

Liberty From the Law

Lesson Scope: [Galatians 5: 1-15](#)

References in brackets relate to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus

This chapter is the climax and pivot of the discourse on the Mosaic Law given at Sinai and the Gospel of the New Testament. It may also be that Paul was saving the most direct and controversial declaration for last. While he mentioned circumcision earlier in the letter, a general reference to the Law carried most of the weight. Now he asserts that “if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.” With this declaration, the Galatians were brought to the heart of the matter and to a decision point between the Gospel preached by Paul or the heresy promoted by the Judaizers. The Galatians saved Paul’s letter, so we may conclude that the Galatians were persuaded by his efforts.

The devil has other heresies with which to tempt those who understand the Old and New Covenants. How then should we live? What does liberty from the Law produce? We do not enjoy liberty from the Law because the Law was removed, but rather because it was fulfilled, and issued into something greater.

Gospel liberty is still under attack. While we are not likely to revert to the ceremonies of Judaism, we may be tempted to rely on a godly heritage or on obedience to a certain set of standards to gain merit with God. However, it is obvious that, in our setting, the far more serious and subtle threats are the pietistic, liberal philosophies that cheapen the grace of God into “an occasion to the flesh.”

Do not confuse church regulations with the Law of this lesson. In a general way the two subjects are unrelated. The Christian is governed by principle. He views church standards as a united effort to apply principle. Standards are safeguards rather than the means to gain approval with God.

The Gospel empowers the justified believer to live above the Law. This freedom in Christ issues into a life of willing obedience and loving service.

Lesson Aim: To present principles related to Gospel liberty from the bondage of the Law.

Theme Verses: [Romans 8:3-4](#). For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Lesson Text

Steadfast in Liberty

[Galatians 5:1-6](#)

¹ (KJV) Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. ² Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. ³ For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. ⁴ Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. ⁵ For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶ For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

Fervent in Service

[Galatians 5:7-15](#)

⁷ (KJV) Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? ⁸ This persuasion *cometh* not of him that calleth you. ⁹ A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. ¹⁰ I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. ¹¹ And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased. ¹² I would they were even cut off which trouble you. ¹³ For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. ¹⁴ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ¹⁵ But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

Questions for Study

Steadfast in Liberty

1. Discuss the “yoke of bondage.” Why must we “stand fast therefore” to avoid it?
2. Why can Christ be of no effect to those who are justified by the Law?
3. Explain “wait[ing] for the hope of righteousness by faith.”

Fervent in Service

4. What do verses 11-12 reveal about the motives of the Judaizers?
5. How might liberty be used as an occasion to the flesh?
6. How does a focus on the Law affect personal relationships?
7. What can we do to heed the warning in verse 15?

Analysing the Passage

The allegory at the close of the last chapter vividly declares that Ishmael and Isaac could not remain in the same household; one displaced the other. Just so, no believer could practice both the Mosaic Law and the Gospel. Any who looked to the Mosaic Law for justification would have to observe the Law in its entirety; observing the Law was never a matter of multiple choice. And since it only served to reveal sin, it could provide no hope of justification.

Our justification comes through grace alone, by the work of Christ on the cross (5:11). Yet a complete reliance on this grace is offensive to our nature. We can take no credit for the accomplishing of our justification. Neither does embracing liberty from the Law accrue to us fleshly benefits or privileges. But it does place upon us obligations of service.

The yoke of bondage (5:1) is a word picture typifying the slavery of the Old Testament Law. It revealed sin, but gave no power to live above sin. Jesus called people to take His yoke upon them, promising, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (see Matthew 11:28-30).

Hope of righteousness (5:5) refers to our standing with God. Hope means “to expect with confidence.” It is a complete trust in someone else to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We can live righteously, but we cannot make ourselves right in the sight of God. Only by faith in the work of Christ and an unconditional surrender to His lordship can we be justified in the sight of God.

Called unto liberty (5:13) implies “on a footing of liberty.” It does not mean an absence of all boundaries. It includes freedom from the Mosaic yoke, freedom from sin, and freedom from slavish fear.

To serve one another (5:13) speaks of a voluntary relinquishing of some liberties for the purpose of benefiting others.

Principles and Applications

Steadfast in Liberty

1. True liberty is found in Christ (5:1). It is not a right that is ours regardless what we do. Rather, we can enjoy liberty so long as we meet the Gospel conditions. The yoke of Jesus Christ is an easy one, and the burden bearable. The difference is that all who are harnessed in the yoke of Jesus Christ receive the power to bear its weight and pull its load.

2. The continued practice of the Law makes the provision of Christ ineffective (5:2-4). Christ came and fulfilled the Law. Its purpose was temporary; it is replaced by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Continuing to keep the Old Testament Law brings us into bondage and indicates that we consider Christ’s sacrifice to be insufficient. Instead, we follow the teachings of Christ and place our faith in His work of redemption.

3. Only through the work of Jesus can we be justified (5:4-5). We live righteously, but we cannot accrue enough to our account to make us right with God. Rather, we place our faith in the work of Jesus Christ to justify us. We expect with confidence and trust that God will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

4. Gospel liberty is expressed in the work of faith (5:5-6). We need faith to claim God’s forgiveness when we confess our sins. We need faith for power to overcome temptation. Even when we pray, we exercise faith. In fact, whatever God calls us to do that is contrary to our natural impulses calls for faith on our part. True faith in our hearts produces works of faith in our everyday lives.

Fervent in Service

5. To reject Gospel liberty is to reject the truth (5:5-7). Nothing we do can add anything to the provision for our salvation, but works of obedience do have an important place in the Christian’s life. In our day, many have turned from the truth in the pursuit of liberty. It is vital that

the church be faithful in carrying out the necessary disciplinary action so that she is protected from the influence of false brethren.

