have been set loose from all kinds of external bondage.

And particularly in the book of Galatians he has in mind the ceremonialism that is Judaism. Now when we talk about our liberty in Christ, we need to define that because it is a term that can run amuck if we're not careful and don't subscribe it to some kind of biblical definition. So when we say we're free when I say as a Christian I'm liberated, what do I mean. What is Christian liberty, what does it involve and how does it operate? We're going to consider those questions tonight. And just let's look at three questions.

Number one, what is Christian freedom? What does it mean when I say I am free in Christ? This is very important and really this amounts to a review of our past studies. Chapter 5 of Galatians, in verse 1 which saw some weeks back says this. "Standfast therefore in the liberty where with Christ has made us free and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Now the verse literally says this. For freedom Christ has set us free therefore standfast in that freedom and don't be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. For freedom Christ has set us free.

Christ set us free to be free men. Now in the book of Galatians, watch this, this means we are free from law. We are free from law. It is the freedom of conscience. The freedom from the tyranny of a legal system. Freedom from the terrible pressure and frustration of struggling to keep a code that we can't keep. We're set free. And so the freedom that the Christian knows is then at least beginningly in our thoughts, freedom from the oppressing awareness that we can't measure up to God.

But I don't have that bondage anymore because I do measure up in Christ. He accepts me in the beloved one. The Galatians as we've seen had been made mature sons, free men, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, no longer bound by external restraints but free in the Spirit to act out their own maturity and their own liberty from within. Now this is Paul's theme. Christianity is not bondage. Christianity is not slavery to a religious system. Christianity is absolute freedom.

And we've seen this over and over again. For example, through Jesus Christ, we have been delivered from the tiring relentless performance of religious ritual. And that's why in my own mind I resist and fight tooth and nail against any kind of formal ritual in the church. Because that's part of what we were freed from, right? The old covenant was legal, external, and it was given to demonstrate what true holiness is and to show men that they couldn't make it. They had all the external symbols to portray the sacrifice necessary for sin. They were pictures of the sacrifice to come and once the sacrifice came, there was no need any longer for the symbols.

So Christian liberty then is to take all that Christ provides, be free from having to fulfill a legal code to please God, being free from the frustration that says I can't make it. Being free from an external set of legal rules that I have to keep. Free to just function in the overflow of the work of the Spirit inside.

Christian liberty. And it all comes by faith in Jesus Christ.

There's no need to go back to circumcision, he says in Galatians. No need to go back to ceremonies. In fact, in Chapter 4, verse 10, he says you've gone backwards, you're observing days and months and times and years and I think maybe I've worked in vain. You're going back to things that are over with. No more ritual, no more ceremony, no more circumcision. You're free from all those external bindings.

Now it is true and I add this because it's important. It is true that the moral law of God hasn't changed. Nor has the believes obligation to that moral law changed. When I'm talking about the law in the general sense here that I've been using, and I'm talking about ceremonial ritual, but also the law morally is included in our freedom and I'll explain that in a few minutes. The apostle Paul was going around announcing all this doctrine about freedom and boy it was a tough thing for the Jewish people to swallow. It was a real stumbling block, because the Jew lived all his life under the legal system. And the Jew prided himself on the fact that he kept the law.

And in addition to that, the Jew believed, and this is important, he believed that the only real restraint to sin just running amuck and to the unbridled indulgence of passion, the only legitimate restraint was law. Do you understand what I mean? The Jew believed that the only way that you could stop sin from running ramped was to set up rules and regulations. And you know something in the old economy he was absolutely right. Absolutely right. The only way to stop sin, the only way to prevent everybody from just letting their passions run crazy was to set up rules and to make the punishment so serious. And in fact, in the Old Testament, you find that for adultery and such things like that what was the punishment? Death. And in the old covenant that was the way you halted the activity of sinfulness in the life of a person given over even to God by making rules with punishments so strong that you put fear in everybody's heart.

And here comes the apostle Paul and he floats in to town and he says I want you all to know you're liberated. No more rules. The average Jew is going to say oh wait a minute. How can you say that? Because passion will run wild. If you pull down all the little dos and don'ts and you strip back all of those little things, there's nothing to check indulgence. Now can you understand why he felt that way? The answer is simple. The unbelieving Jew did not understand what it meant to be saved and then have the Holy Spirit come to live inside. And if you read your Bible in 2 Thessalonians Chapter 2, you'll find that the Holy Spirit is called the restrainer. Have you read that?

And so now as a believer it is unnecessary for me to have a whole little list of laws and codes. I have the restrainer in me. And incidentally, His power within me is a lot greater than my own ability to halt myself in front of the wall of some law. And so it's easy to understand that to those who were accustomed to regard law and law keeping as the only controlling factor that stands in the way of self-indulgence and the free reign of sin. And to whom a highly ethical system was everything the

teaching of Christian liberty was a real threat.

