



**Galatians 5:1-26**  
*Christian Liberty*

**NKJ Galatians 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.**

**2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.**

**3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.**

**4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.**

**5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.**

**6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.**

**7 You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?**

**8 This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you.**

**9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump.**

**10 I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.**

**11 And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.**

**12 I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!**

**13 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.**

**14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."**

**15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!**

**16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.**

**17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.**

**18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.**

**19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,**

**20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,**

**21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

**22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

**23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.**

**24 And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

**25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.**

**26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.**

Last week we began to discuss the freedom that Christians have in Christ, we talked about four glorious freedoms believers have been given in Christ:

- First that we are Free from the Curse of the Law,
- 2nd that we are free from bondage to sin and the devil,
- 3<sup>rd</sup> that we have been delivered from the sting of Death, from damnation and from the victory of the Grave,
- And 4<sup>th</sup> that we have been freed from the yoke of the Ceremonial Law.

But while those are the most important freedoms we have, there are other freedoms we have in Christ, and there are also things that we are not free to do. Clearly our Christian liberty does not consist in a *liberty to sin*. In this chapter even after encouraging Christians not to give up the precious freedoms that they have in Christ he goes on to list a number of sins that Christians do not have “liberty” to indulge in. So today we are going to endeavor to try to get a hold on the “true bounds of Christian freedom” as Samuel Bolton put it.

Those of you familiar with Greek Mythology will recognize the phrase “between Scylla and Charybdis.” Scylla was many headed sea monster who ate sailors who passed too near, and Charybdis was another sea monster who created a great whirlpool that would suck in ships. They were supposed to be on either side of the straits of Messina, and it took great skill to navigate between them so you didn’t get eaten by Scylla or sucked in by Charybdis. Well, it seems to me that for the Christian, our Scylla is Antinomianism or lawlessness and our Charybdis is neonomianism or legalism, and our calling is to successfully navigate the narrow course of true Christian Liberty that lies between the two. And it is very difficult, generally most Christians will chart a course that is too close to one or the other, and often realizing that we have strayed into legalism we will overcorrect and steer towards lawlessness or vice versa. You can see this even in the churches of the New Testament. The Galatian church had become entangled by Judaizers in legalism, which Paul rightly rebukes them for, but the Corinthians for instance, had clearly fallen into lawlessness and Paul rightly rebukes them for that in first Corinthians. So let us see then if we can’t try to discern the path that keeps both law and grace in their proper perspective.

First I want to establish TWO rules for the exercise of our Christian liberty and they seek to apply those rules:

- 1) **The first and most important rule that will keep us on that path is that, “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship.”** To quote the Westminster Confession of Faith in Chapter 20 section 2. What that means is that nothing can bind your conscience to obedience that is not commanded or forbidden in the bible.

Now LOTS of religious people in history have not agreed with this, for instance, the Pharisees. Their belief that men could invent new religious laws and then bind men to observe them caused most of the conflicts between them and Christ and His Apostles. For instance, please turn in your bibles to Matthew 15:1-9

*Matthew 15:1 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying,  
 2 "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."  
 3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?  
 4 "For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'  
 5 "But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God" --  
 6 'then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.  
 7 "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:  
 8 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.  
 9 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "*

Now there is nothing in the law of God in the Bible that said you had to go through a ceremonial purification ceremony of hand washing before you eat lest you be made unclean by eating, but the Rabbis had commanded it, and this was a tradition that people had been observing for hundreds of years, and hey if Grandma and Grandpa did it, it must be good! But Jesus points out how this was a man-made law and one that failed to understand that sin was problem of the heart and of our nature not something that we take in by eating. He also points out how their traditions actually caused men to ignore God's actual commandments in the bible. For instance he points to the practice of declaring your possessions to be *corban* that is an offering to God so that when you die they would go to the temple treasury and then using that as your excuse for not taking care of your own parents as the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment "Honor your Father and Your Mother" commanded.

But it wasn't just the Pharisees, as you follow the history of the church after the Apostolic age you begin to see Christians told to observe more and more traditions that are not commanded in the word for instance, they were told to observe Holy Days and Saints Days that aren't in the word, that instead of Elders and Deacons elected by the congregation we now had Priests and Bishops with authority over the congregation, that clergy shouldn't marry even though the Apostles did, that they shouldn't eat meat on Friday, that they should pray to the saints and Mary, that pilgrimages should be made to supposedly holy places, that relics like bones and bits of wood should be venerated. They invented these traditions and then told believers YOU MUST observe them, and "taught as doctrines the commandments of men." One of the great contributions of the Reformation was to clear away the accumulated garbage of centuries of baseless human tradition and say that the Word alone was a sufficient rule and guide for all of our faith life and practice, and to return to a biblical simplicity of faith and worship.

**2) Now Having avoided Legalism we need to take care to avoid the opposite extreme which leads me to the Second Point: That our Christian Liberty is not Lawlessness.** We do not have the Freedom to do whatever we want. We are not free to sin. Our Christian liberty is intended to free our conscience from the laws of men so that we can more perfectly serve and obey the God we love. So as the Westminster Confession puts it in Chapter 20, section 3: *"They who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty,*

*which is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life."*

Which is another way of saying what Christ said in *John 8:34 Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.*

*35 "And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.*

*36 "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.*

Far too often, grace is being turned into lawlessness by modern Christians. Christ didn't free us from bondage to sin so that we might enslave ourselves to it. There will never be a day now and certainly not in heaven when it will be acceptable for Christians to break God's moral law with impunity. You are not free brethren to lie, to steal, to blaspheme, to covet, to take the Lord's name in vain, to commit adultery and so on. Each one of those sins of the flesh listed in verses 19-21 is a violation of one of the Ten Commandments. But when you point that out to many modern day Christians they will say to you, that's just legalism. To which you should answer, "brother or sister, I am not being legalistic. The indulgence of sin is lawlessness: as John says in *1 John 3:4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.*

And what did Jesus say about those who practice *lawlessness*?

