

# Christian Liberty, Part 8

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Now may I urge you to turn with me in your own Bibles to the book of Galatians, Paul's letter to the Galatians, as you learned in the adult class, this church, or the churches in the Galatia area which would have been founded in that first missionary journey of the Apostle Paul. And as he comes toward the end of this letter, the most passionate, the most vehement of all of the letters of the Apostle Paul, we read in verse 13 these words, "For you, brethren, were called for freedom. Only Use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be servants one to another, for the whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Now let us again ask God to help us as we have prayed in this final hymn. So let us pray again.

*O send your Spirit, Lord, now unto me. Send him to me as I seek to preach. Send him to your people as they eagerly await to hear. Send him to those who have no appetite to hear. Send him to all of us, and may he minister to us Out of this perfect knowledge of our present need, for our good and for your glory, we plead through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Last time we were in the midst of a series of studies that I have entitled "A Fresh Look at the Doctrine of Christian Liberty". And we're going to pick up precisely where I left off.

I began that series by stating that there are two massive blocks of biblical truth that are essential to any proper, balanced understanding of what we call the doctrine of Christian liberty. And those foundational truths are what the Scripture teaches concerning the reality and the nature of our bondage and slavery in Adam, and the reality and the nature of our freedom and liberty in Christ. Without some understanding of those two massive blocks of biblical revelation, we are in no position whatsoever to think or act as we ought with respect to what I am calling a subset of the doctrine of Christian liberty, namely, what shall I or shall I not do in matters concerning which the Word of God gives either no clear prohibition nor commandment. We must come to grips with those foundational issues, and if you have just begun to attend since I preached on those matters, I would urge you, please, to get copies of the tapes or download them if you're online. They are available from the Trinity Church website or get them in the Trinity Book Service to get your soul filled with those biblical realities concerning those five dimensions of our real bondage in Adam and those nine facets of our true liberty in Christ.

Then having examined those foundational issues, I then asked the question, what's the goal for which he has set us free? And I used the imagery. Here is the sinner who has been manacled by his sins. He's been in the prison, and it's locked from the outside. And now in Christ, his shackles have been broken. They lie broken at his feet. The prison door has been thrown open. And this liberated sinner asks the question, "To what end has the great Liberator set me free?" Jesus said, "Whom the Son sets free is free indeed" (John 8:36). And when we ask the question, "To what end have I been set free, set free in those nine areas of real bondage from which I am now liberated by the grace of God?", I suggested that in my present understanding there is no text of Scripture that more succinctly yet comprehensively answers that question than does Luke 1, verses 74 and 75. Here in this prophetic utterance of Zacharias on the occasion of the birth of John the Baptist, he says, "To grant unto us that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days."

And in two expositions of those verses we saw that the goal of our liberty in Christ is, in its essence, that we should serve Him, noting that those words meant that we should render to Him worshipful service as the total perspective of our lives, that we should render to Him worshipful service in every relationship, in every situation, in every circumstance, in all facets of life. He has set us free not to go out of the prison and indulge ourselves, but go out of the prison and be an instrument through which, in every facet of life, God is served in love.

Then we looked at the particulars of that life of worshipful service. As Zechariah sets four of them before us, we should thus render worshipful service without fear, that is, without fear of the former enemies, without a cringing, crippling fear of God Himself. We are to do so in holiness and in righteousness. We are to do so living in communion before His face. And we are to do so all of our days. If Christ has set you free, it is to this end that He has set you free. Not that you might always be playing with the margins of questionable ethical indulgences, saying, "Well, is it my liberty?" But rather you say, "Does this express the gratitude of my heart in rendering worshipful service to my God without being encumbered by the former fears of my enemies that would destroy me, to do so in a context of holiness and righteousness, living before His face in conscious, delightful communion with Him, and doing so all the days of my life."

That's a brief overview of what we've covered in the initial seven messages. Now we come this morning, having looked at these foundational issues, and over the next couple of Lord's Days, I want to address with you, before we come to the particular principles of Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 that address the subset--we're going to get there, but we've got to get there with biblical shoes on our feet or we won't walk straight. And I want us to consider together two great enemies of this exercise of our liberty in Christ, the two great enemies are libertinism, or license, or legalism. You see, in all of our hearts, even in those of us who are believers, there are two naughty, devious, clever advocates who are always pleading their cause. Did you know that? And they don't charge \$200 or \$300 an hour. They're there for free. In fact, if you

could, you'd like to boot them out if you're a true Christian. But they've set up shop, and they've got their own office, and they're all the time pleading their case. One of the advocates is Mr. Libertinism, and the other advocate is Mr. Legalism.