And it is obvious that what happened was they accused Paul of being antinomian. That is lawless, of teaching a libertinism that just turned everybody loose. Well, now we're all Christians and we can just go do what we want. The Judaisers who had messed up the Galatians then had charged Paul with rejecting God's ethical law. And he hadn't done that all. He had simply said God's ethical law has gone inside. They didn't understand that. They didn't understand that things had gone internal since Christ came to live inside.

Now listen to this, from the old covenant and the mosaic law to the new covenant and the law of Christ, not one thing has changed in the mind of God. Do you think God has the same ethics today that He had then? Do you think He has the same morality today that He had then? Absolutely the same. There's no difference. The difference is we don't live as Christians under the bondage and slavery of an external system with terrifying results. We live under the internal restraints of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

And so we're not reacting to a code. We're responding to a person. Do you see the difference? That's important. The law was not set aside in its moral sense. Watch, in its ceremonial sense you can chunk it. Read Acts 10 and you'll see that. The Lord said to Peter, get rid of it all. Eat what you want, live it up. It's over with. The whole ceremonial thing, why? Because listen to me the ceremonial law had two functions. One, to make Israel a unique nation, right? They had to do things nobody else did so they'd stick out.

Two, to picture the coming sacrifice of Messiah. Once the sacrifice of Messiah was made, you didn't need the pictures any more, right? So that left only one reason. And the one reason was to keep Israel a peculiar nation, but once the church was established there was no more Israel as a peculiar nation. The Jew and the Gentile became what? One in Christ. So the ceremonial law goes aside, because one it was only for the unique identity of Israel. Two, it was only the picture of the coming of Messiah.

Once Messiah came, the second reason was gone. Once the church was begun, the first one was gone. But the moral law of God never changed at all. In fact, through the Holy Spirit in your life, now God will be able to accomplish what He endeavored to accomplish in the mosaic law of the Old Testament. So Paul gives not only the positive definition of what Christian liberty is, but he defines it very clearly here in verses 13-16. The law was not set aside. It just went inside, fulfilled internally by divine power rather than attempted externally by human power.

Now he's been accused apparently of being antinomian. That just comes from a word anti, which means against and nomia comes from nomas which means law in Greek, so he was anti law. He'd been accused of that and so he wants to answer that accusation. And so in verses 13-16 he shows

how Christianity is not against the moral law of God. Let me give you a little analogy to help you understand this.

In trying to think how you could express this. I think it was one of the commentators I was reading that hinted it at this idea. Perhaps it was Hendrickson. But Christianity resembles a narrow bridge and it is a bridge spanning a place where two streams come together. One of those streams is one of those crystal clear brilliant sparkling streams, however, it's a treacherous and deadly rapids. The other stream is a polluted, filthy, mucky, stagnant, vial swamp.

Stream number one so pure and sparkly and deadly is legalism. It comes on like great righteousness doesn't it? But you can't stay afloat it'll kill you. It'll smash you on its rocks. But the other stream, the polluted one, is libertinism. You fall into that and you'll drown in the filth of it. And so the Christian maintains balance on the bridge, between the destruction of legalism and drowning in the filth of libertinism. The believer must never lose his balance. There are some Christians who've fallen into the rapids of legalism and they're just getting beat to death.

There are other Christians who are wallowing around in the gross vices of libertinism and being garbaged to the point where they may be shipped out in ultimate discipline. Now this paragraph from 13-16 tells you how to stay on the bridge. It's a good place to be. Up to this point, Paul has been talking theologically. Now he's going to get real practical. In fact, Vincent Taylor once wrote, "The test of a good theologian is can he write a tract." It's good isn't it? It's nice that you can speak in all those flowery terms about all those mystical problems, but can you communicate with the average man.

Paul satisfies the test, believe me. He can go with the best in the theology and he can also come down to where we're at, can't he? Now, we've seen then what Christian liberty is. It's freedom from the bindings of the law. Let me go with Paul here and look at our passage and show you what Christian liberty is not. What Christian liberty is not.

Verse 13, "For brethren ye have been called unto liberty." Stop there. Now this is basic to Christian life. We are free. We are no longer under the bondage of a legal system as he's being saying over and over again. No reason to get circumcised. No reason for feasts and new moons and Sabbath and all those things. And you know, there are some people today who want all kinds of ritual. There are even some Jewish people who want to maintain the Sabbath and they want to do this and they want to do the other. That's all gone. That's all finished. There's no need for any of that.

