

What Liberty Looks Like

Text: Galatians 5.13–15

Theme: We have been set free in Christ to live out the law with a joyful, loving heart

Introduction — Our passage from God’s Word today is Galatians 5.13–15

- pew Bibles, page 1157

- Galatians 5:13-15 ESV

13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

- let’s look to God in humble dependence thru prayer

Most gracious God, Father and fountain of mercy and goodness;

You have blessed us with the knowledge of our salvation
and the way that leads to it

Make our hearts excited with the pursuit of
that knowledge and that way
because many things endeavor to distract us

Let us not presume on our own strength
or resist Your divine assistance

While we are working to confirm our salvation
diligently teach us to depend on You for success

Open our eyes, O God, and teach us from Your law
Bless us with a diligent and tender sense of duty to it
and a knowledge to discern things contrary to it

Direct us to keep Your statutes
so that we are not ashamed when we examine
whether we have kept Your commandments

Turn our eyes away from desiring worthless things,
and make us alive in Your law

Fill our souls with such a deep sense
and full persuasion of the gospel truth that You revealed
that it would govern our lives,
especially our interactions with others

Fill us so that the life we live in the flesh
we would live through faith in the Son of God

Now lead us in Your truth and teach us,
for You are the God of our salvation

Guide us with Your wisdom

And then, at last, receive us in to Your glory,
to the credit and because of the intercession
of Your blessed Son, our Savior, Amen

Picture a train upon its tracks

- quite restricted in its movement; bound to those tracks
- may only go where those tracks go
- yet, as long as follows tracks, free to do that for which it was built
- fulfills purpose
- take train off tracks, now unfettered, no longer restrained—yet no freedom
- lost the ability to do that for which it was made; only do great damage otherwise
- tracks actually help train fulfill its intended purpose
- works like it was intended to work
- gets to its determined destination faster, better

Law of love guides our conduct as Christians like those tracks

- he continues to talk about our freedom in Christ
- it is liberty with a pattern
- it is freedom with a form to it
- gospel promotes genuine love as no other message can
- in Christ, we have been set free to now live out this law of love
- and we do so with a joyful heart overflowing with gratitude to our Savior

So, Paul continues his argument and shows us...

I. FREEDOM WITH LOVE, v. 13

- liberty and love not separated; go together for the Christian
- like guardrails or train tracks...
- help fulfill purpose, enable you to work well, arrive at your destination
- where true liberty resides in Christ, true and genuine love resides also

We see here, in v. 13...

1. The call to freedom

- this is the call to salvation
- Romans 8:28,30 help us see this
- **Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.**
- God calls people to Christ thru the gospel—this is God's gracious provision
- He sets us free from bondage to sin, death, and devil

We also see...

2. The character of freedom

- **“only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh”**
- do not use this liberty as license to sin
- otherwise, we corrupt old gospel song
- **Free from the law**
O, blessed condition
Sin as I want
And not face perdition
- with this privilege of freedom comes responsibility
- use it wisely to glorify God not feed fleshly sinful desires
- sadly, seen believers pervert blessings of God, turn them into sins

- we join others in saying, **“Well, it’s a free country; can do as I please”**
- or free love of ‘60s that was indiscriminate, casting off all restraint
- promotes sin rather than put them to death
- do this and cannot move forward in your sanctification
- legalism demands responsibility without freedom
- license grants freedom without responsibility
- this attitude says: I’m okay; I’m forgiven and will be forgiven no matter what
- Christ’s freedom never an excuse, never a license to sin
- using your freedom takes the train off the rails

At end of v. 13, we see...

3. The control of freedom

- **“through love serve one another”**
- Holy Spirit gives us true liberty in Christ
- Paul will move on to this work of Spirit in v. 16ff
- true Christian freedom is service, not a selfish, sinful lifestyle
- true freedom gives opportunities to love, help and serve other people
- love of Christ, dwelling in us thru Spirit, takes selfishness out
- helps focus upon others’ needs
- by Spirit’s power, we are free to fulfill law of love: love the Lord your God & love neighbor
- which moves us into v. 14

God shows us...

