

GALATIANS

Lesson 17

The Nature of Christian Liberty Galatians 5:13-15

INTRODUCTION

Christian, you are free. Free from Law, free from the dominion of sin, free from good works to gain approval from God, free from condemnation and free from eternal judgment. You are spiritually free in Christ. Galatians 5:1 says it all: **“It is for freedom that Christ has set you free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”**

The context of freedom in the book of Galatians is freedom from the Mosaic Law as a way of life for Christians. Christ brought an end to the Law for gaining righteousness before God (Rom. 10:4 **“Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”**). The Mosaic Law as a system has been set aside as a rule of life in the age of grace for Christians (Rom. 6:14 **“For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”**).

The moment one states the Christian is free from Mosaic Law and under grace, he comes under fire from those who want to be legalistic in sanctification (Christian living). Their minds follow a certain legalistic pattern and they say, “If the Christian is not under the Law, then he can do as he pleases without any restraints.” The Apostle Paul received this kind of reaction when he taught the grace of God in salvation and sanctification (Rom. 6:1, 15 **“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!”**). Christians who have a weak understanding of grace raise these kinds of questions.

However, there are those who have a strong understanding of grace who tend to abuse this wonderful truth. It is easy to mistake liberty for license. Christians who yell freedom often really want anarchy. They want to do what they please and not what they ought. They use grace to free themselves from moral restraints. Grace, however, is never a justification for self-indulgence or sin. Christian liberty must not be perverted as license, but must be expressed by obedience to the Law of Christ (John 14:15 **“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”**).

In Galatians 5:13-15, the Apostle Paul will show that a Christian is free from the Mosaic Law but is not free to do as he pleases. He is now under the Law of Christ as a way of life and has the Holy Spirit as his new restrainer rather than the Mosaic Law, which was designed as a way of life for Israel as a nation.

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY IS NOT FREEDOM TO INDULGE THE FLESH 5:13a

“You, my brothers, were called to be free.”

The Christian was saved when God sovereignly and efficaciously called him to salvation by the pure grace of God. The Christian life for every believer did not begin with the person’s decision to follow Christ but with God’s call to salvation. God in grace took the initiative to save men while they were yet in sin and rebellion. In their unsaved states, they neither wanted to turn from sin to Christ nor were they able to do so. But God came to them and called them to freedom in Christ—freedom from the guilt and bondage of sin and freedom from the Mosaic Law.

All Christians have been called to salvation by the gracious calling of God. The Christian has been called to freedom and it is so sad that many people do not know about this wonderful freedom. The

popular image of Christianity today is not freedom at all, but a hard, cruel, cramping bondage. But real Christianity is not bondage. It is a sovereign call of grace to freedom in Christ.

“But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature.”

The “sinful nature” is the flesh and is referring to the Adamic nature or the sin principle which still remains in the Christian. The flesh or sin nature is that part of man that lives for self and desires to do evil.

The Apostle Paul is saying that the Christian, who is free from the Mosaic Law, should not use this freedom as an opportunity or springboard to indulge the flesh. Liberty from Law should not be used as a base of operation to serve sin.

Christian liberty is freedom **from** sin, not freedom **to** sin. Christians are free from the Mosaic Law but this does not give them a license to sin. Why? First, the Christian is a spiritual creation of God, created for the purpose of producing good works already planned (Eph. 2:10 **“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”**). Second, the Christian now has a new restrainer permanently indwelling him who is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s works of renewing and convicting of sin are far greater deterrents to sin than the keeping of a mere external law. The Holy Spirit is that supernatural element to the Christian life which works internally.

A person may be going 60 miles per hour in a 25 mile zone and be relatively unaffected by the speed signs. However, if a policeman is in that general area he carries much more authority than does the signs. The person of the Holy Spirit carries much more weight than the external law when it comes to the restraining of sin.

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY IS FREEDOM TO SERVE OTHERS 5:13b

“Rather, serve one another in love.”

Christians have been set free to serve others in love. Freedom in Christ means liberty to serve others because Christian liberty is service not selfishness.

Christians are free from the Mosaic Law and the bondage of sin, but are slaves to one another. The word “serve” means “to serve as a slave.” The gospel takes a man from the slavery of Law and sin and makes him a slave of grace and love. The Christian is not totally bound up in pleasing self and fulfilling his base fleshy appetites but he becomes interested in serving God and others in love.