Now the fact that all that ceremonial stuff is set aside, please does not mean that we change our morality. That we turn in the ethics of Judaism for some kind of new morality. None at all. That doesn't mean that what God held as true in the Old Testament all of sudden fades away and we've got some new stuff coming along in the New Testament. No. Now watch this, it is not at all a change in the content of God's moral law. It is only a change in the way God brings about the fulfillment of it. From

the external fear impulse to the internal. From the code of ethics to the dwelling of the Holy Spirit. That's the difference.

Let me give you an illustration. Turn in your Bible to Exodus 21. Now this is a most interesting instruction in Exodus 21. And here you have a lot of various and sundry instructions connected to the Ten Commandments which are given in 20. There are all kinds of other ceremonial things involved. And just to pull one of them out that I think is most interesting is 21:1. "Now these are the ordinances which thou shalt set before them." Here's some of the ceremonial law.

"If you buy a Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve. And in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing." Seventh year let him go, turn him loose, he's on his own. "If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself. If he was married then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given a wife and she had born him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her masters and he shall go out by himself." In other words, there had to be the fulfillment of that six years. If he married and the wife didn't marry till the third year, she's got to fill out her six. That was the standard.

Now, "If the servant shall plainly say," verse 5, "I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go out free. And his master shall bring him unto the judges. He shall also bring him to the door or unto the door post and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul, and he shall serve him forever." You just lay his earlobe up against the door and pfff, put a hole in it. The original pierced ear.

You say what is that trying to illustrate? Just this, the man serves for six years under a legalistic bondage because he has to. The seventh year he can walk out, he's a free man. You know what he does with his freedom? He says I want to take my freedom to serve you because I what? I love you. Now watch. There isn't one bit of difference between what the guy did the first six years and what he does the rest of his life. It's all service. What's the only difference? The only difference is that it has ceased to be an external requirement and it's become an internal desire. Do you see?

And in a very real sense when you were saved God just punched a hole in your ear because the moral code of Israel and Moses never changed for a Jew. If you were a Jew who was saved it was just like getting punched in the ear. A Jew kept the same law, but when he became saved you can throw out that morality. He merely began to do it not because it was out there as a fear thing, but because inside he loved his master and he had the capacity and the energy of the indwelling Christ to fulfill it.

Now that's how it is with our liberty. You can go back to the book of Galatians. Our liberty has no real relation to the morals or the spiritual standards of God. Our liberty has to do with the motive. A devout Jew, now watch this, a devout Jew lived all his life by the code of Moses morally and by the ceremonies when he became saved would drop the ceremonies, but the code of moral truth in the Old Testament would never change. The only difference would be at some point when he came to

Christ his reason for behavior would change.

And I'll tell you another thing, whereas under the mosaic fear economy he tried to keep it, but never could. By the indwelling Christ he will. And so we are free, not free to disobey, but free to do what's right not because we have to do, because we what? Want to. Do you know what freedom is? Freedom is the ability to be able to do what you want. I used to say every time I want to, I'd rob a bank. I do. Every time I want to, I hit people. Every time I want to, I get stoned drunk. You know something? I don't ever want to. I've no desire to do that. But you know something, if I didn't have the indwelling restrainer, I'd fight that thing constantly.

You know, just imagine two houses built on the same block with a huge giant pane of glass in the front. Identical houses, one guy puts a sign on his lawn, do not throw rocks through the window. The other guy puts nothing there. Who's going to get it first? There's just something about that kind of standard that irritates somebody. That's Paul meant in Romans 7 when he says, "The law stirs up sin in me."

But I don't need that external anymore, because the Holy Spirit inside restrains it. So I'm free. But now what does this mean? We said that there are some things that Christian liberty is not. Let me give you the three that Paul gives you. First of all, Christian liberty is not to indulge the flesh. Christian liberty is not to indulge the flesh. Look at verse 13 again. "For brethren you have been called unto liberty only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh." Christian freedom is not to indulge the flesh.

What do you mean by the flesh? Well, we certainly don't mean what's clothing your boney skeleton. We don't mean the physical body. What do we mean? We mean the fallen human nature, the twisted self that's prone to sin. The old man, if you will. No you weren't set free in Christ to do whatever you want. And you know, this inevitably what people say when you get in to a discussion say on eternal security. Someone will say do you believe in the security of the believer? Yes. Then they'll always say if they don't believe, they'll say, in other words, you can do anything you want and still be saved.

And I always say no. No, because you see Christian liberty is not the liberty to indulge the flesh. If you're truly saved, you won't indulge the flesh to that degree. Because there's a restrainer inside. All right, look at it again. Verse 13. "Brethren, you have been called unto liberty not to use it as an occasion to the flesh." The word occasion, aphorme. It's a military term and it's speaks of a base of operation. Don't make your flesh the base of your operation. Don't say well, I'm a Christian. I'm going to go to heaven, therefore I can do whatever I jolly well want to do.

