

Liberty, Love and the Law

Galatians 5:13-15

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TRANSCRIPT:

Galatians 5:13-15 reads:

"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another."

In this passage of Scripture, Paul reminds the believers, as he has just been demonstrating in Galatians 5:1-12, that they are called by God to a life of Christian freedom. But with this call of God to the life of Christian freedom, Paul helps them understand that there is a warning attached to it, lest they misunderstand Christian freedom, abuse Christian freedom, and find themselves in another form of bondage.

Freedom is something that the world speaks much of, and the world has many different views of freedom, most of which are incompatible with the Christian view of freedom. Some view freedom as a license, as the old song goes, "I'm free to do what I want any old time." Others view freedom as anti-authoritarian, basically concluding that the structures and rules of society and organizations are nothing but oppressive and lead to oppression. Others view freedom as independence, simply living a life in which "I don't need anyone, and that's it; I'm independent." Others view freedom a little bit more outrightly as rebellion, and basically, they say if there are rules, they need to be broken to really test whether or not you're free. So they might say freedom is the breaking and bending of rules.

But what is Christian freedom? You can imagine that after Paul has been speaking of freedom and the gospel freedom, and how the believer is no longer under the law, you could just imagine how the Judaizers and the people at Galatia might have a barrage of questions ready to send back in their next letter, saying, "All right then, do you mean by freedom license? You mean by freedom we can live however we want, and that there is no

rule and no restraint?" But Paul helps describe here that Christian freedom is actually quite the opposite to those things that I just mentioned above, and Christian freedom is yet the truest freedom known among men.

Christian freedom is not a license to sin; it is not anti-authoritarian, neither is it rebellious, and neither is it a life of independence whereby the lives of others do not matter to us. Well then, how does Christian freedom work and still be truly freedom without being lawless? This is what Paul addresses in this passage, but I'd like to illustrate this.

It may be similar to playing a musical instrument in harmony with the musical score, but not contrary to it, yet still being able to play in such a way that you're playing freely and going beyond it. To play contrary to the musical score would be chaos, disorder. To play strictly to the musical score will be great and beautiful, of course, but restricted in sound. But to play beyond the score and yet in harmony with it, and not violating the rules of music, is really ultimately the freest form of playing, which is the sound of freedom.

And Paul is going to demonstrate that the believer, as under the life of the Spirit, as moved by God's Spirit to a life of love, is just like that free player on the piano. The Spirit moves a believer through love to this kind of freedom so that his life is not inconsistent with the law. It is not contrary to the law, but it's also not limited to the specific stipulations of the law. The result of such a life in the Spirit, a new covenant life, is a life which is holy and vibrant at the same time.

I don't know if you can remember this far back, some of you, but it's like when you got your L's. Probably some of you paid for your L's, for your P's, and got your license, but anyway, if you did that, you should repent of that. But anyhow, if we think far back, when you know things a bit more tighter these days, it was like when you were driving on your L's, and the teenager that's on their L's and driving, they, before they go and sit their test with their instructor, they are driving quite freely, otherwise they wouldn't go and do it. You know, the parent in the car hardly has to think and say anything by that time, unless they're really anxious or something. But the point is, they drive in harmony with the rules, and they drive freely, and put the window down, you know, all this kind of stuff, and put the music on, and they drive, and they drive perfectly and in harmony with the law. They're relaxed, they're free, and they're fulfilling in their driving the law.

Yet, when the examiner is there, and all of a sudden, the mind and attention of that L driver is so fixated on the presence of the instructor and of the strict regulations that were always there, but now are right before them, laying heavy on their conscience, they sense the freedom dwindling

away, and usually, they are conscious of that, not having that freedom. And even though they drive in the test and out of the test consistently with the law and are not violating the law in any occasion, their experience of vibrant obedience to the law is very different.

And Paul wants the believers at Galatia to understand this: that living a life not under the law and under the old covenant is not a life that is lawless, yet it is still a life that is much more free than what those who are under the law possessed, namely because of the Spirit that now dwells in you.

And Paul exhorts the Galatians to this proper practice of Christian freedom, lest they abuse their freedom and they end up in some another form of bondage. And he speaks of the wrong practice of freedom in verse number 13, and as a result, in verse number 15, who could be in verse number 13 when he says, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty, that is, to freedom; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." He's saying that it's possible to use your freedom as opportunities for the flesh, and opportunities for the flesh simply mean a springboard for the flesh, or maybe better described as a bridgehead for the flesh.

What is a bridgehead? Well, it's a base of operations, a strategic position secured by the army inside enemy territory, from which they can advance an attack and expand their bases in enemy territory to overcome and defeat the enemy. And therefore, in that position where they set up that base, there's a pathway for that expansion and invasion of the rest of the territory. And so, when Paul says, "Do not use your liberty or your freedom as a bridgehead for the flesh," he's simply helping us understand that it is possible to live a life all about freedom, and what you have simply done is that you have set up a base of operations where your flesh, in the name of freedom, exerts its self-expression and starts to conquer and starts to bring you back into bondage, bondage into sin, ensnare you to fall into conduct that is displeasing to God.

Such conduct that is described in verse number 19 of this text, which I call the works of the flesh, which are evident, which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, and heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like. Simply, there is an innumerable amount of opportunities for the flesh to manifest itself in these ways if we allow it to have a foothold through the declaration of our freedom, a misunderstanding of what true Christian freedom really is.

