

**Intro:**

Last week we had a fairly long message on Gal 5.1 entitled *The Concept of Christian Liberty*.

I am afraid we are just scratching the surface of this concept, so we are going to return to our text of last week and develop the ideas a bit further.

Today I want to talk on this subject:

*Perseverance in Christian Liberty*

Calvin is often quoted as saying something along these lines:

“The human heart is an idol factory.”

It appears to me that all human deviation from the pure religion of the New Testament is ample evidence of this.

Jesus said,

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<sup>NAU</sup> **Joh 4:23** "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers."

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Instead of worshipping God in spirit and in truth, men seem to want to put themselves under a system of works to gain God's favour – the idea being that if we keep the external forms, we are approved no matter the condition of our heart. In reality, such a system cannot escape bondage.

Let's recover what we said last week about bondage. What three things does the Bible say we are in bondage to?

1. Sin – enslaved by sin, captive in sin, so bound by sin
2. Law – condemned by Law, obligated to Law, so bound by Law
3. Death – condemned to death by the law because of sin, death inescapable, so bound by death

That is man's state before salvation. Salvation brings liberty. Let's recover the concept of liberty from last week:

1. Greek political concept: the liberty of the free citizen of the city, liberty under the law to do the deeds of a citizen
2. Greek philosophical concept: the liberty of the soul from the bondage of the flesh, gaining liberty by ruling the passions

Note: there are elements of truth in both

3. New Testament concept: liberty from sin, law, and death by submitting one's will to the will of Another and being saved from sin

We want to hold these ideas in our minds as we consider today the idea of *Perseverance in Christian Liberty*.

Read Gal 5.1

**Proposition:** Christian liberty is freedom from sin, not freedom to sin.

## I. Liberty is the purpose of salvation

- A. Can we recall one more thing from last week? Don's Literal Version of Gal 5.1:

1. For liberty us Christ liberated

[Note emphatic position of words]

2. Therefore

- a. Be standing (continue standing) [implied: 'in liberty']

and

- b. Not again to a yoke of slavery be held in a snare [entangled]

- B. The work of Christ is a liberating work

1. The purpose is front and center in this verse (note literal word order)

2. The accomplishing of liberty in Gk culture

- a. Two ways in which a man could have liberty in Greek society

- 1) A child could come to the age of majority – now he is a full citizen

- 2) A slave could be set free for some reason and given citizenship

- b. The child is held in bondage by a schoolmaster (παιδαγωγός)

“i. e. a guide and guardian of boys. Among the Greeks and Romans the name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys belonging to the better class. The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them before arriving at the age of manhood”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

- Severe disciplinarian
- See Gal 3.24-25: the Law seen as this disciplinarian

c. The slave is held in bondage by a master

1) Consider Gal 4.1 – child and slave same thing as far as liberty goes

2) Slave held by his master; child held by his father

3. The whole purpose of Christ’s work is accomplishing liberty for his people

a. Full citizenship

b. Freedom from bondage

But what do these things mean for a Christian?

## II. Liberty is the pursuit of sanctification

**Proposition:** Christian liberty is freedom from sin, not freedom to sin.

A. With freedom from sin, there is the danger of abusing our freedom (Gal 5.13-15)

1. Paul sounds a warning – he does not want liberty misunderstood (13)
2. Paul gives an example of the proper use of liberty in fulfilling (filling full) the Law: love one another (13b-14)
3. Paul gives an example of the improper use of liberty in selfish, destructive behaviour (15)

Wait, a minute, did Paul just become a legalist?

- How dare he tell me I can’t bite and devour my brethren, after all, I have liberty! Who is he telling me what to do?

B. Liberty is not the absence of law, or an elimination of the notions of right and wrong

1. James speaks of “the law of liberty” (Jas 1.25; 2.12)

a. Note: looking into the law of liberty and continuing therein (Jas 1.25)

b. Note: so speak and so do (Jas 2.12)

Oh no, James is a legalist too!

Remember that James and Galatians are the first two books of the NT to be written. Who shall deliver us from this band of legalists?

2. The reality is that liberty is not the license to do whatever you want
  - a. Greek political liberty: freedom of a free citizen to act under the law in the affairs of the city
  - b. Greek philosophical liberty: freedom of a free man to rule his flesh (acknowledging the wantonness of the flesh)

So even in Greek concepts, liberty is not license, and restrictions are not legalisms.

C. Christian Liberty is the freedom to pursue the law of Christ (see Gal 6.2)

1. Freed from the obligation and bondage to sin, law and death
2. Enabled to righteousness by the presence and power of the indwelling Holy Spirit

The whole society of the Christian church is the only place on earth where individuals can truly be free.

- Consider converted Onesimus, sent back by Paul to his *owner* Philemon, who is to receive his run-away slave [death penalty] as a Christian brother.
- Note: Paul didn't tell Philemon to free Onesimus, he told to receive him as a brother.
- Where could this happen but in the Christian church?

### III. Liberty is the place you should stand

A. Since Christ liberated you: Stand!

“The appeal is for an obstinate perseverance in freedom as the only proper response to an attempt to bring Christians once more under legalism.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Galatians”, *Expositors*, vol. 10, p. 486.

“It is an appeal for a resolute and steadfast perseverance in freedom against every effort to bring them again under the yoke of slavery.”<sup>3</sup>

1. Present Active Imperative: an ongoing and continuous command
2. You are never free from *this* law! “Stand (and keep on standing) in your liberty!”

B. Since Christ liberated you: Don’t be entangled in renewed bondage!

1. Jews had a notion that holiness was achieved by ‘taking yoke of law’ on oneself<sup>4</sup>
2. Likely this idea Paul has in mind: don’t put this yoke on, it will not deliver you, it will only entangle you (enslave you)

I am going to develop this idea further in a couple of weeks, but let me point out that there are churches who hold power over their people by a regime of fear:

- Do this ritual, or you will suffer in purgatory
- Do this work, or you will not be allowed into paradise
- On and on it goes – laws, laws, laws, to supposedly gain freedom

If Christ has liberated you, stay liberated!  
Stay out of the religions of fear!

## Conclusion:

*As we close, I’d like to quote Luther again:*

“In this passage Paul again disparages the pernicious notion that the Law is able to make men righteous before God, a notion deeply rooted in man’s reason. All mankind is so wrapped up in this idea that it is hard to drag it out of people. Paul compares those who seek to be justified by the Law to oxen that are hitched to the yoke. Like oxen that toil in the yoke all day, and in the evening are turned out to graze along the dusty road, and at last are marked for slaughter when they no longer can draw the burden, so those who seek to be justified by the Law are ‘entangled with the yoke of bondage,’ and when they have grown old and broken-down in the service of the Law they have earned for their perpetual reward God’s wrath and everlasting torment.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ridderbos, *Galatians*, 186.

<sup>4</sup> James Montgomery Boice, “Galatians”, *Expositors*, vol. 10, p. 486.

<sup>5</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, *in loc.*

“Rightly are the doers of the Law called devil’s martyrs. They take more pains to earn hell than the martyrs of Christ to obtain heaven. Theirs is a double misfortune. First they torture themselves on earth with self-inflicted penances and finally when they die they gain the reward of eternal damnation.”<sup>6</sup>

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We want to be clear: we are not talking about liberty to do whatever you want, but we are talking about liberty to be a Christian.

You can live a life that reflects Jesus Christ in everything you do if you will not get confused by religious ritual as if it somehow will make you holy.

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<sup>6</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, *in loc.*