No, he says you are not made free to use your liberty as a springboard for the flesh. And he's really telling the Galatian Judaisers who come in and tried to say this is what he was teaching that it isn't so. Our freedom does not imply this. But I'll tell you something, you know, there are people who would like to do this. And I have run into Christians from time to time who are on the borderline of buying

that heresy. That Christian liberty means I can sin and get away with it or I can sin and not be condemned or I have the privilege of doing whatever I want. They would defend the fact that you can booze it up and have all the worldly amusements you want and sex and smutty reading and dirty movies and you can appeal to Christian liberty.

No, no, that's very clear here. Christian liberty is not to be used as an occasion for the flesh. In fact, that message whenever I hear that message, you know what my conclusion is, that they're not saved. You say why? Because if they're truly saved, the Spirit would be restraining. You read Romans 8. You read Romans 8 and you'll find that one of the works of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8 is to subdue the flesh. In fact, whenever you hear somebody propagating do what you want as a sort of a side light in Christian liberty, you can classify them according to 2 Peter 2:18. Turn to it and I'll show you what I mean.

2 Peter 2:18 describes false teachers. "For when they speak great swelling words of vanity they allure through the lusts of the flesh through much wantonness those that are just escaping from them who live in error." Those that are just escaping means here's some people who are tired of their lifestyle. They've decided to seek another way to live. They're searching. Maybe they're even searching "for God," and they run into some false teachers. And watch verse 19.

What do the false teachers promise? "Well they promise them," what, "liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption for of whom a man is overcome of the same as he brought into bondage." Some people just coming to the place in life where they're seeking for God or for salvation or for something. At least they're sick of their lifestyle. And somebody comes along and says hey, we've got the religion that says do what you want. Do your own thing. There's really no particular ethics but your own. You can apply what you want to it. Man this is what you hear over and over again connected with eastern religion.

So whenever anybody comes along and preaches antinomianism you can classify them in 2 Peter or if you want another verse, you can classify them in Jude 4. "Certain men crept in unawares before of old ordained to this condemnation," listen to this, "ungodly men turning the grace of our God into the lasciviousness." And lasciviousness just means evil. "Turning grace into license." That's what a false teacher does. No, Christian freedom is not freedom to sin. It's freedom from sin.

You know to give you another angle on it, it means that when you're free, you're free to stop being self-centered and be unselfish. Now the greatest liberty in the world is to be free from yourself, right? To be able to give. The best illustration in the world of this is Jesus. He knew liberty like it's unbelievable. In Romans 13:14, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh." There's a contrast there. You either make provision for the flesh or you put on Jesus Christ. You say what does he mean put on Jesus Christ? Well, you see Jesus Christ made no provision for His own desires. No, not all. He said this, and this is what Paul said in Romans 15:3, "Christ didn't please



Himself." Christ said this, "my meat is to do," what, "the will of Him that sent me."

Yes, Christ was free. He didn't please Himself. He's the perfect example of selflessness. True Christian freedom is to be free from slavery to self desire and to be totally liberated to do whatever God wants you to do. And that's an exciting kind of liberty. The implication is simple. Our aim is not to please ourselves. It's to please the Lord. That's real freedom. Christian liberty is not freedom to please the flesh, but to please the Lord.

And our motivation is not just the stiff upper lip of duty. But it's the loving service of gratitude to one who set us free. And there's great flexibility in there, great flexibility. As we look at the Old Testament, for example, the area of sex is very, very clearly defined. God tolerates no extra-marital, pre-marital sex at all. And nothing outside the marriage bond and there are some very severe prescriptions for anybody who engages in adultery, fornication of any kind bestiality which is sex with animals, homosexuality, anything like that. It is tremendously condemned in the Old Testament.

Now in the New Testament are we to assume all of sudden God's changed all of his patterns? That now because we have liberty in Christ we can do whatever we want to do and we can say well, we love each other. You say who would ever say something dumb like that. Oh plenty of people, believe me. We even have branches of the church now for homosexual. As if God has thrown the Old Testament out. Nothing has changed. God's patterns haven't changed anymore than God has changed. The day God changes His morals is the day God dies and some new God is born, right?

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever. God doesn't change. The advocates of free sex today have infiltrated even Christianity. It's taken for granted that sexual love is the most important thing and the only way to express love is through sex. And it's got to be right because we like each other and after all we prayed. And everything in the name of freedom and Christ. That's not freedom and Christ, that's the same old slavery to self. The same old slavery to lust. The same old slavery to the flesh.