The result of such freedom, Paul says in verse number 15, is basically

a bloodbath in the church. Look at what he says in verse number 15 of this passage: "But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another." Simply, to misunderstand your freedom and to cause your freedom to be an opportunity in a bridgehead for the advancement of the flesh in your life will result in a kind of anarchy and lawlessness and destructiveness that is best described by conduct of an animal biting, devouring, consuming.

A snake poisons its enemy by biting it, and then it eats its enemy, and it's consumed and annihilated. Same with savage wolves and dogs, and you can name all other kinds of predator animals. This is what happens: there is a biting, there is an eating up, and then the result of that is annihilation, carcasses left. And what Paul is simply saying is that if we don't check our liberties and understand liberty in the way that God has told us in the word, in the scripture, what we end up happening is our liberties will cause us to have a bridgehead for the flesh, which will then lead to a life in the church full of biting and devouring and consuming of one another, which really looks like criticizing, backbiting, attacking, dishonoring, disrespecting, hurting, all those stabbing, cutting, harmful remarks and behaviors that bring people down and serve to the opposite of what love does, which is edifies and builds up.

And so, Paul instructs them then on the right practice of freedom. And what then does that look like? If this is the wrong practice of freedom that is akin to the world's kind of freedom that leads to destruction in the church, what is the kind of freedom that God has called us into, and what does it mean to look like? Well, first and foremost, it looks like a paradox. You say, "What do you mean?" Well, look at verse number 13 and see the paradox here. See if you can pick it up:

"For, brethren, you have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, and here it is, but through love serve one another." But through love, be one another's slaves. Well, we've been talking about freedom, Paul, now you want me to be slaves of people? Precisely. This is what Christian liberty calls us to. This is what it looks like to be truly free, to one that has been set free from his reigning sinful passions, one who's been set free to love God, one who has been set free to love his neighbor as himself, one who has been set free to live for the glory of God when in times past he'd live for bondage and ended up in destruction. Paul is saying this is true Christian freedom: to live love, to live bound by love's fetters. This is what it looks like to demonstrate and to live a life that is truly free. This is true gospel freedom. This is the freedom that was reflected by our Lord Jesus Christ, the most free and most sovereign man ever to walk on the earth, yet by love, His life demonstrated a servitude, and through love, He was compelled to heal the sick, to comfort those that

were distraught and hurt, to strengthen the weak, to protect those that were oppressed, to pray for those in need, to weep over those that were being left without hope. He demonstrated love, servitude, so much so that He washed His disciples' feet, among whom was Judas, His very self, and then He dies—yes, to satisfy the righteous law of God and to satisfy God and His justice, but ultimately, He is dying for people. He's not dying for His own sins; He's dying for our sins. He's dying in our place. He is sacrificing Himself, serving us with salvation through His death. The free man demonstrating what true freedom really looks like.

And Paul is saying here, and his argument is here, that to live as this life, demonstrated in love to your neighbor, is not living a life contrary to the law, as was perhaps supposed by others when they heard Paul speak of freedom, but rather to live a life that actually fulfills the law. Verse number 14, he says it this way: "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, or one saying, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" He quotes the law, Leviticus 19:18, uses a statement from the law that captures the entire intention and purpose of the law. The law was given by God as the expression and stipulations of how the nation of Israel, living among themselves, should be able to reflect love toward God and love toward their neighbor. This is the intention of the law, and what Paul is saying: a life that is lived under Christ, a life that is lived in the Spirit, a life that is concerned with this one great commandment to love your neighbor as yourself, may be concluded as a life that is living in fulfillment of the law.

It's amazing how Paul does not call them to do the law, but rather he says that through love they fulfill the law, because Paul is not contradicting himself. In Galatians 5:3, he says, "Whoever does the law is a debtor to do the whole law," and it would seem quite absurd that Paul would jump down only a couple more verses and say, "Now do the law." Rather, what he is demonstrating here is that the work of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, that cleanses our consciences from sin, that unites us to God for the death of His Son, that puts us in right standing with God, and also puts His Spirit within us and pours out His love into our hearts, is a life that, when lived out, fulfills the law's righteousness and demands.

Paul here is helping them understand, as he says in verse number 23, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such, listen to this, there is no law." There is no law that can condemn the man that is walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, living a life that is possessed by the love of God and love to his neighbor, for the very heart and intention of the law is fulfilled through love.

And so, Paul is not resurrecting the law by dividing it up and showing them, "Then you need to do this, and do this, and not do that, and not do that, and do this." No, he's simply saying this: the whole law is fulfilled in one saying, "Love your neighbor as yourself." And if you live in love to your neighbor, you will fulfill the intent and the goal of the law, and the law is satisfied in those who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

And so, Paul's argument here is very, very important in two ways. Firstly, it keeps us from sentimental views of love. It keeps us from views of love that have no commandments, this kind of subjective, wishy-washy sense of love. Paul simply says here that love fulfills the law, and simply, he is showing, as our Lord Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." What he's simply saying is that love is never less than what the law shows. Love is never less than what the law demands. Simply, to live out the principle and the law of love, which is to love your neighbor as yourself, will never put you in contradiction to the law of God because the very intent of the law, as expounded in the old covenant, is that very truth expounded. So it's never less than what the commandments show, and it keeps us from this view of a sense that "I love everybody," and then you just live your own way. "I love my wife, but I never serve her. I love my husband, but I never submit to him. I love God, but I do not worship Him." There's a lot of talk like that, isn't there, in the world today about love? "I love people." Well, the demonstration of whether you love people is whether or not you serve people, not whether or not you feel love fluttering in your heart like a butterfly. By the way, it's nice to feel that; I'm not saying we shouldn't feel something of that, but I'm just saying that is not the essence of what love looks like. Anyone can have love like that or sense love like that, and it's not true love. Love is not a part or contrary to commands; hence, through love, we serve one another.

