

Christian Liberty

Today's message is about Christians liberty.

I. Lesson on Liberty

From an article entitled, 'Freedom Versus Liberty,' comes a question,
 "The Sons of Liberty, the Liberty Tree, the Liberty Bell, the Statue of Liberty – liberty, liberty, liberty – our Founding Fathers were enamored with the idea of liberty. But why?"¹

Freedom is defined as "independence, the license to do as one wants, the permission to do as you please."

Richard Maybury has written,

"Permission is necessarily granted by someone, which means freedom can be revoked by that someone."²

Thomas Jefferson is described liberty in the Declaration of Independence, "all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights."

Liberty, second only to life, is a right endowed by the Creator.... It cannot be revoked. Liberty provides for the protection of an individual's rights, expressly because with it we have been endowed by our Creator with the capacity for self-government. Freedom is something that a government grants; liberty is something we own that a government cannot take away.³

Benjamin Franklin said,

"Democracy is
 ...two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch.
 Liberty is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote!"

¹ Brad Cummings & Lance Wubbels, General Editors, *The Founders' Bible*, (Newbury Park, CA: Shiloh Road Publishers, LLC., 2012), p. 1860.

² Richard J. Maybury, *Are You Liberal? Conservative? Or Confused?* (Placerville, CA: Bluestocking Press, 2004), p. 48.

³ The Founder's Bible, *ibid*.

II. Liberty or Legalism

Gal. 5:1

It was for freedom that Christ set us free;
therefore keep standing firm
and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

1. The purpose of redemption: freedom.

It was for freedom that Christ set us free...

The gospel frees a Christian from the curse of the law
and brings him into a right relationship with God.

2. Then an admonition:

Keep standing firm ... in that freedom.

“Since you are free in Christ, don’t go back to a life of slavery!”

Prior to this verse Paul used the historical story of Hagar and Sarah as an allegory illustrating how those enslaved to legalism were like Hagar’s children, and those who were of faith were like the children of Sarah.

Just after the phrase, “and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”, Paul wrote,

“Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.”

(Gal. 5:2-3).

Background:

In Acts 15 the first church council was called to discuss and solve a major issue concerning what to do with Gentile believers who came into a largely Jewish church setting.

“But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying,
*‘It is necessary to circumcise them
and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.’*”

(v. 5)

Peter's response became the standard answer on behalf of this issue.

“Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a **yoke** which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.” (v.10-11)

yoke – refers to a common yoke worn by oxen to pull a load or plow.

Paul is saying in picture language, “*Don't reconnect to the yoke of legalism.*”

To a Jew the yoke of the Law was positive– *the essence of religion.*

But Paul called it *a yoke of slavery.*

False teachers known as the Judaizers taught that believers needed circumcision.

James Boice writes,

“Circumcision was, of course, the particular form of legalism that was a problem in Paul's day, and the argument is simply that, circumcision having taken the position it had and signifying what it did, the choice was between Christ and no circumcision at all, or circumcision and no Christ at all. In other words, God would put a minus sign before Christ in the lives of the Galatians if they put a plus sign before anything else.”⁴

Paul is mainly condemning a theology that makes works necessary for salvation.

1. Christ will not benefit you.
2. You will be obligated to keep the whole Law.

Paul reasoned:

⁴You have been severed from Christ,
you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

And,

⁴ James Montgomery Boice & A. Skevington Wood, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 81.

⁶“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.” (v. 6)

It’s either liberty or legalism.

III. Licentiousness or Love.

Once again Paul repeats the concept of Christian liberty first in resistance against the Judaizers’ teaching (as we have seen); and second, in resisting the flesh.

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.
 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement,
 ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Gal. 5:13-14)

Freedom in Christ is not a license to sin – to please one’s self.
 Freedom means loving service to God and man.

Freedom is not the right to do what we want,
 but it is the power to do what we ought.

Paradox:

Paul has urged them not to become slaves to law
 so that they can become slaves to one another.

Boice writes,

“Slavery to sin is involuntary and terrible; a man is born into sin (Ps. 51:5) and cannot escape it (Rom. 7:18). Slavery to law, which comes by choice is foolish and burdensome. On the other hand, slavery to one another is voluntary and a source of deep joy...”⁵

v. 13 but through love serve one another.

⁵ Boice and Wood, p. 82

Contrary to the fears of the Judaizers who believed that without laws believers would enter into licentiousness, love is the key to living as a believer.

“⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.” (v. 6)

- Love fulfills the whole Law of God.
- Love treats others as we would like to be treated.

Relationship

The end product of a works-based righteousness is pride and self-righteousness.

The end of grace is gifted righteousness and selflessness.

When someone comes to Christ they don't realize that they have entered into a new relationship with God based on grace, and a new relationship with others based on love.