6. The cross of Christ is the foundation of Gospel liberty (5:11-12).

Jesus died to defeat the power that Satan had over us through the fallen nature within us. By identifying with Jesus in His cross experience, we die to sin and live unto righteousness. The cross offends man's pride, his stubborn will, his carnal mind, and fleshly desires—the things that bring man into bondage. As we are crucified with Christ, we experience deliverance.

7. Gospel liberty is not liberty to serve the flesh (5:13). The biting and devouring that is so native to our carnal nature is incompatible with those who have been liberated from the yoke of bondage. They who walk in the Spirit rise above the lusts and tension of the flesh.

Anyone who promises liberty to those who live in sin is a deceiver (2 Peter 2: 19). If Christ cannot deliver man from the power and practice of sin, then His suffering and death were in vain, and Satan is not defeated. God's acceptance of repentant sinners as His children is conditioned on their separation from evil (2 Corinthians 6: 17-18).

8. Christian love is the fulfilling of the Law and the essence of Gospel liberty (5:14-15). The love of Christ in the heart is a constraining force that seeks expression (2 Corinthians 5:14). Daily life presents abundant opportunities to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. When we graciously permit an interruption to our busy schedules, when we seek the welfare of our spouse, child, or church brother, and when we are happier that someone else's choice was granted rather than our own; we are loving our neighbour as ourselves. Sometimes it is easier to love our neighbour in the larger issues of life than in the daily routine.

Important Teachings

1. True liberty is found in Christ (5:1).

2. The continued practice of the Law makes the provision of Christ ineffective (5:2-4).

3. Only through the Work of Jesus can we be justified (5:4-5).

4. Gospel liberty is expressed in the work of faith (5:5-6).

5. To reject Gospel liberty is to reject the truth (5:5-7).

6. The cross of Christ is the foundation of Gospel liberty (5:11-12).

7. Gospel liberty is not liberty to serve the flesh (5:13).

8. Christian love is the fulfilling of the Law and the essence of Gospel liberty (5:14-15).

Answers to Questions

1. Discuss the “yoke of bondage.” Why must we “stand fast therefore” to avoid it?

The “yoke of bondage” is a vivid metaphor referring to the Mosaic Law. The Law made mankind painfully conscious of their sinful state and reminded them of God’s disapproval of sin. While it did provide a covering remedy for the weight of guilt, it offered no power to live above sin. The yoke of Jesus Christ is easy, because He enters the yoke with us and enables us to bear its weight. We must “stand fast” to avoid the yoke of bondage, because adherence to the Mosaic Law is appealing to our nature. It is a sequence of things that we do, which we tend to find gratifying. We want to be involved in our salvation, we want to be assured of it, and doing specific things of religious significance seems so right to man.

2. Why can Christ be of no effect to those who are justified by the Law? Those who rely on the Law for justification are focused on that Law and on their discharge of it. Christ can only provide justification to those who place their faith in Him. The ego-based tendency to trust in the Law and one’s behaviour toward it is incompatible with faith-grounded trust in the efficacious work of Jesus Christ.

3. Explain “wait[ing] for the hope of righteousness by faith.”

We recognize that we are unable to make ourselves righteous. We cannot rise above our sinful nature far enough and completely enough to please God, nor can we pay the debt we have accumulated by the sins of our past life. Instead, we place our faith in the work of Jesus Christ and confidently anticipate that God will account us to be righteous before Him through that faith. We cannot “make” ourselves righteous, but we can exercise faith in Christ. In response to our faith, God Himself “makes” us righteous before Him.

4. What do verses 11-12 reveal about the motives of the Judaizers?

The Judaizers did not truly have the interests of the Galatians at heart. Paul, their spiritual father, placed their own spiritual welfare above his own physical comfort. Rather, the Judaizers were troubling the Galatians, to lord over them and oppress them. Paul sharply condemns their

conduct by wishing the advocates of circumcision to be fully cut off spiritually to remove their influence (5:12).

5. How might liberty be used as an occasion to the flesh?

Christian liberty becomes an occasion for the flesh when it is used as an excuse for every man to do what is right in His own eyes. Christian liberty is not an excuse to ignore or violate New Testament teaching.

6. How does a focus on the Law affect personal relationships?

Those concerned with efficacious performance of religious rituals are highly critical of their peers. They tend to compare themselves among themselves, and ruthlessly condemn others for perceived inadequacies that in no way pertain to salvation. They tend to hold others to higher standards of conduct than they will bear themselves. This results in a community of people being consumed with internal strife rather than a community being enriched.

7. What can we do to heed the warning in verse 15?

We must fully comprehend the futility of focusing anywhere but in Christ for our justification. The good works that we are called to perform come after justification as a result of God accounting us righteous. Good works of religious merit cannot form the basis for justification, either in ourselves or in others. When all are focused on God for justification, we then have the spiritual capacities to look on our fellowmen in a new light, as fellow believers who help us and are helped by us in the outworking of our salvation. Any time the object of our faith is placed anywhere but in Christ, the result will be misery and death.

Summarizing the Lesson

Those under the Law are bound to keep the whole Law, because they must; there is no other choice. Anything we do because we must will eventually be a drudgery; the work will feel burdensome and joyless. “But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Romans 7:6).

In the Gospel era, we are freed from the various imposing burdens of the Law to live a life of victory over sin. The newness of the Spirit invigorates us to serve our Saviour and our fellow man because we want to. We can discharge our responsibilities with energy, enthusiasm, and vigour when it is for someone we love.

Research Guide

1. Do a topical study of liberty. Besides the word liberty, consider such related words as freedom and free, as well as opposite terms such as bondage, snare, captivity, and servant.
2. Read Hebrews 8—10 to see how Christ fulfilled the Law and provided the believer with a new relationship with God.