



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 5: 13-15

Summer 2021

"Liberty Not License"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are continuing our studies in the Book of Galatians. We're at chapter 5 this morning and we're going to look at verses 13 through 15. A shorter passage than we normally take, but it's an important passage, and one that gets us into an important and sometimes difficult subject to explain; the believer's relationship to the Law of Moses. Paul writes in verse 13,

<sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Galatians 5: 13-15

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and our time of studying it together.

*(Message)* John Stott wrote, "Freedom is a word on everybody's lips today. There are many different forms of it and many different people advocating it." He wrote that over 50 years ago but it's just as true today. People want freedom. The desire for it gave birth to our nation. Our Declaration of Independence spoke of life, and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Liberty and happiness go together. Freedom is one of our greatest

blessings. Paul believed that. Freedom was on his lips a lot, but a freedom, a liberty, that is far greater than anything spoken of today by people or politicians.

He has written about it several times in the Book of Galatians: in chapter 2, in chapter 4, and in chapter 5. Chapter 5 begins with the statement, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free;" . And now, in verse 13 he writes, "For you were called to freedom, brethren;" . Chapter 5 is about freedom. The Book of Galatians is almost entirely about freedom. Christianity is freedom. —But what kind of freedom is it?

Paul has made it plain that believers in Jesus Christ are free from the Law. We are not under the Law of Moses. We have been liberated from "the elemental things." (Gal 4:3). But does that mean that we are now free to do whatever we want? Does Christian freedom mean, 'freedom to live my life my way, or even to sin?' Well, that is the warning that is often given, that is raised, against grace—that 'freedom from the Law will result in moral chaos. We need the Law as a fence around our lives to keep us from straying.'

But the Law does not keep people from straying. It does not prevent moral failure. It does not have that kind of power. And the Galatians weren't protected from sin. In fact, they were falling into sin. Paul writes of their problems here in chapter 5, of a lack of love among them—of strife and immorality. He writes in verse 15, "...take care that you are not consumed by one another." Well, that's what they were doing. These Judaizers had come into the church. And what was the result of introducing the Law? They were on the verge of consuming each other—not living a righteous life.

The Law is powerless to prevent sin. It cannot save and it cannot sanctify. And Paul stresses that in the Book of Galatians. It's two main themes are 'How to be saved' and 'How to be holy'. Both are through faith in Christ, apart from the Law of Moses. Believers are free from the Law's condemnation; and they're free from the Law's supervision.

Now that raises a question, and it's a question among Christians, (I mean genuine Christians), and that is, 'What about the Ten Commandments?' Are we not obligated to

keep the Ten Commandments? And many Christians today fervently suggest and argue that we are. The idea is based largely on the belief that the Law is divided into three parts: the civil, the ceremonial, and the moral. We are no longer under the civil and the ceremonial laws, but we are under the moral law. —We'll discuss this at some length in our lesson this morning, but that distinction is a relatively modern one—this three parts of the Law. It's not a division that the Jews held—and it's not one that Paul taught.

Now, it's true that the Law can be analyzed in those ways. It has civil and ceremonial and moral aspects to it. The moral aspects are the Ten Commandments. The civil are the laws that regulated the life of the Israelites. And the ceremonial were designed to train Israel in the person and work of Christ who was to come—to prepare them for His coming and what He would do. There are these three aspects of the Law of Moses.

But the Law is not structured in three divisions. The Law is a unit. When Paul writes of it, he writes of it as a single, indivisible whole, without the neat distinctions of moral and ceremonial. It is simply "The Law." It is a unit. It's like a seamless garment. It can't be divided. We can't pick and choose ten laws out of 613. 'If we chose one, we choose all.' Now, that's what Paul says. He said that, (we covered that last week), in chapter 5, verse 3. The man who receives circumcision takes that one law out of the entire Law. That one rule, he says, 'Well, you're "under obligation to keep the whole Law." We can't pick and choose.

James said, 'Whoever stumbles in one point of the Law, he has become guilty of all.' (James 2:10). It is, as Douglas Moo put in one of his books, "An all or nothing proposition." So when Paul says, 'We are not under the Law', he means the whole Law—not just parts of the Law.

