

GALATIANS – Lesson 18

5:13-16 - “Freedom In One Word”

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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.

3 WAYS TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

1. LEGALISM = living by a standard of righteousness
2. LICENCE = living out whatever feels right, as long as you “love God”
3. LIBERTY = living to please God in attitude and action

In Galatians, Chapter 5, the apostle Paul denounces #1-LEGALISM in verses 1-12. He then denounces #2-LICENSE in verses 13-15, which we examine today. And beginning in verse 16, he teaches true LIBERTY as the only correct Christian option.

True Christian freedom in one word: LOVE

We are in the final two chapters of Galatians, where Paul has moved to the practical teaching on how the Christian is to be justified by faith, and not by rule-keeping.

In verses 1-12 of chapter 5 he has denounced LEGALISM or “rule-keeping” as the correct way to live out our Christian faith.

***5:4-5** You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.*

Simply said: You are ruining your relation to Jesus if your M.O. is “Christianity by self-effort,” i.e. “doing the best I can.” Rather, it is “Christianity by faith and the Spirit” that pleases God.

But LEGALISM is not the only wrong way to live our Christian life. In verses 13 and following, Paul addresses the wrong of LICENCE:

***5:13** 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.*

Yes, God's gospel of grace has set us free from bondage to rule-keeping.

But this does not give us LICENCE to do whatever we please.

√ "Opportunity for the flesh" can be interpreted as fleshly indulgences – clearly not how Christians should live their lives.

√ But it can also be interpreted as "doing your own thing" – i.e. living for self. And this is equally not the way God wants us to live.

The most important theologian of the western church in the first millennium was St. Augustine. He lived 354-420 in North Africa. And from age 37 until his death at age 76 he was the bishop of the city of Hippo, faithfully building upon the teachings of Jesus and the apostle Paul.

His most famous quote is "**Love God and do whatever you please.**" Clearly this can be wrongly interpreted as teaching LICENCE.

I have known Christian brothers and sisters who are convinced that their Christian freedom allows whatever choices they want to make, as long as they still "love God." They wrongly follow an incorrect interpretation of St. Augustine's teaching.

But let's examine Augustine's complete statement:

"Love God and do whatever you please; for the soul trained in love to God will do nothing to offend the One who is Beloved."

St. Aurelius Augustine (354-430)

I couldn't say it better! Augustine was teaching on Galatians 5:13, which teaches LIBERTY, but not LICENCE. True Christian LIBERTY is neither LEGALISM nor LICENSE, but a deep LOVE for God and others that seeks to please Him in all our attitudes and actions.

In verse 14, Paul goes on to give us Christian **FREEDOM IN ONE WORD: LOVE**

5:14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Here Paul is quoting Leviticus 19:18:

Leviticus 19:18 "... you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord"

As we examine Leviticus 19 closer we find a long list of God's commandments, covering many topics:

- ✓ Don't reap your whole field or gather fruit from your vineyard on the ground – leave some for the needy (v. 9-10)
- ✓ Don't steal or lie (v.11)
- ✓ Don't swear falsely by God's name (v. 12)
- ✓ Don't oppress or rob your neighbor (b. 13)
- ✓ Don't curse a deaf man or cause a blind man to stumble (v. 14)
- ✓ Don't be partial either to the poor or to the great (v. 15)
- ✓ Don't go about as a slanderer (v. 16)
- ✓ Don't hate your fellow countryman in your heart (v. 17)
- ✓ Don't take vengeance or bear a grudge (v. 18a)
- ✓ Don't cross-breed cattle (v. 19a)
- ✓ Don't sow the same field with two kinds of seed (v. 19b)
- ✓ Don't commit fornication with a slave woman (v. 20) etc, etc.

Right in the middle of this chapter, amidst all these other laws, we find:

- ✓ Love your neighbor as yourself (18b)

It is the ONLY law that is positive instead of negative (don't...) And Paul tells us that this law – one out of hundreds of others – is the fulfillment of the whole Law. In fact he picks ONE WORD out as the fulfillment of the whole law, and that would be "LOVE."

Matthew taught it this way by relating a true story in the life of Jesus:

Matthew 22:35-40 *One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him: "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."*

Again: LOVE. And, "love your neighbor" implying that this is how we truly "love God" – by doing nothing that would harm another in any way.

Jesus taught it this way in the upper room, the night before he was to die:

John 13:34 *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*

We see that the “new” part of the commandment is to love “as I have loved you” - that is, following the love example of Jesus for his own

Paul is teaching the PRACTICAL lesson that walking in TRUE FREEDOM by faith is walking in LOVE by SERVING OTHERS. FREEDOM = LOVE in service. The next verse warns against what could be called “Christian Cannibalism”:

5:15 *But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.*

This is a graphic way of describing what LEGALISM and LICENSE do to others. It is the opposite of LOVE.

Note: “bite,” “devour” and “consume.” We can do this in many ways: gossip, judging, showing preferences, manipulation, lying, ignoring, snide remarks – and the list goes on and on. But they all are failure to LOVE.

Christian LEGALISM and LICENSE are SELFISH – they are about self-satisfaction by rules kept or pleasures enjoyed.

Christian LIBERTY is SELF-LESS

So now we come to the VERY IMPORTANT v. 16. This is the verse that propels Paul’s thought through the remainder of the chapter. It is a CRITICAL verse of practical Christian living. We will discuss it the following next week. But for now, let’s examine it as a closing thought to today’s lesson on LOVE

5:16 *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.*

We can “walk by the flesh” – meaning, doing it our own way as best we can; Or we can “walk by the Spirit” – meaning doing it God’s way by the power of the indwelling Spirit.

To learn to walk by the Spirit, and not by the flesh, is one of the most important lessons of loving and free Christian living. Paul tells us here that is can learn to “walk by the Spirit” then we will not fall into selfish living.

WE ARE IN A WAR. It’s SELF vs. SPIRIT. Christians living primarily for SELF become LEGALISTIC or take LICENSE to do whatever feels best. Others get hurt on the process with little LOVE given. Christians living by the SPIRIT find joy in serving others in love, thereby discovering true Christian FREEDOM.

For now – freedom in ONE WORD is LOVE.

LOVE GOD, LOVE OTHERS – by serving them.

**That's lesson #1 to “walk in the Spirit” – an attitude to cultivate and harvest.
More next week ...**