Mr. Legalism, he would depreciate the grace of God in dealing with our sins. When you sin, Mr. Legalism is always trying to put something between you and Christ in dealing with your sin. When you think of how to overcome your sin, he's always trying to put something between you and Christ in dealing with your sin. Mr. Legalism hates you as a sinner dealing directly with Christ in the sufficiency of His grace. He's always pleading his cause. You've got to have Christ plus. He's set up shop for that. Alright? But then there's Mr. Libertinism, and he's always degrading the grace of God into a license for sin. He's always trying to persuade us, since we have direct dealings with Christ in grace, we don't need to take sin seriously.

And those two advocates are in your heart pleading their cause continually. And nowhere, nowhere is it more evident than when you wrestle with the issue of Christian liberty. So it should not surprise us to find that if the doctrine of Christian liberty is a central note of New Testament saving reality, and it is, that within the corpus of the New Testament literature we would find the apostles having to deal with shutting the mouths of those two advocates. And we find them dealing with those two advocates throughout the New Testament letters.

Well, we're going to deal with Mr. Libertinism this morning. We're going to take up attorney Libertinism and seek to arm you with biblical principles that will help you to see through his very persuasive arguments, to see through what at times is very convincing sophistry, and to nail him to the wall with biblical logic and motives so that you do not turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. And that is why we are going to park this morning on this one text in the book of Galatians. Galatians chapter 5 and verse 13: "For you, brethren, were called for freedom. Only do not use your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love [literally, slave] one another [perform the functions of slaves for one another]."

Now, just a word about the larger context of the book of Galatians. The dominant issue in the book of Galatians is shutting the mouth of Mr. Legalism. Paul had preached the pure gospel of grace. Along came the Judaizers and said, "No, no, no, no. Christ alone is not enough. Keep Christ. Keep His sacrifice. Keep His grace. Keep His Spirit. But if you're going to be a full-blown, sure enough, real, bona fide, 100% pure Christian, you need circumcision, the law of Moses. You need Christ plus all of the trappings of the Old Testament covenant law, dietary laws, days and weeks and feast days and all the rest." And the main burden of the book of Galatians is Paul's going after this attorney, Mr. Legalism.

So in this book, he is white-hot. Some have said that they would imagine that if Paul had a quill when he wrote this letter, it might have melted in the first chapter. He's calling down the curse of God on anyone who wants to dilute pure grace as the ground and the method of our salvation. So there is a tremendous emphasis upon

maintaining our liberty in Christ. In fact, it comes to a climactic statement in chapter 5 and verse 1: "For freedom did Christ set us free. Stand fast, therefore, be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage." That is the summary of all thrust of the previous part of the book. You are free in Christ. Stand in your freedom. Let no one rob you of your freedom. It is blood-bought. And it is only in that freedom that you will know God's gracious salvation. And only in that freedom do you magnify the Savior.

However, Paul is a realist, and he understands the human heart. And he knows that no sooner can he say to people who have got Mr. Legalism and Mr. Libertinism who have set up shop in the human heart, but that some are going to abuse that call to liberty. And therefore, in chapter 5 and verse 13, he says, "For you, brethren, were called for freedom." He's not in any way undermining the very essence of their salvation in Christ as freedom. But he says, "Only use not your freedom for an occasion for the flesh, but through love be servants one to another."

So that's something of the general overview of the background of the book and why this note is sounded. Now, very simply, I want you to think with me as I attempt to open up the text under two headings. First of all, the glorious affirmation, and then the necessary exhortation.

First of all, the glorious affirmation. Look at the text: "For you, brethren, were called for freedom." That's the affirmation. And the key to understanding the affirmation is the word "called". And realizing we have a number of new believers and some of you who are not believers but have begun to sit under this ministry and just beginning to feel your way around with biblical words and terms, it's vital that you understand that when you read in the New Testament epistles--Once or twice in the Gospels you'll find the word called used in a different way, but here in the Epistles from Romans onward, without exception, when you find the word "called" in connection with Christians, it is a synonym for God's gracious work in actually making people Christians.

