

Galatians 5:13-15 “Christ’s Purpose for Us”

GAL 5:13-15 “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”

You’ll remember that this is the way Paul started this section as he says in verse one of chapter five, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

The slavery Paul refers to in verse one is in reference to being burdened with the law and circumcision as a way to earn righteousness before God, which of course is impossible to do. The freedom he speaks of in verse one is the freedom from the penalty of our sin which is found only in Christ.

But here in our text the freedom Paul refers to has more to do with freedom not only from the penalty of our sin but also from the power of sin over us. The law cannot provide freedom in any sense. It only binds us to the frustration of how we can’t keep the law. And the law’s only outcome is death.

2CO 3:6 “He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter [of the law] but of the Spirit; for the letter [of the law] kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

So, whether it’s justification or sanctification the law is powerless to accomplish either. And so, for the believer to place any confidence in the law is only to place confidence in the flesh, as the law only curbs the potential of the flesh to act out as it considers its consequences.

For example, when the law says, you shall not steal, it doesn’t address the heart of the person who might want to steal. If someone is bent on stealing they will. But they might have second thoughts if they think they’ll get caught as they now have to face the charges of disobeying the law.

And what Paul is addressing in our text is that the law will not and cannot be used as a means of changing the heart of a believer. This is why for example, when a church devises a myriad of rules and

regulations for its congregation it may put a fear into the people of getting caught or being ostracized because of peer pressure, but it doesn't take the desire out of the heart of the people.

If a church has as one of its rules that its congregation cannot eat meat you can be sure that at all of its fellowship dinners there will be no meat. But behind closed doors in their own homes you can also be sure that those who desire to eat meat will do so.

Now they may feel guilty to some degree, but it's a guilt which man has placed on them, not a guilt which has anything to do with actually displeasing God. And so, they've become slaves to law which kills. In this case a killing of a love for God, which is replaced with being afraid of God.

This is different from having a healthy fear of God, a reverence for God. In revering God we desire not to displease Him because we love Him, but we are not afraid of Him as though He were an abusive Father. We are His children whom He loves. This is what Paul points out when writing to the Romans.

ROM 8:15-16 "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

The law doesn't accomplish this relationship, nor does it sustain it. It is a relationship which was begun by the Spirit and will be accomplished to the end by the Spirit. Jesus made this clear.

JOH 6:63 "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."

The law and the flesh count for nothing in terms of having life with God, which is the equivalent of the freedom Paul is speaking of here in our text.

GAL 5:13 "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."

This one verse sums up what it means to be a Christian. We have been set free from the penalty of sin, but we have been set free for a purpose. That purpose is to demonstrate the freedom we have in Christ. In other words, it is to demonstrate that we now belong to a new master who has liberated us.

I was watching a documentary on the Second World War this last week and the allies were going into Paris, France. And the citizens of Paris were holding signs which said, "Welcome Liberators," as the Americans were pouring into the city in their tanks, and vehicles.

Now just hours before that these same Parisians were under bondage by the Nazi's. They were restricted in where they could go and when they could go there. They were restricted in what they could say and they were careful to make sure they didn't disobey all of these laws which bound them.

But can you imagine, after having been liberated, still fearing the laws which were set in place by the Nazi's, living as though they were still under their dominion? No. Once they were set free, they acted as free people. There was celebration, there was relief and a sense of gratitude.

And it's the same with the freedom we have in Christ. We have been liberated, and yet invariably Christians act as if they've still under the dominion of the enemy as they subscribe to the laws and the fear the enemy instilled in them. And in that environment they walk in the flesh, not in the Spirit.

This is what Paul means when he says in verse 13, "but do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."

This is a two-fold command from God. On the one hand we are to flee from that which we've been liberated from, but on the other hand we are to do something with that freedom, namely to serve one another in love.

This is the concept Paul introduces in the letter to the Ephesians.

EPH 4:22-24 "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Put off and put on. Put off the old self, the sinful nature, the old desires from the old master, and put on the new life you've been given in Christ in the sense that you live as though you've been liberated. And part of what it means to be liberated is to walk as free men and women.

Now, what does it mean to put off and put on in a practical way? Well, it's not as though we wake up in the morning and grab our spiritual clothes and slip into them one leg or arm at a time. And it's not as though we come home in the evening and slip out of them. What Paul means by this is to make a choice.

You choose to live in the old nature, or you choose to live in the new nature. Whatever choice you make at any given time is indicative of either living in the flesh or in the spirit. To live in the flesh is the equivalent of living in the sinful nature.