God's ethics haven't changed one bit, not one bit. They're the same as they were under Moses law. The whole thing has just ceased being external. It's gone inside and the energy of the Holy Spirit. Ceased being a fear motive and become a love motive. I don't serve Jesus Christ because I'm afraid of Him. I serve Him because I love Him, right? You can relate to that. Cease being impossible in the flesh and become possible in the Spirit. So our freedom is not licensed to indulge in the flesh, but freedom to know victory over the flesh. Christian freedom then is not freedom to indulge the flesh.

Secondly, Christian freedom is not freedom to injure others. You know, this is a very important area. Look at verse 13 again, back to Galatians here, 5:13. "For brethren you have been called unto liberty only use not liberty for an occasion of the flesh, but by love serve on another." Oh that's so good. Somebody could say hey look man, I'm free in Christ, so I'm going to do what I want and that's how it

is. And you go waltzing off, stomping all over a whole lot of other Christians.

Somebody put it this way not in the biblical context, but he said "your freedom ends where mine begins." And that's right spiritually. The argument of the Judaisers would have been oh that's great everybody's free, so everybody just mows down anybody in the way. And here we get into this whole area of Christian liberty and relationship to my brother. My liberation is not to hurt my Christian brother. Verse 13, look at it. It's very simple. It says this, by love, agape, supreme kind. By love serve one another.

Now here we come again with the death to self. Your freedom in Christ isn't to do whatever you want, it's to do that which is going to help your brother not hurt him. I like this word serve. It's douleuo. It means bond slavery. It means to do that which would serve someone else. Make yourself a slave of someone else. You say that's a kind of a paradox isn't it? Liberty and slavery? Yeah, that's a paradox, but it isn't a contradiction. For such service is voluntary. You say what are you trying to say John?

I'm trying to say what Paul said in Romans 14 and 15. So we might as well go there, because he said it a lot better than I'm saying it. But it's very easy, now think about this, it's very easy for the Christian to say well, I'm free in Christ, so I'll do that and go and do it and make somebody else stumble, right? Paul plays the service over selfishness. Now looking at Romans 14, notice verse 1, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye but not to doubtful disputations."

And here we have two kinds of people, two kinds of Christians. Did you know there are two kinds? There are. You say men and women. That's two kinds, but that's two different kinds. Two kinds of Christians. You say what are they? Weak and strong. You say what's a weak one? A legalistic one. What's a strong one? A free one. A mature Christian is one who understands his liberty. A weak one who's still hung up on the law. Now the weaker brother just couldn't accept his liberty. You say well, what do you mean by that?

Well, let me illustrate it this way. All right in the church, for example, at Rome, you've got a lot of Jewish people. Okay, some Jewish people get saved. And some of these Jewish people get saved and they're told all of a sudden you're free, no more bondage to the ceremonies, you can change your diet. You can change your cooking habits. You can change all the feasts. You can alter everything. You're free from all of that. And he just gags. There's no way he's going to do that. There's no way he can get by the Sabbath and not keep all the laws. He's not about to carry sticks on the Sabbath. He's not about to work on Saturday so he can meet with the Christians on the Lord's day, the first day of the week. He can't do that in that his conscience yet.

And he may get invited over to a liberated brother's house whose having pork chops. He can't eat them. He...there's something in his conscience that just doesn't let him accept his freedom. Do you see? He is free. He can't accept this freedom. So what is this other liberated character over here do?

Does it just say hey fellow what's wrong with you and sit and eat pork chops right in his face. You see that would be to flaunt his liberty wouldn't it?

And all you'd be doing would be hurting him and wounding him and injuring him and making him think less of you, because he still thinks these things are right. The best thing to do is don't eat those pork chops because then you don't offend him. Well, that's the point. There is some that are weak in the faith. Verse 2, "One believes that he may eat all things. Another who is weak is a vegetarian." You say well does the Bible teach you should be a vegetarian. But if you want to be a vegetarian, you can be a vegetarian. Notice it says who is weak eateth herbs. I didn't say that. It's right there.

And perhaps they were not pure vegetarians, but they were trying to avoid meats offered to idols. Now some guy it's legalistic. You know, of course, that it says in 1 Timothy that all things should be received at Thanksgiving. And that all those animals and the sheep in Acts 10 and the Lord said to Peter, "Rise Peter, kill and," what, "eat." So don't worry about trying to vegetarianism biblically. It can't be done. So there may be a guy though who just doesn't want to take a chance on eating some meat that had been offered to an idol. You know people would offer things to idols and they'd go out the back door with the stuff and sell it on the street to people and they would wind up buying food that was offered to an idol. Which is no big thing, but for some it was a stumbling block.

