

GALATIANS: THE ONE TRUE GOSPEL



WEEK 21 THE FINAL WORD: FULFILLING THE LAW GALATIANS 5:13-15

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Doulos Fellowship Group
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2015

Galatians 5:13-15 –The Final Word: Fulfilling the Law

The Text

For you were called to freedom, brothers.

Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh,
but through love serve one another.

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word:

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

But if you bite and devour one another,
watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Introduction

- “False brothers” (the Judaizers) have infiltrated the churches in Galatia.
 - Paul is astonished that some of the Galatians are abandoning the gospel freedom to be justified by obedience to the law.
 - He has stressed the superiority of the promise God made to Abraham and the inferiority of the law to bring salvation.
 - The law was not given to replace the promise, but to increase transgressions and show how important the promise really is.
 - Paul has pleaded with them to not return in slavery to the law.
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Principal Proposition

Our freedom in Christ to serve one another in love fulfills the Old Testament Law.

Literary Context

- A. Paul's Gospel is God's Gospel (1:11-2:21)
- B. Paul's Explanation of the Gospel (3:1-4:11)
- C. Paul's Application of the Gospel (4:12-6:10)
 - 1. The Plea not to Return to Bondage (4:12-31)
 - 2. The Appeal to Stand Firm in Freedom (5:1)
 - 3. **The Call to Freedom (5:2-6:10)**
 - a. Freedom through Resistance to Circumcision (5:2-12)
 - b. **Freedom through Walking by the Holy Spirit (5:13-26)**

Literary Structure

The Final Word: Fulfilling the Law

The Freedom	(v. 13)
The Fulfillment	(v. 14)
The Flesh-Eaters	(v. 15)

Interpretive Comments

The Final Word: Fulfilling the Law

The Freedom

v. 13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

➤ “For you were called to freedom, brothers”

- This is the battle cry of Galatians (5:1).
- We have been set free from sin and the Mosaic Law – as represented by circumcision.

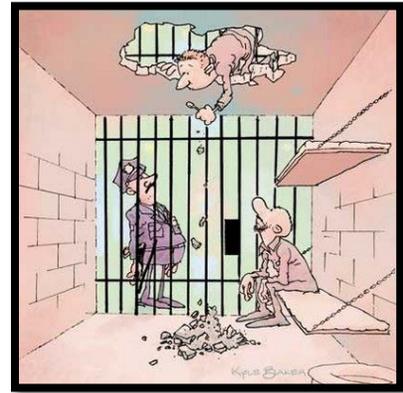


➤ “Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh”

- We should not make a license out of our liberty.

Remember that liberty from sin is not liberty to sin. – Charles Spurgeon

- So far, Paul has been begging the Galatian churches to stand firm in the liberty they have in Christ and abandon the legalistic entanglements of the Judaizers.
- However, when we escape one error, it is often our tendency to run into another. Looking ahead, Paul warns them against abusing their freedom in Christ.
- True freedom comes from not being a slave to our natural desires. We should never use our freedom as an excuse to excuse sin.



➤ “but through love serve one another”

- Where faith really lives, it creates love.
- A believer’s life is characterized by loving service to one another. What does serving one another in love look like? How can we better serve others in the body of Christ?

The Fulfillment

v. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

➤ “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word”

- Love fulfills the true purpose of the Old Testament law (Romans 13:8-10).
- In the first portion of the Ten Commandments, we are taught to love God. In the second, we are taught to love each other.
- On one hand, we are no longer under the law and its prescriptions. On the other hand, we now fulfill what the law intended by the Spirit.

➤ “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

- This is not a new statement in Scripture: Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:39, and Luke 10:25–28.
- What is love?

This is more important than symbolic rites: To destroy love to preserve a ceremony is to kill a child in order to preserve its clothes. – Charles Spurgeon

The Flesh-Eaters

v. 15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

➤ “But if you bite and devour one another”

- It is better to be bitten by a dog than a sheep.

➤ “watch out that you are not consumed by one another”

- Most often, churches are destroyed from within rather than without.
- Without love, we obliterate each other. Obedience is not a requirement for justification, but it is a critical component of the Christian life.