The word flesh can be used in a variety of ways. When speaking of the flesh in one sense it simply identifies our physical bodies. But when speaking of the flesh as it relates to the inner man it identifies the sinful nature which came into being when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, which has now been transferred to their offspring; me and you.

That sinful nature seeks to please self. That sinful nature rebels against God. That sinful nature does not employ faith in the God who made us and loves us. This is not the nature we should give in to.

But the new nature, which is the new life we have in Christ, is a nature which desires to please God and others; it is a new desire to love the Lord and trust Him for all things. It is a nature which is not self-seeking, but others oriented.

This is a work of the Spirit of God who has given us new life in Christ and who now indwells us and prompts us to seek the things of the Spirit. And one of those things is the desire to serve one another in love.

Often times Christians have only a one-sided view of salvation which centers on the self. I've been forgiven of my sin. I've been given eternal life. I've been given a new nature. I'm now part of the family of God who must love me.

All of this is true. But, it's only part of the equation. Because now that we are in Christ we have all of this, but we have it for the purpose of serving Christ as we serve one another in love.

And so, now we can say, I've been forgiven of the penalty of my sin so that I might tell others how they may be forgiven. I've been given eternal life so that I might live for others and express that new life in the power of the Spirit. I've been made part of the

family of God who loves me and whom I desire to love as I share my gifts with them and encourage them in the faith.

The new nature we have in Christ is a nature which is to be given away as the love of Christ is shed abroad in our hearts. It's not a nature which wants to hoard the things of God. It's not a nature which wants to serve God on our own terms.

It's a nature which looks at God and others in a brand new way. This is why the law is seen as the antithesis of grace. The law may mandate certain behavior, but grace working in the lives of people has a real desire to instinctively do the things of the law from the heart.

For example, the law says not to covet. But the grace of God demonstrated in the new nature we have in Christ would not need a law to point that out. We would instinctively know, as the Spirit works in our lives and hearts, not to covet or lust after something which doesn't belong to us.

And by the way, this is one reason the law was so important. Without the direct influence of the Spirit of God in the lives of people mankind needs direction. Without a standard man is left to himself. And when left to himself he will always go to the extremes of pleasing self without regard for others.

Now it should be noted that man is not without a conscience. Man was created in the image of God and so he does have some sense of right and wrong built into him despite how that has been adversely affected by sin.

And so, we don't want to try and make the case that if there was no formal law man would be a mere brute beast like the animals without any sense of right and wrong. But in so far as man is inherently rebellious against God the law does serve in curbing sin. But it does it as it imposes itself on mankind.

The Spirit of God works with liberated people in Christ in such a way as to fan the flames of that new nature. The Spirit of God is always pointing us back to the love of Christ as He directs our steps and encourages us to love God above all.

But in loving God above all we see a new thing happening, and that is a new desire to reach out to other people in a way that we didn't in the past, outside of Christ. This is why we not only have a

new desire but a new power in the Spirit to be able to fulfill the summation of the entire law which is to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves.

And this is the point Paul is making in our text. He is saying that what the new life in Christ produces in us is that new desire to fulfill the law which is now in our hearts, not just on tablets of stone.

Our new motivation comes from the Spirit of God empowering us to walk in the ways of Lord according to His word which comes from that new life in Christ, not from the law which forces us to walk in a certain way and fools us into thinking that simply observing a law pleases God.

God wants the heart of a person. He wants our motivation to come from a love for Him and others. He wants us to live in such a way where the new nature or new life we have in Christ takes the forefront of our lives as we depend on God for all things.

In fact, Paul gives us a glimpse into what this new attitude is to be when he wrote to the Corinthians and explained to them that instead of writing to others and telling them about how you love Christ, your lives should be that letter. It isn't a matter of putting it down on paper, but it should be a matter of having it leap off the pages of our very lives.

2CO 3:2-3 'You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.'

In other words, without having to tell people how much they love God, they simply love God. I get a little suspicious when people are always telling me how much they love the Lord and yet never seem to be inclined to show that love with lives of gratitude and obedience.

I remember counseling one family years ago. And the wife would actually break down and cry and convey her love for God with her words. And yet, you very rarely saw them in church. You very rarely saw them serving the body of Christ. You very rarely saw them obeying the Lord in everyday life.

Paul would say to them and all of us, don't tell me about your love for Christ, show me; let it be a living letter. And part of the way we show the love of Christ is to love our neighbors as we encourage them with the resources the Spirit of God has given us in this new life; this new freedom we have in Christ.

And of course, the resources we have are the gifts of the Spirit working in conjunction with the fruit of the Spirit which Paul deals with in this very chapter of Galatians, which we'll look at in some detail in the coming days ahead.