But also, what it is, what Paul keeps us from, is thinking that the law is the full and final expression of love. Simply saying this, that I love people as long as I do everything that the law commands, and I don't have to do anything beyond the law. As long as I play to the musical score, Paul is saying this is not true freedom; this is not true Christian love. And Paul's argument here keeps us from the law's limited expressions of love because many people approach the law as law and do not see its intent and simply limit the statements, the scenarios, and the context that it was given, and therefore they say, "Well, I don't have to do this; none of this applies to me." And Paul says, "Well, this is wrong also." Love actually goes beyond the commandment, not contrary to it; it fulfills it in that it's in harmony with it, but it goes also beyond the commandment. Therefore, love is not lawless, but it transcends the commandments.

A good illustration of this may be the Good Samaritan. The priest and the Levite were not necessarily specifically obligated by certain stipulations in the law—I'm not talking about the principles and about the specific statements in the law—to stop and help that man that was bleeding and left for dead. In fact, they could have probably argued by the law that they didn't really have to do that because they'd become ceremonially unclean and not be able to serve in the temple. And hey, you know, "We need to love God first, and what would God want me to do? He wants me to serve in the temple. I've got to make the Sabbath service; don't want to be late for church to help someone who was left for dead on the side of the road." And so, arguably, they could have used the law, even though they would have used it incorrectly, as the Pharisees did all through the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. But they could have used the law to make themselves feel like, "My conscience is clear in this matter," not recognizing the intention of the law.

Jesus dealt with this in so many ways, about eating on the Sabbath day and all these kinds of things that we see, healing a man on the Sabbath day as well. And so, they could have used the law in such a way as to say that "I'm in harmony with the specific commandments of the law as revealed in the Old Covenant, and therefore I'm okay." But it was the Good Samaritan who walked in the demonstration of the true intention of the law, which is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself, which is actually fully fulfilled and manifest and demonstrated in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is part of Paul's argument. He's simply saying and showing that it's not that we are to stay within the confines of the law and not go beyond it and therefore think that everything is okay. We are to understand the intention of the law, and we are to let love drive us through what is demonstrated in the gospel and obey that gospel by living lives that love our neighbor as ourselves.

And what Paul is simply saying to the Galatians here is, "Do not misunderstand Christian freedom because if you just see it as, 'Oh, I'm keeping all the laws,' then you'll limit yourself into what God actually requires of you, and you will not let the gospel take you further. But then, on the other side, if you think it is pure sentimentality, that 'I just have this great love in my heart,' and you're not living in harmony with the law, then you know that you're really not loving your neighbor as yourself. But Jesus and the scriptures and the New Testament want us to not focus our entire attention on those particular stipulations as if to think, 'I'm okay because I did this, and I did this, and I did that.' What the Bible is teaching us is here: you go love God, love your neighbor, just as Jesus did. Oh, but we want to know exactly what that looks like, and we don't want to go beyond that. Haha, that's where the Spirit comes in. He might get you to do something you never thought of that would be a demonstration of the intention of that

law. And you might think everything is good, and I've got my rights, and I've got my privileges because I'm standing right within the barriers of the law, but God says to us, "Love your neighbor as yourself." And the legalists love to know their barriers and boundaries, don't they? Because they are satisfied by staying within them, but they never see that love may go beyond them, and although not be contradictory to them.

And this is the problem that we need to examine ourselves with this morning. How should we then approach Christian freedom? We should approach Christian freedom as it accords with Christian love. And maybe this morning, you are ensnared by wrong views of Christian freedom. Look, we all exercise freedoms, and we all have liberties in matters of conscience. Some of us here perhaps watch certain kinds of movies that are not immoral or ungodly, and we'd like to enjoy certain kinds of entertainment. Others of us here like to have a drink, alcohol, and to enjoy a glass of wine or whatever it may be, or scotch even, or whiskey. Some of us like smoking cigars—God bless you, you can be the chimney for the church—but, and you are at liberty by the grace of God. Some of us like certain kinds of music that is not confined to, that is not particularly Christian in nature, but it is not ungodly, neither; it's just music. Some of us have physical boundaries that we set in dating relationships that are different to others. Some like to hold hands; some don't like to hold hands. We'll have a chat about that sometime, but hey, the point is, everyone has their differences of liberties and the expression of those things, and you know what? Well within your Christian liberties, you may live and practice, but do not forget this law that you are to love your neighbor as yourself.

What does that mean? There are some Christians that are just so concerned about being in the boundaries; they're always talking about laws and prohibition. "Well, I'm not, I'm allowed to do this, and I'm allowed to do that," and on and on and on and allowed and allowed and allowed and allowed, and it's like, "I just want to be free." Well, the law takes us further than that, doesn't it? The law of love takes us further than that, doesn't it? It tells us this: how may my freedoms, may they cause someone to sin against their conscience? Listen to this, for all you pork lovers like me, "If meat makes my brother to offend," says Paul, "I will eat no meat while the world stands." If meat makes my brother to offend, that doesn't mean that your brother doesn't like it—careful, unless he becomes a tyrant over you and tries to put you under bondage and legalism—but if my eating of meat in the presence of my brother will cause my brother, who does not eat certain meats, to sin against his own conscience because he believes that it's right for him before God not to eat those meats, then Paul says, even something as silly, quote-unquote, and something as that sense of liberty that we have, even that, Paul says, "I'll give up," because of the law of love. Paul's not gonna say, "But the law says this, and this says that, and really

you can do that," and that. He says, "You know what? Love compels me to love you, and I'm willing to sacrifice that which is most dear to me so that my brother may not be enslaved into sin and sin against Christ and be in bondage." And as he is working at his conviction, and his conscience is being developed and growing as he matures in his faith in Christ, and he comes to understand more and more of his Christian liberties and is not so offended by them and stumbled by them, fine. But Jesus is saying to us, "It's not about your liberties; it's about love." And love sacrifices things so that others might be edified.