It doesn't mean that God is just calling to them, speaking to them, summoning them in the Gospels to come to Christ. But it speaks of God's supernatural, inward, powerful work by the Spirit in which He actually takes sinners out of Adam and brings them into union with Christ, so that to be called is a synonym for being a Christian. For example, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:5, "God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Or in 1 Corinthians 1, in verse 26, Paul says, "For behold your calling, brethren." What's he saying? "Behold how you became Christians." To be called is to be a Christian. Or Jude chapter 1. Jude is writing to believers, and he describes them as called, chosen, and faithful. That's part of their essential description. And in Romans 8:30, it is one of those links in the chain that leads from earth to glory: "Whom He called, them He also justified. Whom He justified, them He also glorified." So you've got to understand, when Paul writes, "For you, brethren, were called", he's saying, "For you, brethren, when you were made Christians by the grace and power of God..."

What were you made Christians for? Look at the text: "You were called for freedom." So central is this matter of being set free to God's purpose in His saving mercy that Paul can say, "You were called for freedom." The very essence of becoming a Christian is to be made God's free man, God's free woman, free from all of the things that we considered in our study of our nine-fold freedom in Jesus Christ.

And having been called for freedom, Paul is passionate that no believer allow anyone under any circumstances to rob him of that freedom which is the very end for which God has saved the Christian. So that we must never in our consciences allow anyone for any reason whatsoever to rob us of one shred of that nine-fold freedom that is ours in Christ. We are free from the condemning power of the law. We must allow no one to bring us back into condemnation. We are free from the sin-provoking influence of the law. Free from slavery to sin, slavery to the devil, slavery to the world, slavery to the idol of self, slavery to the Mosaic law covenant, the tyranny of man-made doctrines, rules, and regulations, and the horrible tyranny of the fear of death. We've been called for freedom. As Paul says in chapter 5 and verse 1, We're to stand in that freedom. We're to understand it. We're to appreciate it. We're to revel in it. We're to glory in it. We're never to make light of it.

But remember, and this is crucial, we'll come back to it again and again, that freedom is essentially and fundamentally an internal understanding and awareness of the soul. It is what I understand myself to be in the presence of God in the light of the great issues of sin, and law, and men's rules, and death, and issues in life. The exercise of my freedom is not an internal issue, it is an external issue of my deeds. And while I must never give up the internal understanding of, and appreciation of, and believing reception of my freedom in Christ, there may be a thousand reasons to give up manifold exercises of that freedom for compelling reasons related to the cause of Christ in the lives of my brethren and in the lives of sinners. You follow me? Internally, I must know I'm a free man. Anyone comes with shackles, I can look them straight in the eyes and say, Christ broke those things. Don't you dare put them back on me.

Let me give you a silly illustration. I told my wife last night, I said, "Honey, I'm not sure if I'd use it. I prayed about it, I said, Lord, if I should, bring it to mind on my feet." So it's come to mind, I'm going to give it. I hope you never have to have surgery on your primary hand. If you're right-handed, that's your right hand. It was so frustrating in those early days. I'd have to put a big plastic bag over the half-cast and all--I'm all wrapped up. And then trying to get my hair washed with this hand--doesn't know what to do and how to do it. It just sort of hangs out there. And you've got to tell it. You concentrate, go to put eye drops in. And what I've done thousands of times without thinking, I have to think, how far is the end of the dropper? How hard do you...? I'm serious. It was mental anguish. The slightest thing. Go to my wife. "Honey, will you tie my shoes?" I mean, terrible.

But then the real cruncher came when after I did get through the shower in this awkward way and get myself all dried, found a way to dry my back one-handed with a

towel (I'll tell you sometime, but that was something), then it came time to try to comb it. And my hair's parted on this side, as you can see. And then how do I use the blow dryer so I don't just look like, you know, a firecracker went off in a mattress? And it, I mean, it really got emotionally traumatic. I said, sweetheart, I've wanted for some time to just get a Matt Lauer sort of a crew cut. I said, I'm really tempted to go down to the barber and say, take it all off... And trying to shave, I was cutting myself every time I shaved. Blood here, blood there. I didn't know how hard to press, what angle. I could do this blindfolded and half asleep with this arm. I'd been doing it for 55 years. I said, well, maybe I'll grow a beard too.