Everywhere people are crying for free rights, free love and free living, apart from any restraints. Yet these same people are becoming slaves to their own sinful appetites to which they give free reign, simply because they cannot control them. The world’s concept of freedom often brings men into slavery to sin. The Christian, on the other hand, is free to do as he pleases but he pleases to do the will of God because God has done a work of grace in every Christian’s heart.

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY IS FULFILLING THE LAW OF LOVE 5:14

“The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

The Apostle Paul now states that the whole Mosaic Law (the whole moral law of the Old Covenant) is fulfilled when the Christian exercises love towards others. All the moral aspects of the Mosaic Law are summed up in the one word love. God in grace has planted the love of God in the heart of every true child of God, and now the Christian has the capacity to show love to others but the power to produce this love comes only from dependence on the Holy Spirit. Love is the basis for a whole new way of life for the Christian, and this love is all tied up with the Law of Christ.

What is the Law of Christ and what relationship does the Christian sustain to the moral law of the Old Covenant?

The Mosaic Law (Old Covenant) consisted of 613 commands for the nation of Israel. The Mosaic Law for theological and practical reasons has been divided into moral, ceremonial, civil and social law. Moral law is summed up in the Ten Commandments. Ceremonial law involved religious activities such as feasts, priesthood, sacrifices and circumcision. Civil law included laws for running a theocracy (God-ruled state). Social law dealt with things like sanitation, rotation of crops, quarantines and diet. It is not always easy to distinguish moral law from ceremonial, civil and social law. Therefore, there is some subjectivity and Christians disagree over what extent the Christian is related to the Mosaic Law. A Theonomist would be on one end of the spectrum and a Dispensationalist on the other. However, most Christians believe the moral law is still binding on Christians today, and this moral law is summed up in the Ten Commandments.

Christians who make up the universal Church are now under the New Covenant, which was first mentioned in Jeremiah 31 and was officially established by Christ in His death. Each time a Christian partakes of the wine at the Lord's Table he is reminded of the words of Christ: "This is the New Covenant in my blood." Christians today are under the New Covenant, not the Old Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6 **"He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."**). The Mosaic Law as a unit is not binding on a Christian as a way of life. The social, ceremonial and civil aspects of the Law are not mandatory for the Christian to keep. If they want to keep some of the social and ceremonial aspects of the Law, like dietary laws and circumcision, it is perfectly okay, but they have nothing to do with salvation or spirituality.

However, the Ten Commandments, which are moral law, are still to be observed by the New Covenant Church. The church is spiritual Israel and still has a relationship with the Ten Commandments as moral law. The coming of Christ and his death did not do away with Old Covenant moral law. Why is this so?

Christians are said to uphold the morality of the Mosaic Law (Rom. 3:31 **"Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law."**). The Apostle Paul as a Christian desired the moral aspects of the Law in his walk with God (Rom. 7:22 **"For in my inner being I delight in God's law."**).

Four of the Ten Commandments are mentioned to be kept by the Christian through love—no adultery, no murder, no stealing and no covetousness (Rom. 13:8-10 **"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."**). In Romans 13:9, after listing four of the Ten Commandments, the Apostle Paul says, "And whatever other commandment there may be," which obviously includes the other six commandments.

In the New Testament, all but one of the Ten Commandments are repeated as commands for the Christian. The one exception is in keeping the Sabbath. However, this does not mean there is no Sabbath for a Christian under the New Covenant because the Ten Commandments are a unit and reflect and sum up all the moral law of the Old Covenant. Christians debate as to whether there is a Sabbath for the Church in the New Covenant, but the answer to this is that the Sabbath was a creation ordinance set forth in the book of Genesis, being in existence before there ever was a Mosaic Law. However, the Sabbath must be poured through the New Covenant in order to make it relevant to us today.

Certain of the Ten Commandments (moral law) are quoted for Christians to keep. Children are told to obey their parents and the fifth commandment is quoted (Eph. 6:1-3 **"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."**). Notice, however, that the Apostle Paul, under the guiding of the Holy Spirit, changed the wording to say, "That you

may enjoy long life on the earth” and the original command says “land.” The commandment is adjusted for Christian living under the New Covenant.