And this is really important for us to realize in all these areas and spheres that even I just mentioned. Some people have alcohol addiction or ex-alcohol addiction that struggle being in the presence of alcohol, so that one glass will tip them over back into the old pit hole that they were hewn out from by the grace of Christ. And some Christian brothers are like, "Yeah, we're free," and then it's like this brother comes along, and next thing you know, he's gone off the radar. What's happened to him? "Oh, he's a drunkard now." It happens. It happens, even in the matter of dating relationships. You might be like, "Well, I'm, we're free to do this, and the Bible doesn't tell us," and you know what? It doesn't. But there's your touching that may be particularly innocent, tempt your spouse to have some kind of fantasies that are inappropriate of you. That's a case-by-case matter. Maybe you should have that conversation. Maybe it'd be helpful to have that conversation because love will not be saying, "What can I do and not do?" It will be saying, "How can I serve the other so that they won't fall into sin?"

Then there are Christians that are provokers of Christian liberty, not really lovers of the brethren, but they're provokers. They use freedom to bite and devour and to stir souls. Of course, there we joke about these things often, but I'm not talking about that. There are people who will call other Christians soft or weak or sissy. Some of the real reformed guys will say, "You're not really reformed unless you go a bit and have a beer and a cigar. You don't watch movies? Are you a weirdo? A legalist?" A legalist, that's not legalist means. Others are dismissive of others. All they're concerned about is, "I have liberty to say the truth, no matter what, and I didn't care who it hurts. I'm gonna speak the truth." That might accord with something of the law, but does it accord with Christian love? What does it accord with the principle of Christian love, as explained by Paul, who says, "I become all things to all men, so that I might by all means save some"? That's a man that's willing to let go of some things that he prefers in the name of the law of love, so that his neighbor might have the gospel.

But there are many Christians that are just dismissive of others. They take their freedoms and their rights, and they do not care about their neighbor. All they care about is themselves and their self-indulgence. This is causing

there to be a bridgehead for the flesh. Others are disrespectful to authority. They undermine parents who are trying to rear and raise their children in certain ways that, you know what? The Bible doesn't specifically say whether or not your kids should eat sugar or not, you know, right? Christian Liberty, you know, or whether or not they should watch a certain thing or not, and it might be innocent fun, and it might be harmless, and all these kinds of things, but they may speak and behave and feed and entertain someone else's children with failure to understand that the law of love should ask the question, "Is this actually going to be serving the parents in such a way as they are trying to raise their children, or is this just about just me being able to do what I want because I'm free to do so?"

You might look at these as somewhat trivial matters, but I think at the end of the day, it is as trivial as, "If meat makes my brother to offend, I'll eat no meat while the world stands." I think what Paul is trying to say here is that love goes well and truly beyond the law and may demand of us things that cut us deeper than what we realize, and we must always, always remember and never forget this very truth: that where you may freely walk, others will stumble. This is what it means to love your neighbor as yourself, to think in terms of them. "I can walk here freely." Yes, you may walk there freely, but it doesn't mean that everyone is able to walk there with you. And therefore, in your liberties, do not take people to the place of stumbling, or you ask the question, or you get to know them, or whatever it may be. But the simple point is this: live in a way that demonstrates that you love your neighbor as yourself.

Therefore, we are to positively obey this commandment by obeying the commandment by using our freedom to actually serve one another, to live in such a way that pursues the things that make for peace. See, pursue the things that make for peace. No more, not to be a church that is so taken up in the peripheral matters that the Bible doesn't clearly specify, but rather to be a church that lives with that one focus, which is Christ Him crucified and the glory of His gospel, to live in peace, to pursue the things which make for peace and the things whereby we may edify one another. That's what the law of love has in its ultimate intention. I want to build up people, not destroy them. The priority of the Christian is not his liberties but his love toward his neighbor, and it is important that we live in such a way that we serve one another, that we live in such a way where we are seeking to come alongside one another to build one another, to ask, "How can we help this person grow in their faith, be edified in their faith? How can we help this person become more like Jesus Christ the Lord? How does my behavior affect my neighbor?" No one lives unto himself, says the Bible. No one is an island unto himself. All of our conduct affects those around us, and we have to be mindful of how we are loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Let us be a people that do not create a bridgehead for the flesh and allow the flesh to dominate our lives through our supposed liberties because there are many Christians that are living in their liberties, thinking that "I'm in the boundaries of the law," but failing to realize that around the corner is the temptation of addiction, around the corner is the temptation of substance abuse, around the corner is the temptation of things that have not yet seen, even leading a brother into a place of stumbling. Therefore, walk in your freedom TRANSCRIPT:

Beloved, let us turn to Galatians Chapter 5, considering verses 13 through to verse 15. Galatians 5:13-15 reads, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another."