Now, let me ask you something. Is there anyone here that would dare to bind my conscience and tell me I was not free in Christ to get a crew cut and grow a beard? Anyone ready to come up to me with a Bible and say you would be violating the moral law of God to get a crew cut and grow a beard? I knew my liberty. And if anybody came up to me, if I was just sort of joking, saying I think I'm going to get... "Oh, you mustn't do it." I'd say, "Show me from the Book." As my good friend Achille Blaise would say, "Show me from the book, from the book." But I didn't get crew cut, did I? And I'm clean shaven, you know why? Because that liberty, though I was free in Christ to exercise it, had external dimensions. And I was not free to exercise it, thinking as a Christian man. Because the first thing your mind would have gone to when I came on that platform this morning was not what will be the call to worship, but "What's that crazy old man done? He's turned 70. Has he gone crazy? True cotton beard. What's next? He lives to be 80. What in the world will he do?" And I love God's worship too much to let my convenience for a few weeks detract you from the worship of God.

My liberty is internal. It comes through unscathed. My exercise of it is external and may be restrained for many compelling reasons. Now, we've got to understand that, dear people. And Paul, as he's going to address things that impinge on the limitation of the exercise of one's liberty, he starts by this glorious affirmation: "For you, brethren, were called for freedom. You were saved to be God's free men and women. Know it. Understand it. Never forget it. Stand in it." All right? You got that.

But now he follows, second heading, the necessary exhortation. And what is it? "Only use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love, be servants of one another." Here is the necessary exhortation. John Brown introduces his exposition of this verse with this very insightful comment:

"There's a strange disposition in mankind to misapprehend the meaning and tendency of religious truth, however plainly stated, and to turn it to purposes which it was never intended to answer, and which, when rightly understood, it obviously appears it was never intended to answer. The Apostle Paul was well aware of this tendency, and accordingly he often connects a statement of Christian doctrine, a caution against the abuse of that doctrine. This is what we find him doing here in reference to the doctrine of Christian liberty, which he'd been stating and defending. The whole paragraph that begins with this verse [verse 13] and ends with the 10th

verse of the next chapter is occupied with showing that the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free by no means relax their obligations to religious and moral duty, but on the contrary, furnish them at once with the most cogent motives and the most powerful encouragements to avoid sin in all of its forms and to cultivate universal holiness both in attitude and in conduct."

Now as we look at this necessary exhortation, it's typical Pauline. It comes to us in this two-strand form. Look at it in your Bibles. It comes with the negative strand and the positive. "Only [negative] use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh [positive], but through love be servants one to another."

So we take up the negative first. Only use not this liberty or freedom for an occasion to the flesh. Now, the two key words in this negative injunction are "occasion" and "flesh". We've got to understand what they mean. The word "occasion" (aforme) in secular Greek is the word you would use if you were to describe that place where a group of hunters were going out for a hunt, and they were setting up a base camp. The camp from which they would go out into the woods and to which they would return, that's the word you would use. If there was a military operation and you were establishing a base camp of operation, this is the word you would use. So in secular Greek, it was used to describe a base of operations. So as it came over into its use in the New Testament, it's translated several times for pretext. In other words, an apparent basis for a given expedition of action or thought or relationship. And so the Apostle says, "Do not use your freedom as the apparent legitimate base of operations for something it was never intended to support." Don't use your freedom as an occasion, as a base of operations for what? He says, "the flesh".

Now what does the word the flesh mean here? Well, it's used here as it is used in one of its major ways in the New Testament, though it's used in many ways, with reference to sinful human nature, or human nature in its sinful state. It's not talking about sin residing in the corpuscles and in the capillaries and in the bloodstream and in the stuff of the muscles and sinews of your body. No. It's talking about sinful nature. That's flesh. And according to the Scriptures, it is the thing out of which sinful acts and attitudes come. Look at verse 19 of this very chapter: "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are fornication, uncleanness, idolatry..." In other words, sinful human nature produces deeds and attitudes and words and thoughts consistent with its essence.