So verse 3 says, "Let not him that eats despise him that eats not. Let not him who eats not judge him that eats. For God's received him." Listen God takes the weak and the strong, the eaters and the non-eaters. So don't make a big issue over whether he eats or doesn't eat a certain thing. And he says to the strong in Chapter 14, listen just remember the weak person hasn't yet discovered the meaning of his freedom. At heart, he's still a legalist. He still sees Christianity as a set of rules. He hasn't yet understood his liberty. And boy there are a lot of Christians like that. I'm telling you, there are a lot of churches like that. Where in the church, they set up a code of rules where everybody has to function by the rules.

You know what they're doing? They're implying that the work of the Holy Spirit inside is inadequate. That's right. They're trying to go mosaic. They're trying to re-establish an external code. There are some people who don't understand their liberty and so they live according to certain ritual and rules. Now what do you do to them? If you're a stronger brethren and you're not hung up on that, do you mock him and say look at him, look at him? Weakling. No, you receive him as a beloved brother. Yes, verse 1, receive ye, receive ye.

That's very important. Your freedom is no excuse and now we're talking about neutral things, non-moral things like eating certain foods and such neutral things. You say what do you mean neutral? Well, you say does that mean baptism? No, it doesn't mean baptism. Does it mean reading the Bible? No. Does it mean shopping at Montgomery Wards on Sunday. Yes. If in your mind there's something wrong with shopping at Montgomery Wards or Save-on on the Lord's day, then that's fine. That's a

non-moral thing. That's just the way you feel. Maybe you've been raised that way. I'm not going to take you over there and push in the door and say be free my brother be free.

That's where you are, I love you, and I'll say praise the Lord and I don't go there either because I don't want somebody to see me go there who doesn't think that's the thing you should do and then say well look at John, he did that and I'm offended. Now what he's saying is let the Lord deal with it. Verses 4 and 5, he just says "Let the Lord take care of this." "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. You let God be the judge of him."

Verse 5, "One man esteems one day above another. Another esteems everyday alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. If the guy wants to keep the Sabbath for a while, it's fine, just don't offend him. Just let him do it. There's no sense in making an issue out of it. Verse 6, "He that regards the day regards it under the Lord." I mean, if a guy wants to keep the Sabbath, he's doing it for the Lord, he thinks it's right. "He that regards it not to the Lord he doesn't regard it." He's saying man I'm free from that. I don't want to keep that anymore. "He that eats, eats to the Lord and gives God thanks. And he that eats not does it to the Lord and gives God thanks." So don't make an issue out of it.

The Lord will take care of all the decisions. Verse 10 of the judgment seat of Christ. He'll make all the dispositions. What did Peter say in 1 Peter 2:16? Do you remember this? "Never use your liberty as a cloak of," what, "maliciousness." Don't flaunt your freedom over somebody who doesn't understand it. You're going to meet legalistic brothers. You're going to meet people who think it's wrong to dress a certain way. It's wrong to do certain things on the Lord's day. It's wrong to use certain kinds of...you know there are some people who you say oh golly, and people go oh a minced oath. And they give you this long lecture about golly is a contraction of God or something or another. You know, you've heard that. The best thing you can do is just avoid it.

You certainly don't want to just flaunt it. No you want to serve lovingly the need of your brother, even though he's weaker. Now look at verse 13. "Let us not therefore judge one another anymore, but judge this rather that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." Don't do anything that's going to make your brother stumble. Verse 21, jump down, "It's good neither to eat meat or drink wine nor anything by which thy brother stumbles is offended or made weak." That's right. If somebody is offended...now nobody today is offended in terms of meat or foods, certain foods. We don't have foods offered to idols, but there are some people who get offended by people who drink wine. I don't drink wine. One of the real reasons I don't is just because of this verse. It is good not to do that because it will inevitably make somebody stumble and make somebody be offended and somebody will be made weak. And I'd just rather not do that to my brother.

Now you'll notice three concepts in verse 21. "It is good neither to eat meat, drink wine, or anything by which thy brother stumbles or is offended or made weak." Stumbling means to halt the progress. You

can actually halt the progress of a Christian by doing something in front of him which his conscience doesn't allow him to do. You say well, how do you mean that? We'll pursue it a little further. You can offend him. First of all, you jeopardize your testimony don't you? He thinks less of you as a Christian as well as the fact that you've offended him. In other words, you've said in effect to him, I don't care what you think I'll do what I want. And that hasn't shown him love.

But notice this little phrase, be made weak. That is really interesting. If he has stumbled and become offended, he will probably fall back further into legalism. That's right, because when he sees that thing going on in his face, such liberty will nauseate him and often force him back into deeper legalism. And he'll fall further away from real freedom and Christ. Well, verse 14, "I know when I'm persuaded by the Lord Jesus. There's nothing unclean of itself. But to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean to him it's unclean." Isn't that right? Boy it may not be unclean in itself, but if a guy thinks it is, he just can't handle it. So bring him a long lovingly, slowly.