But back in our text, Paul reminds the Galatians that the alternative to loving our neighbor as ourselves is to seek only self which ultimately always leads to an improper relationship with our neighbor, who might be a member of the body of Christ, or the world in general.

Now, in our text Paul is dealing specifically with the body of Christ there in Galatia. And evidently, under the leadership of the Judaizers, the attitude has been one of division instead of coming together in love for one another.

GAL 5:15 "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."

Ironically, the law which the Judaizers were trying to use to bring about righteousness and holiness, actually ends up creating the opposite effect. And the reason is that the law, once again, doesn't deal with the heart of a person, but only with the performance of people.

And after awhile performing gets old. After awhile going through the motions gives way to frustration and anger and results in gravitating back to the old nature which is to consider "me" as more important than others, rather than what the Spirit accomplishes as we submit to His love, which considers others as more important than ourselves.

And if we gravitate back to the old nature, the sinful nature, eventually biting and devouring and destruction is what ends up being accomplished. It is the opposite of that which is of the Spirit.

And by the way, the world can see through this as they view the people of God. If those in the world are only seeing biting and

devouring in the church, then what would be their motivation of wanting to be a part of that?

Real love in the Lord can be tasted. And the reason for this is because it's not a love which the world can conjure up. When they taste the love of Christ in our lives they are able to taste and see that the Lord is good.

You see, all of this talk of loving God and our neighbor as ourselves is really an opportunity for the world to see Christ in our lives, again going back to that living letter Paul talks about.

Nobody had to tell the Parisians during the mid-1940's that tasting liberation was a good thing. They instinctively knew, and they were instinctively appreciative. And no Christian has to sell the idea of the love of Christ to the world, if we are truly loving the Lord as we reach out to the world with that love.

They will know the real thing when they experience the real thing. And we have the real thing because we have the Spirit of God. It doesn't get any more real than that.

Living in the Spirit is not an option for the Christian. Living in the Spirit is to be the norm. And of course, living or walking in the Spirit is, as F.F. Bruce points out, to "let your conduct be directed by the Spirit."

Again, this goes back to the choices we make and now have the power to accomplish because of the indwelling power of the Spirit.

God would never expect anything of His people unless He provided the power and the means to accomplish it. This is why we ask God for this power to be worked out in our lives, not only to live everyday life, but also to be able to be servants and ambassadors of our great God and Savior.

This is precisely why the Lord Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to us before He ascended back to the Father. It is the power of the Holy Spirit who enables us to walk and work in the Kingdom of God.

If we seek to walk a spiritual life while walking in the flesh or the old nature, we will never accomplish the will of God in our lives or in the life of His church. It is the Spirit of God who enables us to do this.

ACT 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The Spirit of God has been given to us so that we might be His witnesses in both word and in deed. If our lives seem to be powerless, then we need to go to God and ask for what we already possess in the Spirit. But we must ask in faith and with an attitude of using that power to love and serve in the Spirit.

If we ask for God's power only to get us through the day, then we ask for selfish motives. But if we ask for God's power to get us through the day so that we might represent Christ more faithfully we ask for the right reasons.

If we seek God's power to be better servants to others than that is a prayer that God is faithful to answer. To ask for the filling of the Spirit is a humble admission that we need to be filled up with the things of God.

The busyness of life, the distractions of the world all drain us of the desires we need for God. The old nature wants its ways, and before you know it we're so distracted that we're trying to operate in our own strength.

If we will just stop during those times and seek and dwell on our Savior and His word, that filling can take place in a fresh new way. And instead of being beat down we can find ourselves being lifted with wings of eagles as we're renewed in the Spirit.

It's then when we can resume being those living letters and those servants whose lives can be summed up in the two great commandments to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves.

Again, it all comes down to a choice. Outside of Christ our choice was for self. In Christ we have a second choice, but it's a choice which is empowered by God Himself. We need to be made aware of this constantly and to realize that our choices are either of the flesh or of the Spirit. Paul addresses this to the Romans.

ROM 8:6-11 "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of

Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”

It's life versus death. It's Christ versus the world. It's hope versus hopelessness. It's peace versus strife.

We are new creatures in Christ and next week we're going to look at the struggle of this new life against the old nature. Why do we struggle so? Why is it so hard to make the right choices? Why don't I seem to be more motivated in the Spirit? These are all questions we'll deal with then.

But in the meantime let me just encourage you this morning in that as much as we might want to move forward in our faith God wants it more for us; infinitely more. And if He wants it more for us than even we do, we can know for certain that He'll provide the way if we're willing to submit and love Him and trust Him.

ROM 15:13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”