Paul says in Romans 8, in unconverted people, the flesh has a clenched fist against God and against His law. "The mind of the flesh is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be." So then, Paul says, "They that are in the flesh [that is, those who know no moral realm but the realm into which they were born] cannot please God." They have a disposition of soul that is a clenched fist against God in subordination to the law of God, and out of that come these specific acts.

Now, when we are called, when we are made Christians, when we are brought out of Adam and into Christ. The domination and the governing principle of the flesh is subdued in virtue of our union with Christ in His death burial and resurrection. So Paul can say in verse 24 of this chapter, "And they that are of Christ Jesus, they that are called [they that are true Christians] have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts thereof." There has been a fundamental death blow struck to the flesh. It no longer governs while it yet remains. It does not reign, but it remains.

Look at verse 17: "For [and this is speaking of the experience of the Christian] the flesh lusts against the Spirit, the Spirit against the flesh. These are contrary, the one to the other, that you may not do the things that you would." Now this verse could give the impression that there are two equal and contrary principles, but that's not true. The rest of Scripture, right here in the context, tells us though there is flesh that is warring against the Spirit, lusting against the Spirit, it is from the defeated, subdominant posture. Spirit reigns in every true believer. Spirit governs in every true believer. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God [and only they]." Romans 8:14. "You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you." So that the teaching of the Bible is not that there are now in the believer two equal and contrary principles. No. No. Flesh is subdominant. Spirit is dominant. Spirit reigns, but flesh remains.

And it does not remain inactive. That's what gives birth to that attorney in your breast. He is flesh's ally in order to war against, to lust against the dominance and the control of the Spirit in your life and mine when we're thinking about Christian liberty. When I'm thinking, what am I free to do? What am I free to take up for entertainment? What relationships am I free to enter into in Christ? Where the Spirit would govern that question by principles that lead us into righteousness and holiness and life before the face of God, there will be the advocate saying, "Ah, in the light of your freedom in Christ", and push us into realms that will do what? that will lead us into fleshly thoughts and fleshly relationships and fleshly activities and things that will dishonor God and erode the vigor of our own walk with the Lord Jesus. And so the Apostle says, "Here is my necessary exhortation: do not use your freedom for an occasion to the flesh." Don't set up in your mind and heart a staging area to justify fleshly activities from the doctrine of Christian liberty.

Let me illustrate. Is my liberty in Christ a liberty from the condemning power of the law? Yes. Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ." Well, if my sin cannot bring me into condemnation, then my sin really is not quite so serious, is it? If it does not make me liable to damnation, maybe it's not worthy of being the object of serious, vigorous mortification. What's that doing? That's taking my liberty in Christ and making it a staging area for the flesh. "If my liberty in Christ means I am not in bondage to the rules and regulations of men, oh, then I don't need to listen to the counsel of my parents. They're from a different generation. They warn me about this. They warn me about that. And my pastor's warned. They can't give me chapter and verse for the thing they warn. I'm free in Christ. I'm free

for..." What are you doing? You're taking the doctrine of your liberty in Christ and you're making it a staging area to feed your flesh. That's what you're doing.

Some of you kids are doing that all the time. And Paul says, "If you're a Christian, stop it." Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Don't use your freedom as a staging area for the flesh. Don't do it. You've got an advocate within you who's constantly trying to argue from the reality of your liberty to give you a launching pad for your flesh. You see, as a Christian, you know better than to say, "Well, if I do this thing, that's downright carnal. That's displeasing to God. That's going to erode my walk with God. That's going to take the edges off the consistency of my testimony as a Christian. I don't want that. I have got to give it the semblance of spiritual justification. So if I do that under the semblance of, I'm honoring Christ by exercising my liberty. Oh, doesn't that sound so spiritual? Doesn't it? I'm proving I'm so free in Christ, Doesn't that glorify Christ?" Use not your liberty for an occasion to the flesh. Don't do it. Don't do it. Don't do it. It's prohibited by the Word of God. So that's the negative.