Verse 15, "If thy brother be grieved with thy food you're not walking in love. Destroy not him with your food for whom Christ died." Jesus loves that guy. Loves his heart. Don't exercise your liberty in his face to the point where you destroy your testimony and you cripple him and push him further into legalism.

Verse 17, "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Those are the things that matter. Verse 20, "For food destroy not the work of God." Well, one other verse. 2 and 3, Chapter 15, two verses, well, let's go all three of them. "We then that are strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves." Now see there's the crux of the whole issue. We're not to please ourselves. "Let everyone of us please his neighbor for his good to edification for even Christ pleased not," what, "Himself."

I'll tell you something beloved, Christian liberty is not the freedom to injure my brother. Do you see it now? It is not the freedom to do whatever I want and say I'm free, I'll live it up. It is the freedom to lovingly serve that brother. There are some things that I could do that are not wrong. But they are those gray area things that to some people would be very, very wrong. And so I don't do those things, because I wouldn't do anything consciously to offend my brother. For that would be a misuse of my liberty. That would be a gross misuse of the freedom that the Lord has given me.

Now go back to Galatians Chapter 5 and let's wrap it up. On the other hand, if you decide you're just going to use your liberty, you're going to do whatever you want. You're going to live it up. You're going to go out and drink and smoke and do whatever else and dance and party around and go to Las Vegas and do whatever you want and maybe even throw in some of those little kind of neutral things and just live it up. Do you know the result? Verse 15, "If you bite and devour one another take heed that you be not consumed one of another."

If you're just going to accept to exercise your liberty and just stomp all over everybody else, you know what's going to happen? You're just going to have the whole church fighting itself. You know the words bite and devour are words used primarily of animals. Bite, daugnate, is a word that is used to speak of animals. We act like animals, beasts. Devour means to gulp down. If you're just going to go around and just take chunks out of each other and gulp them down, you're going to wind up being consumed, analothata, annihilated. You know what will happen to the unity of the body if everybody does that? If everybody exercises his own liberty? Will destroy these people.

You say well, John, you could sure really change your whole life pattern if all I did was go around worrying what everybody thought. Yeah, but it's wonderful to do that, because that's what the Bible says. By love, serve one another. Don't use like Peter said, don't use your liberty as a cloak of maliciousness. So Christian freedom then is not the freedom to indulge the flesh and is not the freedom to injure others.

Thirdly, and lastly, Christian freedom is not to ignore the law. You can't say well, I'm free in Christ. I'm going to ignore the whole law. Verse 14, look at it, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word even this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Listen people, freedom in Christ isn't freedom to ignore the law. It's freedom to what? Fulfill the law. Isn't that great. Freedom to fulfill the law. For Paul the moral law was still the expression of the will of God. Romans 7, you read it. He loved the law. He says, "I delight in the law."

It was still God's law, but Paul says I'm not bound externally in the concrete forms of Judaism. But I have the internal form of the law, love of Christ bubbling out of my life in which the whole law is fulfilled. The law is summarized in love. That's nothing new. That's Leviticus 19:18, tells us the law is summarized in love clear back then. And it's now made possible by the power of the indwelling Christ. No, the requirements haven't changed. But the basis of operation has gone inside. And the law is simply this, "love thy neighbor as thy self."

This then is the message that Paul is giving. Christian liberation does not result, listen, in pagan vice. It does not result in the destruction of others in a plethora of personal pleasure seeking. And Christian liberty does not ignore God's moral law. It fulfills it from the inside. And you know if you read Romans 13:8-10 he says, you know, "You've heard the law, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not covet," thou shalt not do this, thou shalt not do that, and they said the whole law is fulfilled in this. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self." You know, if you have love you don't need those laws.

Do I need a law that says don't kill if I love somebody? Do I need a law that says don't covet if I love somebody? Do I need a law that says don't steal if I love somebody? Am I going to steal from the one I really love. Am I going to kill the one I really love? Am I going to covet from the one I really love? Am I going to commit adultery against the one I really love? No you see, if love is there, all the rest of the

law is fulfilled. You'd say I'd sure like to have that love. You do the moment you're saved. That's the point of the whole text. When you were saved the love of Christ was what? Romans 5:5, "Shed abroad in your heart and you fulfill the whole law."

It's there. And when the Christian acts on the principle of love, he is fulfilling everything that mosaic law was intended to accomplish, but he's doing it from the inside. So we're called the freedom beloved. Freedom in Christ, not to serve self anymore, but I'm liberated from myself to serve God. Number one, to serve God, and then to serve others.