*Mark 7:21 " Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*

*22 "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'*

*23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*

*Three Applications -*

**1<sup>st</sup> Application:** We have to avoid Creeping Back into Neonomianism, Legalism. We have to avoid either re-establishing old traditions or creating new ones, and when we see that we have, we have to do the painful work of reformation again.

What do I mean? Well as good children of the Reformation we all generally tend to say YES, THAT IS GOOD when it comes to reversing the traditions of Roman Catholicism or enforced traditions of cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons, but we tend to like and defend *our own human traditions.*

The problem is, that after a reformation the tendency is to go back into the old channels to once again load men down with man made laws and ceremonies. Over the years since the Reformation, many of the churches that came out of the reformation Baptists, Presbyterian, Congregationalists and so on, have been adding back old traditions and inventing new ones. The Holy Days are gradually creeping back, clerical garb and unnecessary liturgical ceremonies, other churches have entire lists of rules without which holiness is supposedly impossible. And here's where I'm going to get into trouble:

Often what happens is that a good principle based upon the law of God becomes the basis of a new law that isn't necessarily biblical. Many examples of that principle could be cited let me give you just one, the Bible in both Testaments tells us that Drunkenness is sinful: *Eph. 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.* So we take a good law, "don't be drunk"

and take it to an unbiblical excess. *Don't ever drink alcohol.* Now this ignores the fact that Christ and the Apostles drank wine, as well as saints in the Old Testament, and God calls wine his good gift which *gladdens the hearts of men*. But instead of saying don't abuse HIS gift through excess we say, DON'T USE his gift.

The odd thing is that people who can see the problems with this kind of thinking when it comes to say GUN OWNERSHIP, so they understand that simply because a gun can be misused is not an argument for banning them, don't understand it when it comes to alcohol. This is largely because of the pervasive influence of tradition. People from Europe and Japan who have been raised without the tradition of private Gun ownership can't understand why anyone should feel they should have them and get angry with those who do. People raised in a tee-total tradition often can't understand why any Christian would want to drink and get angry with those who do.

Many will say abstaining from things that are lawful can't hurt. Yes it can. It did with the Pharisees, it built up in them a self-righteous and censorious spirit, and it tends to pull us away from doing that which the Lord commands. We can see that in the number of people who wouldn't dream of missing uncommanded Christmas services on a Thursday who have no problem forsaking the regular assembling of the saints on the Lord's day. Remember the cautions of Paul:

**Col. 2:20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations --**

**21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,"**

**22 which all concern things which perish with the using -- according to the commandments and doctrines of men?**

**23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.**

**So 2nd Application:** We have to remember that understanding circumstances is important, failing to do so can lead us into legalism or lawlessness

For instance, legalism - I can take a good principle, and enforce it without regard to circumstances.

Let me give you an obvious example:

It is not indecent for me to wear boxers and a T-shirt to bed, they are not in and of themselves indecent, but it would be indecent for me to wear them to preach. The circumstance changes things dramatically. One of the great problems we have today is that people seem to have totally lost their grip on this idea, and so they wear sleepwear to Walmart.

Similarly, while it is good to dress modestly, this should not be an excuse for us to enforce the wearing of a burkha or say that all women must dress a certain way that we like. While we should not have women pretending to be men and vice versa, it is not the case that we should mandate hair length in every case. *Oh no Andy, men with Long hair are always effeminate in every circumstance, really?* Were John Owen, Thomas Jefferson, Davey Crockett, and James Longstreet, effeminate? The problem is that we can make our preference the rule in every case and say that there is only one way for Christians to do this and it is my way. There is only one way to dress, there is only one way to educate, there is only one way to eat and drink, regardless of the circumstances, and then we seek to bind consciences to our preference and disfellowship all others. For instance, I happen to personally prefer

homeschooling, but I must not dogmatically say that it is the only way in every circumstance for Christians to educate their children and then attempt to discipline those who do not conform.

*It is a common saying that every man has a pope in his own bosom. That is, the disposition to lord it over God's heritage is almost universal. Men wish to have their opinions on moral questions made into laws to bind the consciences of their brethren. This is just as much a usurpation of a divine prerogative when done by a private Christian or by a church court, as when done by the Bishop of Rome. We are as much bound to resist it in the one case as in the other. – Charles Hodge*

Circumstances are also important on the other side however in regard to lawlessness. Eating a Jelly Doughnut is not sinful, however in most circumstances, eating a dozen a day would be. Also care must be taken not to cause weaker brothers to stumble. We can do this in the way we dress or when we encourage weaker brethren to do things they regard as sinful. For instance, I will never encourage a man who thinks drinking is always sinful to drink, or cause an individual who becomes drunk easily to over-indulge or lead them into circumstances where I might be able to resist temptation but they aren't.

**So 3<sup>rd</sup> Application:** Remember that we have been redeemed by Jesus Christ so that we can live lives not of legalism and self-righteous nor lawlessness and sin, but so that we can serve Him:

**Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,**

**9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.**

**10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

Have you been set free? Then be about those good works you were saved for *not worldliness!*