In this passage of Scripture, Paul reminds the believers, as he has just been demonstrating in chapter 5 verses 1 to 12, that they are called by God to a life of Christian freedom. But with this call of God to the life of Christian freedom, Paul helps them understand that there is a warning attached to it, lest they misunderstand Christian freedom, abuse Christian freedom, and find themselves just in another form of bondage.

Freedom is something that the world speaks much of, and the world has many different views of freedom, most of which are incompatible with the Christian view of freedom. Some view freedom as a license, as the old song goes, "I'm free to do what I want, any old time." Others view freedom as anti-authoritarian, basically concluding that the structures and rules of society and organizations are nothing but oppressive and lead to oppression. Others view freedom as independence, simply living a life in which "I don't need anyone, and that's it; I'm independent." Others view freedom a little bit more outrightly as rebellion, and basically, they say if there are rules, they need to be broken to really test whether or not you're free. So they might say freedom is the breaking and bending of rules.

But what is Christian freedom? You can imagine that after Paul has been speaking of freedom in the gospel, freedom, and how the believer is no longer under the law, you could just imagine how the Judaizers and the people at Galatia might have a barrage of questions ready to send back in their next letter, saying, "All right then, do you mean by freedom license? You mean by freedom we can live however we want, and that there is no rule and no restraint?" But Paul helps describe here that Christian freedom is actually quite the opposite to those things that I just mentioned above, and Christian freedom is yet the truest freedom known among men.

Christian freedom is not a license to sin; it is not anti-authoritarian, neither is it rebellious, and neither is it a life of independence whereby the lives of others do not matter to us. Well then, how does Christian freedom work and still be truly freedom without being lawless? This is what Paul addresses in this passage, but I'd like to illustrate this. It may be similar to playing a musical instrument in harmony with the musical score but not contrary to it, yet still being able to play in such a way that you're playing freely and going beyond it. To play contrary to the musical score would be chaos, disorder. To play strictly to the musical score will be great and beautiful, of course, but restricted in sound. But to play beyond the score and yet in harmony with it and not violating the rules of music is really, ultimately, the freest form of playing, which is the sound of freedom.

And Paul is going to demonstrate that the believer, as under the life of the Spirit, as moved by God's Spirit to a life of love, is just like that free player on the piano. The Spirit moves a believer through love to this kind of freedom so that his life is not inconsistent with the law. It is not contrary to the law, but it's also not limited to the specific stipulations of the law. The result of such a life in the Spirit, a new covenant life, is a life which is holy and vibrant at the same time.

I don't know if you can remember this far back, some of you, but it's like when you got your L's. Probably some of you paid for your L's, for your P's, and got your license, but anyway, if you did that, you should repent of that. But anyhow, if we think far back, when you know things a bit more tighter these days, it was like when you were driving on your L's, and the person, you know, the teenager that's on their L's and driving, they, before they go and sit their test with their instructor, they are driving quite freely, otherwise they wouldn't go and do it. You know, the parent in the car hardly has to think and say anything by that time, unless they're really anxious or something. But the point is, they drive in harmony with the rules, and they drive freely, and put the window down, you know, all this kind of stuff, and put the music on, and they drive, and they drive perfectly, and in harmony with the law. They're relaxed, they're free, and they're fulfilling in their driving the law.

Yet, when the examiner is there, and all of a sudden, the mind and attention of that L driver is so fixated on the presence of the instructor and of the strict regulations that were always there but now are right before them, laying heavy on their conscience, they sense the freedom dwindling away, and usually, they are conscious of that, not having that freedom. And even though they drive in the test and out of the test consistently with the law and are not violating the law in any occasion, their experience of vibrant obedience to the law is very different.

And Paul wants the believers at Galatia to understand this: that living a life not under the law and under the old covenant is not a life that is lawless, yet it is still a life that is much more free than what those who are under the law possessed, namely because of the Spirit that now dwells in you. And Paul exhorts the Galatians to this proper practice of Christian freedom, lest they abuse their freedom and they end up in some another form of bondage. And he speaks of the wrong practice of freedom in verse number 13, and as a result, in verse number 15, who could be in verse number 13 when he says, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty, that is, to freedom; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." He's saying that it's possible to use your freedom as opportunities for the flesh, and opportunities for the flesh simply mean a springboard for the flesh, or maybe better described as a bridgehead for the flesh.

What is a bridgehead? Well, it's a base of operations, a strategic position secured by the army inside enemy territory, from which they can advance an attack and expand their bases in enemy territory to overcome and defeat the enemy. And therefore, in that position where they set up that base, there's a pathway for that expansion and invasion of the rest of the territory. And so, when Paul says, "Do not use your liberty or your freedom as a bridgehead for the flesh," he's simply helping us understand that it is possible to live a life all about freedom, and what you have simply done is that you have set up a base of operations where your flesh, in the name of freedom, exerts its self-expression and starts to conquer and starts to bring you back into bondage, bondage into sin, ensnare you to fall into conduct that is displeasing to God, such conduct that is described in verse number 19 of this text, which I call the works of the flesh, which are evident, which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like. Simply, there is an innumerable amount of opportunities for the flesh to manifest itself in these ways if we allow it to have a foothold through the declaration of our freedom, a misunderstanding of what true Christian freedom really is.