And now we come to the positive. "But" with a strong adversative, a but that's a strong but. The Greek has strong buts and weak buts. There's the strong but. "But [in contrast to using your freedom for a staging area, a launching pad, a stepping off place to the flesh] through love, be slaves to one another." You see, what Paul is doing here, in the contrast of the positive, is putting an emphasis upon the abuse of liberty as it touches other people. And that's the major area that's addressed in Romans 14 and 15, and also in 1 Corinthians 8, 9, and 10. And so, I felt it was wise to start here.

Peter gives another emphasis. He says, "Don't use your liberty as a cloak for maliciousness, but as bond slaves of God." He gives the vertical dimension. Paul gives the horizontal. And I want us to focus on that. That's where the text takes us, and that's where I want us to go together. Now, I've translated it, "But through love, be slaves to one another." Why? Because the word "slave" in its verbal form is used here. (Duluo, in an imperative, take the role and function of slaves to one another.)

Now let's pause and make sure we understand what the Apostle doesn't mean and then we'll get to the heart of what he does mean. He is not saying become slaves of one another in the sense that you give up your conscience and your will to the conscience and will of another human being. No, in that sense you have only one master. Paul could say in Romans 1:1, "Paul [a dulos], a bondslave of Jesus Christ." In Romans chapter 6, he says, "Being made free from sin and become bondservants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness in the end everlasting life." Never forget this. There is only one being worthy of being your master in the absolute sense, and that is God revealed in Jesus Christ. That's why Paul could say to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 7:23, a critical text in this whole area: "You have been bought with a price. Don't become the slaves of men." He says, "Don't let men take the place of absolute lordship over you." Someone else has that right and He purchased it by His own precious blood. Don't let anyone take it away from Him in your heart and in your conscience.

Well, then what does he mean? Well, a little Greek grammar is helpful here. He uses a dative case. "Be slaves with" or "by two" or "four" in the dative case. "Be slaves for one another." This is what he's saying. If we can get this thing and the Spirit of God can write it on our hearts, it will revolutionize our whole thinking about Christian liberty in terms of that subset of things indifferent. What should I drink or not drink? What should I watch, not watch, Listen to? All of those other nitty-picky questions. Get hold of this and it will resolve I don't know what percentage of those issues and resolve them in the right way. This is what he's saying.

When you were in bondage to your sins, here you are, shackled with your sins, a slave of your lusts. And being a slave of your lust of the flesh and of the mind [Ephesians 2], you were the lackey of the devil. He's behind all of this, pushing the buttons. "You are of your father the devil", Jesus said. "The lust of your father it is your will to do." Enslaved to the devil. Enslaved to the condemning power of the law of God, enslaved to the galling influence of God's law. Every "thou shalt" becomes an "I will not" in the human heart. Every "thou shalt not" becomes "I will". That is the galling power of the law in an unregenerate heart. Slaves to a thousand things.

Now Christ comes and He breaks the chains as we have seen. All nine chains He breaks. He throws open the door and outside that door there are fellow believers with all kinds of needs, with all kinds of sensitivities, with all kinds of hang-ups, with all kinds of things that have molded and shaped the way they think and act. And outside that prison door there are sinners still going about clanking in their chains. They themselves are in their own prison house. And what Paul is saying is this: Christ has set you free. He's broken your chains. He's thrown open the door that when you walk out and look at those people, you are so free in Christ from slavery to idle self and slavery to sin that you can now voluntarily enslave yourself to these people in this sense: whatever you can do to help your brothers and sisters heavenward, even if it means you must walk over the belly of your own legitimate desires; even if it means you must deny yourself a thousand legitimate liberties. You're so free in Christ you can make yourself slaves to your brothers and sisters and their spiritual prophet. That's what he says.

And then he says there are sinners out there that have got all kinds of prejudices against the gospel and misconceptions, and you want to win them to yourself that you might win them to your Savior. He says in Christ you're so free you can make yourself slaves to them for Christ's sake. That's why Paul could say in 1 Corinthians 9 "To the Jew I became as a Jew. I submitted myself afresh in certain circumstances to Jewish kosher laws while everything in me might have longed for a nice juicy lobster tail. I didn't touch it around my kosher friends." He said, "Am I not free to carry about a wife, lead about a wife? Yes. Am I not free to be supported? Yes. Yes. But I say no to legitimate freedoms in Christ. Why? I make myself a slave to the unsaved that I might gain them." I mean a man so free that he can deny himself a thousand liberties for others. That's freedom. That's freedom, folks. Do you know anything about that?