II. FULFILLMENT IN LOVE, v. 14

- Gospel does not repudiate the law
- Gospel does not do away with the law
- Paul will echo this in Romans 3:31
- **Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.**
- in fact, Gospel provides the love that fulfills the law

In the first words of v. 14, we hear that...

1. The law is one of love

- law of God is all about love
- how so? Some will ask
- think about the Ten Commandments
- do not kill, do not steal, do not commit adultery
- do not have any idols, do not make false images, do not covet or bear false witness
- these don’t talk about love...or do they?
- on at least two occasions, Jesus was asked, “What must I DO to inherit eternal life?”
- answer always a summary of the entire law:
- love the Lord your God with whole heart, soul, and might: Commandments #1–4
- love your neighbor as yourself: Commandments #5–10
- summation of the law: love God and love others—it is the law of love
- this is what God requires—and it ought to drive us to our knees
- humble repentance ought to be the response: confess...I can’t do this
- God says: Right, but I can and did
- **Romans 5:8—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

- now law becomes perfect, true, a treasure, longing of our heart
- because love of God set me free, I can now live this law of love

We see this in...

2. The law of love

- love neighbor as yourself
- not a command to get busy loving self to point where you can finally love neighbor
- goodness knows we don't need to be told to love self more
- no; loving God—come to know the love of God in Christ—best way to love neighbor
- long for others to know, experience, benefit from this love in Christ
- Paul says the whole law is fulfilled in this one word—how?
- by keeping the law where it belongs: this side of the cross
- law shows us our sin; we've studied this in our time here in Galatians
- it is a mirror to reveal true self: sinner, condemned, unclean
- law drives us to Christ who saves us since the law cannot
- once in Christ & set free, now law shows us how to live for God
- Spurgeon once said: “...**law is road that guides us, not rod that drives us...**”
- so, now free to love neighbor; not as way to get right with God
- but way of living free in the Holy Spirit
- so, we're not under the law but in Christ we fulfill—live out the law of love

Now, in v. 15, we recognize the...

III. FAILURE WITHOUT LOVE, v. 15

- “**But...**” in one little word, Paul gives fair warning
- when love is lacking, there will be problems
- when we want to simply get our way, without consideration of love for others, trouble arises
- apostle lays out what these will look like
- it even sounds as if the legalists were living proof of these troubles
- mixing law and grace will do that
- grace ceases to be grace and love cannot be genuine when mixed wrongly with law

And so we see...

1. The sin in the failure

- **if you bite and devour one another**, Paul writes
- very strong possibility that they are already doing this to some extent
- and if they are, they are acting like spiritual cannibals
- it happens: we come to church, we hear something we don't like or agree with
- then, either on way home or over Sunday dinner, we eat roast pastor or deacon or member
- Paul says, “Brothers, sisters; this ought not to be”
- you fulfill nothing; you appear to make love & grace null and void
- you are living out sinful, fleshly desires not the Spirit of the living Christ

Finally, we recognize...

2. The sequence in the failure

- Paul, in final phrase, shows natural outworking of backbiting, backstabbing
- you get devoured along with the one you skewered in the first place
- you sow what you reap—you sow discord, you reap division & disunity
- you sow anger or unforgiveness, you reap bitterness
- the law of love says, “No! Love God uppermost, then you will love others”

- you will love and treat them in manner you wish to be treated

Conclusion – Christian liberty is glorious thing

- came to us thru Christ's love, perfect obedience, substitutionary atonement
- it was bought at great price
- we should be willing to take up our cross for it, just as Jesus said
- it lies at the very heart of the gospel
- but let not that for which we are willing to suffer and die be marred by abuse of it
- let us not return to bondage but live law of love in power of Holy Spirit
- brothers and sisters, let us love one another

In end, I hope we recognize need for gospel of Christ—always and forever

- apart from gospel, left to bondage and slavery of sin and law
- thru Christ's life, death, resurrection, applied to us by Spirit
- we live and enjoy freedom of redemption
- we now have the freedom to love one another

1 John 4:7—Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.