The result of such freedom, Paul says in verse number 15, is basically a bloodbath in the church. Look at what he says in verse number 15 of this passage: "But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another." Simply, to misunderstand your freedom and to cause your freedom to be an opportunity and a bridgehead for the advancement of the flesh in your life will result in a kind of anarchy and lawlessness and destructiveness that is best described by conduct of an animal biting, devouring, consuming. A snake poisons its enemy by biting it, and then it eats its enemy, and it's consumed and annihilated. Same with savage

wolves and dogs, and you can name all other kinds of predator animals. This is what happens: there is a biting, there is an eating up, and then the result of that is annihilation, carcasses left. And what Paul is simply saying is that if we don't check our liberties and understand liberty in the way that God has told us in the Word, in the Scripture, what we end up happening is our liberties will cause us to have a bridgehead for the flesh, which will then lead to a life in the church full of biting and devouring and consuming of one another, which really looks like criticizing, backbiting, attacking, dishonoring, disrespecting, hurting—all those stabbing, cutting, harmful remarks and behaviors that bring people down and serve to the opposite of what love does, which is edifies and builds up.

And so, Paul instructs them then on the right practice of freedom. And what then does that look like? If this is the wrong practice of freedom that is akin to the world's kind of freedom that leads to destruction in the church, what is the kind of freedom that God has called us into, and what does it mean to look like? Well, first and foremost, it looks like a paradox. You say, "What do you mean?" Well, look at verse number 13 and see the paradox here. See if you can pick it up: "For, brethren, you have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh," and here it is, "but through love serve one another." But through love, be one another's slaves. "Well, we've been talking about freedom, Paul. Now you want me to be slaves of people?" Precisely. This is what Christian liberty calls us to. This is what it looks like to be truly free: to one that has been set free from his reigning sinful passions, one who's been set free to love God, one who has been set free to love his neighbor as himself, one who has been set free to live for the glory of God when in times past he'd live for bondage and ended up in destruction. Paul is saying this is true Christian freedom: to live love, to live bound by love's fetters. This is what it looks like to demonstrate and to live a life that is truly free. This is true gospel freedom. This is the freedom that was reflected by our Lord Jesus Christ, the most free and most sovereign man ever to walk on the earth, yet by love, His life demonstrated a servitude, and through love, He was compelled to heal the sick, to comfort those that were distraught and hurt, to strengthen the weak, to protect those that were oppressed, to pray for those in need, to weep over those that were being left without hope. He demonstrated love, servitude, so much so that He washed His disciples' feet, among whom was Judas, His very self, and then He dies—yes, to satisfy the righteous law of God and to satisfy God and His justice, but ultimately, He is dying for people. He's not dying for His own sins; He's dying for our sins. He's dying in our place. He is sacrificing Himself, serving us with salvation through His death. The free man demonstrating what true freedom really looks like.

And Paul is saying here, and his argument is here, that to live as this life, demonstrated in love to your neighbor, is not living a life contrary to

the law, as was perhaps supposed by others when they heard Paul speak of freedom, but rather to live a life that actually fulfills the law. Verse number 14, he says it this way: "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, or one saying, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" He quotes the law, Leviticus 19:18, uses a statement from the law that captures the entire intention and purpose of the law. The law was given by God as the expression and stipulations of how the nation of Israel, living among themselves, should be able to reflect love toward God and love toward their neighbor. This is the intention of the law, and what Paul is saying: a life that is lived under Christ, a life that is lived in the Spirit, a life that is concerned with this one great commandment to love your neighbor as yourself, may be concluded as a life that is living in fulfillment of the law.

It's amazing how Paul does not call them to do the law, but rather he says that through love they fulfill the law, because Paul is not contradicting himself. In Galatians 5:3, he says, "Whoever does the law is a debtor to do the whole law," and it would seem quite absurd that Paul would jump down only a couple more verses and say, "Now do the law." Rather, what he is demonstrating here is that the work of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, that cleanses our consciences from sin, that unites us to God for the death of His Son, that puts us in right standing with God, and also puts His Spirit within us and pours out His love into our hearts, is a life that, when lived out, fulfills the law's righteousness and demands.

Paul here is helping them understand, as he says in verse number 23, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such, listen to this, there is no law." There is no law that can condemn the man that is walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, living a life that is possessed by the love of God and love to his neighbor, for the very heart and intention of the law is fulfilled through love.

And so, Paul is not resurrecting the law by dividing it up and showing them, "Then you need to do this, and do this, and not do that, and not do that, and do this." No, he's simply saying this: the whole law is fulfilled in one saying, "Love your neighbor as yourself." And if you live in love to your neighbor, you will fulfill the intent and the goal of the law, and the law is satisfied in those who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

And so, Paul's argument here is very, very important in two ways. Firstly, it keeps us from sentimental views of love. It keeps us from views of love that have no commandments, this kind of subjective, wishy-washy sense of love. Paul simply says here that love fulfills the law, and simply, he is showing,

as our Lord Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." What he's simply saying is that love is never less than what the law shows. Love is never less than what the law demands. Simply, to live out the principle and the law of love, which is to love your neighbor as yourself, will never put you in contradiction to the law of God because the very intent of the law, as expounded in the old covenant, is that very truth expounded. So it's never less than what the commandments show, and it keeps us from this view of a sense that "I love everybody," and then you just live your own way. "I love my wife, but I never serve her. I love my husband, but I never submit to him. I love God, but I do not worship Him." There's a lot of talk like that, isn't there, in the world today, about love? "I love people." Well, the demonstration of whether you love people is whether or not you serve people, not whether or not you feel love fluttering in your heart like a butterfly. By the way, it's nice to feel that; I'm not saying we shouldn't feel something of that, but I'm just saying that is not the essence of what love looks like. Anyone can have love like that or sense love like that, and it's not true love. Love is not a part or contrary to commands; hence, through love, we serve one another.