I tell you, folks, I believe with all my heart that this issue is crucial to the future of this church. We are not going to hear the prayers of Wednesday night; see them answered. How do we penetrate this community? How do we more fully validate the gospel unless we are prepared to take seriously what is said here? "Use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but [so free, now look at the phrase] through love be willing to make yourself a slave for the sake of others." And there's the key: through love. Impelled, motivated, pressured by love.

What kind of love? The kind of love Paul describes in the second chapter of this epistle: "I have been crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I. But Christ lives in me in the life that I now live in the flesh. I live by faith in the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me." Gave Himself. You talk about Christian liberty? He had liberties we'll never have. It would be idolatrous for us to even want them. He was the adoring object of seraphim and cherubim, and all the angelic host, in face-to-face, intimate, unbroken communion with His Father (John 1:1). He was the adoring object of the worship of the spirits of just men made perfect. No jarring of His Holy Soul with face-to-face interaction with unbelief and hardness of heart and sin and crippled bodies and twisted limbs. But the Scripture says He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, willing to be bruised and buffeted and stripped naked, and hung up in total public shame, and swallowed up under the billows of God's wrath. That's love. That's love. "Here in his love, not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins." Ephesians chapter 5. We're called upon to love one another with what kind of love? even as Christ loved you and gave Himself up for us. That's the essence of love.

When you bring it into the realm of Christian liberty, see what Paul is saying. "Don't use your liberty that is real and precious, and I've been defending it", Paul says with white-hot passion in this letter, "as a staging area to gratify your flesh! Use your liberty to be so free that, driven by Spirit-empowered, Spirit-engendered, Christ-like, self-giving, self-sacrificing love, you are free enough to trample on all your liberties in order to assist your brothers and sisters on their way to heaven and to seek to get sinners to go to heaven with you." My friends, if that ain't Bible, you tell me how I've mishandled the text. And if that's Bible, then forever be done with any talk in this place of making Christian liberty a cloak for all forms of carnal indulgence, downright worldliness, and evil, and sin, and uncleanness. God grant that we'll be done with it by the grace and the power of God.

Well, I've tried to take on that attorney called Mr. Libertine. Let Paul take him on and show him up for what he is. He's a sophist. He's anti-God. He's out to fight the progress of grace in your soul and in mine. Could it be that the reason some of you who are so cavalier in your talk about Christian liberty and your use of it, you've never really taken your place as a broken sinner before the Savior. And you've just found in the nice structure of a proper middle class ethical framework, something that's pretty good for you, keeps you healthy; you don't go out and get drunk and

blow your brains and steal your dignity and all the rest. But down underneath, the reason you're so quick to make your so-called liberty in Christ the staging area for the flesh, you've never known what it is to be transformed by grace, to have the love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit. And as he says in this chapter, the fruit of the Spirit is at the head of the list, love, that principled, God-like, Christ-like affection that wills and seeks the good of its objects even at great personal cost? You don't know that love. All the time wanting to hedge up your bets to preserve your rights, to justify your liberties. I'm only asking, dear friends, could it be, could it be that the root cause is you've never really taken your place in your uncleanness and undumbness, in the presence of a sinner-welcoming Savior, and been enamored with Him?

When we get enamored with Him, then (and this is my closing text) we turn to a passage such as John 13, and we read these words, "Jesus, knowing that He came forth from God and was going back to God, rises up, having loved His own, He loved him unto the end." He rises up from supper, lays aside His outer garment, girds Himself with a towel, and takes the posture and fulfills the role of a bondservant to these disciples. The only one who had rights, the only one who had absolute liberties laid them all aside out of love for His own. And here symbolizes what He was doing externally was what He was about to do virtually and truly by going to the cross and shedding His precious blood to provide the one and only cleansing for sin that we sinners need.

Oh, dear Christian brother, sister, and I say it to myself, how can I gaze upon such a Savior and be so concerned to stand on my liberties? Should I not passionately be looking for ways to relinquish my liberties for the good of my brothers and sisters, and for the good of sinners, and thereby reflect likeness to my blessed Lord Jesus?

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