It is clearly stated that the Christian is not under Mosaic Law as a rule of life but under grace (Rom. 6:14 **“For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”**). However, this does not mean a Christian is free from all law. The Christian is under the Law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:20-21 **“To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.”**).

In order to reach Gentiles for Christ, who had nothing to do with the Mosaic Law, the Apostle Paul operated as if there was no Mosaic Law. Yet, he carefully adds these words, “Though I am not free from God’s law (moral law) but am under Christ’s law.” Under the New Covenant, the Christian is bound by the Law of Christ which includes all moral law in the Old Testament. Therefore, we can assume that the eternal moral law includes all moral law before the Law of Moses, moral law in the Mosaic Law, and the moral law as taught by Christ and the Apostles. The Law of Christ is a higher law than the Mosaic Law. For instance, the Mosaic Law said, **“Love your neighbor as yourself”** (Matt. 22:39), but the Law of Christ says, **“Love one another as I have loved you”** (John 15:12).

It is imperative that the Old Covenant moral law which includes the Ten Commandments, be poured through the New Covenant. For instance, there is no death penalty for adultery in the New Covenant. How one observes the Sabbath rest is a matter of individual conscience. Christ Himself picked corn to feed His disciples on the Sabbath, allowing for an act of necessity. Christ also healed people on the Sabbath, allowing for an act of mercy. The Law of Christ is much more forgiving and flexible than the Law of Moses.

Christ essentially gave one new commandment—love one another (John 13:34 **“A new command I give you: Love one another, As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”**). We know the Mosaic Law could be summed up in two concepts: love God and love your neighbor (Matt. 22:38-39 **“This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”**). But Christ says Christians are to love one another as He loved them—enduring, unselfish—unconditional love. One of the ways the Law of Christ is fulfilled is to carry one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2 **“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”**). Love is the essence of all law whether Mosaic Law or the Law of Christ.

The Law of Christ is still a law with rules, regulations and principles to be obeyed. It is true that if all men loved one another there would be no need for law of any kind. The fact of the matter is that men are sinful and rarely understand what love really is. Yet there are some Christians who say we don’t need law because love covers it all. They claim if we love our neighbors, as we want to be loved that is all we need. Yet, what is love? How is love defined? Love must have definition and boundaries and that is where moral law plays its role. Moral law tells us how to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. The particulars, such as ‘do not commit adultery,’ ‘do not covet,’ ‘do not lie,’ ‘do not steal,’ define for us how to apply the law of love as found in Christ.

It is not enough to say if everybody loved everybody else and treated them as they wanted to be treated, there would be no need for law. For instance, suppose you have two people in a marriage committing adultery. Both are convinced that to have an affair with someone else is not wrong but strengthens a marriage. They would be loving their neighbor as themselves, equally applying the right to have affairs outside of marriage. For them, love needs definition and the moral law of God in both the Old and New Testaments say in marriage couples are to be faithful one to another. Law must define what real love is.

The Christian is not under Mosaic Law but under the Law of Christ, which includes all moral law in both the Old and New Testaments. The Ten Commandments are part of the moral law. However, the Ten Commandments are no longer condemning to the Christian. The moral law as found in the Ten

Commandments is simply an objective guide for Christian living. The moral law cannot save or sanctify a Christian today but it can tell us how to live in a sin-cursed world. The Christian can say as the Psalmist, **“I love your law”** (Psa. 119:97) and as the Apostle Paul, who said, **“For in my inner being I delight in God’s law”** (Rom. 7:22). Yet, it is through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit that we keep the Law of Christ, remembering it is God who saves and sanctifies.

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY NEGLECTED RESULTS IN SIN 5:15

“If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”

When Christians fail to keep the Law of Christ by not loving and when they fail to operate in dependence on the Holy Spirit, they get like wild animals in a deadly struggle. They become guilty of Christian cannibalism through malicious talk and actions.

When a person professes to be a Christian but has a negative, critical attitude about someone or something and is spreading the poison of rumor and gossip, then you know this person is not filled with the Spirit or in obedience to the Law of Christ. Those Christians who fail to keep the Law of Christ must expect to receive discipline from the hand of a loving Father.

CONCLUSION

Do you think of Christianity as a life of cruel and cramping bondage in which a person cannot have any fun? You must understand that Christianity is real freedom from sin and Law in Christ and one is set free to be himself and to serve others in love. Come to Christ and He will show you real love!