But also, what it is, what Paul keeps us from, is thinking that the law is the full and final expression of love. Simply saying this: that I love people as long as I do everything that the law commands, and I don't have to do anything beyond the law. As long as I play to the musical score, Paul is saying this is not true freedom; this is not true Christian love. And Paul's argument here keeps us from the law's limited expressions of love because many people approach the law as law and do not see its intent and simply limit the statements, the scenarios, and the context that it was given, and therefore they say, "Well, I don't have to do this; none of this applies to me." And Paul says, "Well, this is wrong also." Love actually goes beyond the commandment, not contrary to it; it fulfills it in that it's in harmony with it, but it goes also beyond the commandment. Therefore, love is not lawless, but it transcends the commandments.

A good illustration of this may be the Good Samaritan. The priest and the Levite were not necessarily specifically obligated by certain stipulations in the law—I'm not talking about the principles and about the specific statements in the law—to stop and help that man that was bleeding and left for dead. In fact, they could have probably argued by the law that they didn't really have to do that because they'd become ceremonially unclean and not be able to serve in the temple, and, "Hey, you know, we need to love God first, and what would God want me to do? He wants me to serve in the temple. I've got to make the Sabbath service; don't want to be late for church to help someone who was left for dead on the side of the road." And so, arguably, they could have used the law, even though they would have used it incorrectly, as the Pharisees did all through the ministry of our Lord Jesus

Christ. But they could have used the law to make themselves feel like, "My conscience is clear in this matter," not recognizing the intention of the law. Jesus dealt with this in so many ways, about eating on the Sabbath day and all these kinds of things that we see, healing a man on the Sabbath day as well.

And so, they could have used the law in such a way as to say that "I'm in harmony with the specific commandments of the law as revealed in the Old Covenant, and therefore I'm okay." But it was the Good Samaritan who walked in the demonstration of the true intention of the law, which is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself, which is actually fully fulfilled and manifest and demonstrated in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is part of Paul's argument. He's simply saying and showing that it's not that we are to stay within the confines of the law and not go beyond it and therefore think that everything is okay. We are to understand the intention of the law, and we are to let love drive us through what is demonstrated in the gospel and obey that gospel by living lives that love our neighbor as ourselves.

And what Paul is simply saying to the Galatians here is, "Do not misunderstand Christian freedom because if you just see it as, 'Oh, I'm keeping all the laws,' then you'll limit yourself into what God actually requires of you, and you will not let the gospel take you further. But then, on the other side, if you think it is pure sentimentality, that 'I just have this great love in my heart,' and you're not living in harmony with the law, then you know that you're really not loving your neighbor as yourself. But Jesus and the Scriptures and the New Testament want us to not focus our entire attention on those particular stipulations as if to think, 'I'm okay because I did this, and I did this, and I did that.' What the Bible is teaching us is here: you go love God, love your neighbor, just as Jesus did. Oh, but we want to know exactly what that looks like, and we don't want to go beyond that. Haha, that's where the Spirit comes in. He might get you to do something you never thought of, that would be a demonstration of the intention of that law. And you might think everything is good, and I've got my rights, and I've got my privileges because I'm standing right within the barriers of the law, but God says to us, "Love your neighbor as yourself." And the legalists love to know their barriers and boundaries, don't they? Because they are satisfied by staying within them, but they never see that love may go beyond them, and although not be contradictory to them. And this is the problem that we need to examine ourselves with this morning.

How should we then approach Christian freedom? We should approach Christian freedom as it accords with Christian love. And maybe this morning, you are ensnared by wrong views of Christian freedom. Look, we all exercise freedoms, and we all have liberties in matters of conscience. Some

of us here perhaps watch certain kinds of movies that are not immoral or ungodly, and we'd like to enjoy certain kinds of entertainment. Others of us here like to have a drink, alcohol, and to enjoy a glass of wine or whatever it may be, or scotch even, or whiskey. Some of us like smoking cigars—God bless you, you can be the chimney for the church—but, and you are at liberty by the grace of God. Some of us like certain kinds of music that is not confined to, that is not particularly Christian in nature, but it is not ungodly, neither; it's just music. Some of us have physical boundaries that we set in dating relationships that are different to others; some like to hold hands, some don't like to hold hands. We'll have a chat about that sometime, but hey, the point is, everyone has their differences of liberties and the expression of those things, and you know what? Well within your Christian liberties, you may live and practice, but do not forget this law, that you are to love your neighbor as yourself.

What does that mean? There are some Christians that are just so concerned about being in the boundaries; they're always talking about laws and prohibition. "Well, I'm not, I'm allowed to do this, and I'm allowed to do that," and on and on and on, and allowed, and allowed, and allowed, and it's like, "I just want to be free." Well, the law takes us further than that, doesn't it? The law of love takes us further than that, doesn't it? It tells us this: how may my freedoms cause someone to sin against their conscience? Listen to this, for all you pork lovers like me, "If meat makes my brother to offend," says Paul, "I will eat no meat while the world stands." If meat makes my brother to offend, that doesn't mean that your brother doesn't like it—careful, unless he becomes a tyrant over you and tries to put you under bondage and legalism—but if my eating of meat in the presence of my brother will cause my brother, who does not eat certain meats, to sin against his own conscience because he believes that it's right for him before God not to eat those meats, then Paul says, even something as silly, quote-unquote, and something as that sense of liberty that we have, even that, Paul says, "I'll give up," because of the law of love. Paul's not gonna say, "But the law says this, and this says that, and really you can do that," and that. He says, "You know what? Love compels me to love you, and I'm willing to sacrifice that which is most dear to me so that my brother may not be enslaved into sin and sin against Christ and be in bondage." And as he is working at his conviction, and his conscience is being developed and growing as he matures in his faith in Christ, and he comes to understand more and more of his Christian liberties and is not so offended by them and stumbled by them, fine. But Jesus is saying to us, "It's not about your liberties; it's about love." And love sacrifices things so that others might be edified.