Now in those three points that I gave you, we have every relationship covered. That's right. First of all, I told you that Christian liberty is not freedom to indulge the flesh, right? That's self-control. Christian liberty is self-control. Not freedom to indulge the flesh, control self. Secondly, I said that Christian liberty is not freedom to injure others. That has to do with loving others, ministering to others. Thirdly, I said Christian liberty is not freedom to ignore the law, but to fulfill it. That's toward God. The first point toward self. The second point toward others. The third point toward God.

My freedom is expressed in self-control, love of others, obedience to God's law. Every relationship is harmonized in Christian liberty. You say John, I sure wish I had that. How? I mean, it's nice to say all that about my Christian liberty, but how does it operate. And that's the third and last question in our study. How is the expression of freedom possible? Are you ready for this? You want to know how it's possible. Verse 16, "This I say then," what's the next phrase, "walk in the Spirit." Stop right there.

We'll cover this verse next time. I just want to hint at the start of it. "Walk in the Spirit." Oh that's so exciting. Listen the operation of Christian liberty is not automatic. We must walk in the Spirit. The Spirit is there. When I was saved I came out of the control of self, out of the control of a system of legal and enactments, into the control of a person, God the Holy Spirit. When God set the law aside at the cross He knew what He was doing. He didn't leave the world without a restrainer. No. You want to hear something interesting? Did you know that God ran the world for 2,500 years plus before Moses ever arrived without the law? Yes, He did. Did a good job.

And I'll tell you, God can run the world after the law has been set aside just as well as He ran it before. You say but without the rules, how will He restrain sin? He'll restrain sin by the indwelling presence of whom? The Holy Spirit. People let me tell you something personal from my life. I chaff like gangbusters under an illegal system. I spent the most carnal years of my Christian life in a legalistic Christian institution. Those were the most carnal years of my Christian life. You know why? Because externals were being substituted for the work of the Holy Spirit. And consequently I ignored the work of the Holy Spirit and endeavored to subscribe myself to externals.

I didn't do the Spirit any favors did I? God will fulfill His entire law in me, if I do what? Walk in the Spirit. On the other hand, you say, but what if you don't walk in the Spirit. Then you need the rules.

No, if I don't walk in the Spirit, the rules won't make me spiritual. What'll they do? They'll make me mad. And they did and that's why I left in a hurry. Listen to me, no one ever enables Christians to live a better life by putting them under law. No, you never enable Christians to live a better life by putting them under law and fear because what you've done is you have substituted for the Holy Spirit.

And some people would say to me, well, John, in your church you have these rules about this and rules about that. No, but you know what we have? We have the Holy Spirit. What else do we need? You say, but how do you get people to conform? Well, listen friend if I have to resort to...resort to rules to get people to conform and nothing happening anyway. And so he says if you just walk in the Spirit, it's all going to flow. Don't you remember Romans 7 where Paul was trying to live according to the code. "I love the law of God. I'm working on it. But you know everything I want to do, I don't do. And everything I don't want to do, I do. Oh wretched man that I am. And he wallows around in his inability to keep the ethics of God.

And finally he comes bouncing in Romans 8 and he says you know what happened, I just discovered the Holy Spirit and I've been made free from the law of sin and death by the Spirit. Walk in the Spirit and I'll tell you something friend you'll stay on the bridge. Let's pray.

God, we're so glad You set us free in Christ and we sense that freedom and we feel liberated, unbounded. We feel that we could scale the heights into thy very presence and know that we're welcomed and loved. We thank You Father that we don't have to try to prescribe our lives carnally after a set of external rules, but that we can live in response to the blessed Holy Spirit. Father, we know for that there is no substitute. Lord we thank You that we've been able to share tonight. Thank You that You've spoken to my own heart, clarified, and refreshed many things. I pray truly that this has occurred in the lives of all of us gathered in this place.

Blessed Lord, we think too that perhaps there are some here who've never known the freedom in Christ because they've never bowed at the feet of Jesus Christ and acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior. We know the Bible says that every knee shall bow some day, but Father in that day it's going to be too late for some. If there are any here tonight who have not bowed, may this be the day that they bow before Jesus Christ accepting the freedom that He gives, perfect forgiveness. Absolute peace and acceptance with thee. For those who are Christians Father who may have been under legalism, we pray that You'd help them to grow slowly to understand the freedom.

For those who are stronger brothers who understand their liberty that You'd give them a great deep compassion at love those who are not yet so free that we might circumscribe our lives in love to those that we may not offend. And Father, help us to realize too that if we're truly walking in the Spirit, we'll fulfill the whole law from the love that flows out from the Spirit within. God help us to stay between libertinism and legalism walking in the Spirit, fulfilling the law, loving each other and not serving the flesh. To this end we pray that Christ may be exalted in us. In Christ's name. Amen.



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