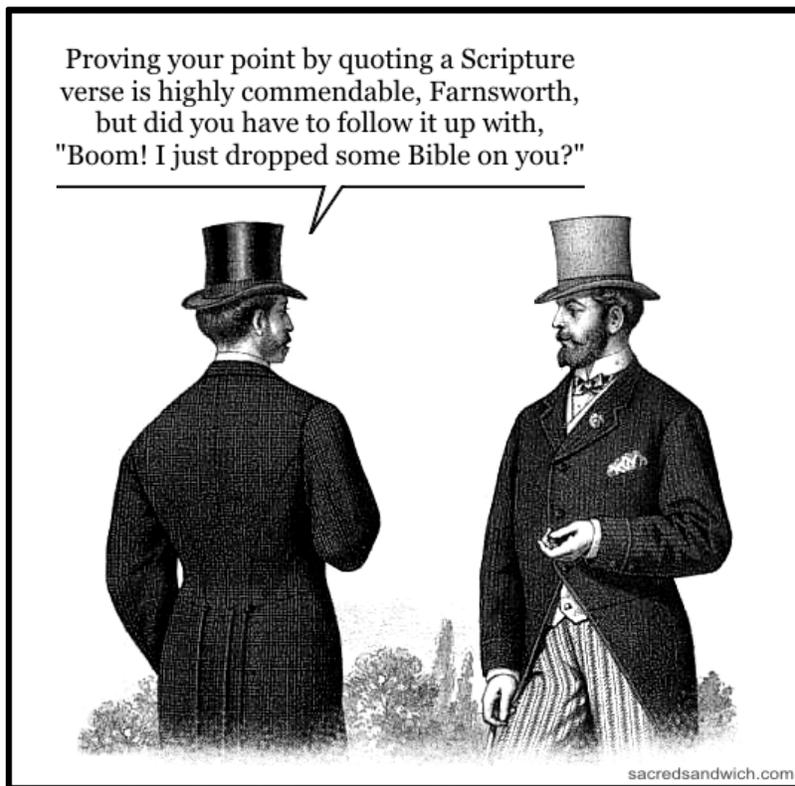
Summary Quote

The ruling principle of Christian freedom is always love. The believer with an unnecessarily strict conscience and the one with a freed conscience are to lovingly accept and serve one another in Christ. Otherwise, they will be just like the most ungodly, self-centered pagans who bite and devour one another and end up being consumed by one another. Lovelessness is utterly destructive. So we are called to freedom, the freedom of love that walks the bridge over legalism and license.

– John MacArthur

Discussion Questions

- What does serving one another in love look like? How can we better serve others in the body of Christ? (pg. 3)
- What is love? (pg. 4)



No Love

The Freedom and Bondage of the Will

Proper understanding of the freedom of the will in the fallen human condition is assisted by distinguishing free *agency* from free *will*.

Free *agency* is a mark of humanity as such. All humans are free agents in the sense that they make their own decisions about what they will do, choosing as they please in the light of their conscience, inclinations, and thoughts. They are answerable to God and to the rest of humanity for their choices. Adam was a free agent before the Fall, and afterwards. He continued to have desires and thoughts and to put them into action through his will. Similarly, we are free agents now; we will continue to be so after the resurrection. The glorified saints exercise their wills, but they are confirmed in grace, so that they cannot sin. Their choices are the product of human free agency, made in accordance with their nature, but now these choices are good and right. The transformation of their hearts is complete and they desire to do what is right.

Free *will* has been defined by Christian teachers from the second century on as the ability to choose any at all of the moral options offered in a given situation. Augustine taught that this possibility was lost through the Fall. The loss is part of the burden of original sin. After the Fall, our natural hearts are not inclined toward God; they are in bondage to sin and cannot be freed from this slavery except by the grace of regeneration. Such an understanding of the fallen will is taught by Paul in Rom. 6:16–23.

Only a will that has been set free is able to choose righteousness freely and heartily. A permanent love of righteousness, that is, an inclination of the heart to the way of living that pleases God, is one aspect of the freedom that Christ gives (John 8:34–36; Gal. 5:1, 13).¹

¹ R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Orlando, FL; Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 1078.

Do Not Try to Love without Faith

Faith creates love in the soul wherever it really dwells. Do not begin to say, “I am afraid I do not love the Lord as I ought,” and so on. Take it for granted that you do not love Him to the full of His infinite deserts. Instead of raising questions about the degree of your love, ask yourself whether you believe in Him. Are you trusting in the Lord Jesus? Are you confiding in Him? Because if the root is there, the flower will appear before long.

If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, you are born of God, and all who are born of the God of love must themselves love God. Do not talk of trying to love God. You cannot force yourself to love anybody. Who in his senses would ever dream of such a thing? Such attempts would be utter foolishness.

Love must be free; it cannot be bought or forced. We cannot tell what love is, although we feel it. It is a mysterious something, not to be described by the cold maker of definitions—but it is always a product of something else that goes before it. If you believe, you will love; if you do not believe, you will never love till you do believe. Go to the root of the matter. Do not try to grow the hyacinth of love without the bulb of faith. Do you trust Jesus with all your heart, and are you confiding your soul’s eternal interests with Him? Then I know that you love Him, though you may for a while be occupied with other pursuits. Love slumbers in you like fire in a flint. Look well to your faith, and your love will not fail.²

² Charles Spurgeon, *Galatians*, ed. Elliot Ritzema, Spurgeon Commentary Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013).