And this is really important for us to realize in all these areas and spheres that even I just mentioned. Some people have alcohol addiction or ex-

alcohol addiction that struggle being in the presence of alcohol, so that one glass will tip them over back into the old pit hole that they were hewn out from by the grace of Christ. And some Christian brothers are like, "Yeah, we're free," and then it's like this brother comes along, and next thing you know, he's gone off the radar. What's happened to him? "Oh, he's a drunkard now." It happens. It happens, even in the matter of dating relationships. You might be like, "Well, I'm, we're free to do this, and the Bible doesn't tell us," and you know what? It doesn't. But there's your touching that may be particularly innocent, tempt your spouse to have some kind of fantasies that are inappropriate of you. That's a case-by-case matter. Maybe you should have that conversation. Maybe it'd be helpful to have that conversation because love will not be saying, "What can I do and not do?" It will be saying, "How can I serve the other so that they won't fall into sin?"

Then there are Christians that are provokers of Christian liberty, not really lovers of the brethren, but they're provokers. They use freedom to bite and devour and to stir souls. Of course, there we joke about these things often, but I'm not talking about that. There are people who will call other Christians soft or weak or sissy. Some of the real reformed guys will say, "You're not really reformed unless you go a bit and have a beer and a cigar. You don't watch movies? Are you a weirdo? A legalist?" A legalist, that's not legalist means. Others are dismissive of others. All they're concerned about is, "I have liberty to say the truth, no matter what, and I didn't care who it hurts. I'm gonna speak the truth." That might accord with something of the law, but as it accorded Christian love? What is it called with the principle of Christian love, as explained by Paul, who says, "I become all things to all men, so that I might by all means save some"? That's a man that's willing to let go of some things that he prefers in the name of the law of love, so that his neighbor might have the gospel.

But there are many Christians that are just dismissive of others. They take their freedoms and their rights, and they do not care about their neighbor. All they care about is themselves and their self-indulgence. This is causing there to be a bridgehead for the flesh. Others are disrespectful to authority. They undermine parents who are trying to rear and raise their children in certain ways that, you know what? The Bible doesn't specifically say whether or not your kids should eat sugar or not, you know, right? Christian Liberty, you know, or whether or not they should watch a certain thing or not, and it might be innocent fun, and it might be harmless, and all these kinds of things, but they may speak and behave and feed and entertain someone else's children with failure to understand that the law of love should ask the question, "Is this actually going to be serving the parents in such a way as they are trying to raise their children, or is this just about just me being able to do what I want because I'm free to do so?"

You might look at these as somewhat trivial matters, but I think at the end of the day, it is as trivial as, "If meat makes my brother to offend, I'll eat no meat while the world stands." I think what Paul is trying to say here is that love goes well and truly beyond the law and may demand of us things that cut us deeper than what we realize, and we must always, always remember and never forget this very truth: that where you may freely walk, others will stumble. This is what it means to love your neighbor as yourself, to think in terms of them. "I can walk here freely." Yes, you may walk there freely, but it doesn't mean that everyone is able to walk there with you. And therefore, in your liberties, do not take people to the place of stumbling, or you ask the question, or you get to know them, or whatever it may be. But the simple point is this: live in a way that demonstrates that you love your neighbor as yourself.

Therefore, we are to positively obey this commandment by obeying the commandment by using our freedom to actually serve one another, to live in such a way that pursues the things that make for peace. See, pursue the things that make for peace. No more, not to be a church that is so taken up in the peripheral matters that the Bible doesn't clearly specify, but rather to be a church that lives with that one focus, which is Christ, Him crucified, and the glory of His gospel. To live in peace, to pursue the things which make for peace, and the things whereby we may edify one another. That's what the law of love has in its ultimate intention. I want to build up people, not destroy them. The priority of the Christian is not his liberties, but his love toward his neighbor. And it is important that we live in such a way that we serve one another, that we live in such a way where we are seeking to come alongside one another to build one another, to ask, "How can we help this person grow in their faith, be edified in their faith? How can we help this person become more like Jesus Christ the Lord? How does my behavior affect my neighbor?" No one lives unto himself, says the Bible. No one is an island unto himself. All of our conduct affects those around us, and we have to be mindful of how we are loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Let us be a people that do not create a bridgehead for the flesh and allow the flesh to dominate our lives through our supposed liberties because there are many Christians that are living in their liberties, thinking that "I'm in the boundaries of the law," but failing to realize that around the corner is the temptation of addiction, around the corner is the temptation of substance abuse, around the corner is the temptation of things that have not yet seen, even leading a brother into a place of stumbling. Therefore, walk in your freedom. Don't let anyone tell you, "You can't do this," and "This is what you have to be in order to be pleasing in the sight of God." True, but at the same time, do not take your freedom and smash your brother over the head and make him feel that he's less than what God has made him to be because he does not live like you.

So, through love, serve one another, just as Jesus did for us. Let us pray.