The Law of Moses was not given to the church. It was given specifically to the nation Israel. It was ... we might think of it in this way ... 'their constitution'. It was given to that nation, and it was given to that nation for a specific period of time—from Moses to Christ; for a specific purpose and that was to prepare the nation for the coming of Christ. And it did that in three ways. Negatively, it revealed sin. It was not given as a way

of salvation. That's what the Galatians were falling into, but it wasn't given for that. It was given to show the people that they needed salvation. It was given to expose sin, so that the people would seek the Messiah and the solution to sin.

Secondly, and positively, the Law revealed the holy character of God. And thirdly and positively, it was a safeguard for the people. It supervised Israel under the old covenant to preserve the nation; to keep the nation distinct from the rest of nations. They were to be separate from the nations—and separated unto God. And the Law gave them directions on how to do that and taught them about that. The Law, as Paul has explained, was a *tutor*; it was a *guardian*; it was a *pedagogue*.

It was actually like a babysitter. That's how he described it in Galatians chapter 3, in verse 24. It's like the ancient *pedagogue* who supervised the child, but he only did it for a period of time. He did it until the child 'came of age'—reached maturity.

And the Law supervised Israel for a limited time, until the date set by the Father. Just as the father in a Roman household would set the date for the guardians and the tutors to take care of the child, the Father, God the Father, set that date for the nation Israel: what Paul called "the fullness of the time" in chapter 4, verse 4. When that time came, Christ came. He achieved everything He was sent to do: And with His death, burial, and resurrection, that period of the Law came to an end.

Now, that does not mean that the Law ceased to have value and that Christians have no relationship to the Law. The Law is God's perfect revelation. It reveals, as I said, His holiness; and we still learn from it. It is God's Word and so we are to study it: Because it teaches us about God's character and His ways; and what He expects of us as His people. So it applies to us indirectly, but not directly. And when I say not directly, I mean not 'as the code of our life', not as 'the set of rules' that direct and regulate our behavior as it did the behavior of the Israelite. We are not under the Law as our guardian.

Does that mean, then, that Christians are lawless, without principles to guide us? No, not at all. We have the Holy Spirit as our guide. And in chapter 6, verse 2, Paul writes that we have “the law of Christ.” That's our law. But what is it? It's a set of principles, taken from the teaching of Jesus; taken from the instruction and the writings of the apostles; with the central demand of love, and under the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit. It's all New Testament, for the most part, and the Spirit of God using it to instruct and guide us.

In fact, nine of the Ten Commandments have been taken up into “the law of Christ.” The fourth commandment, the sabbath law, is the one exception. And it's the exception because the sabbath was the sign of God's relation with the nation Israel, and the covenant that He had made with the nation at Sinai. He specifically ... Moses specifically states that in Exodus, chapter 31, verse 13 through 17. This is the sign that He has given that He has a covenant relationship with the nation. And the separation of that one day from the other six signified the nation's separation from the other nations. And they were to keep that. And if they didn't, they did so under penalty of death.

But the other nine are expressions of God's holy nature; and they are eternal; they're universal; so they have been repeated in “the law of Christ.” Christian freedom then, is freedom from the Law of Moses—from its condemnation and its obligation. But we are not free to live any way we want. We're not free to sin. We are under a new law that frees us from selfishness, so that we can serve God and others—as love requires that we do and as the Holy Spirit empowers us to do; and leads us to do.

Now that's how Paul begins the passage in verse 13. "For you were called to freedom, brethren;" . And there Paul sounds the overarching theme of this book, which is grace. You see that in that word *called*; 'Called them to freedom'. And He did the same for you and for me; for all of us who are believers in Jesus Christ. He *called* us. We didn't gain our freedom by fighting for it. We didn't win our freedom. We were “called to freedom.” Before we called to God, God called us. He took the initiative. That is God's

grace, His electing grace, His irresistible grace, His sovereign grace that called us out of spiritual darkness into light and life.

Now, if He had just called us to life, and just called us to service, that would have been enough. That would have been a great blessing. We who were dead in darkness have been called into life and light. What a glorious, unimaginable blessing that is. But He did more than that. He called us to freedom. That's what it means to be a Christian. We are free. The yoke of the Law has been broken from off of us, and we are free.

But again, as John Stott wrote, "It is tragic that the average man does not know it." The popular image of Christianity today is not freedom at all, but a cruel and cramping bondage. Well, that's not Christianity. It's not a life of prohibitions and rule keeping. It's not a life of striving to please God and so that the things we do will make us more acceptable to Him. No. Through faith alone, in Christ alone, we are fully accepted by God, when we are His sons. And that acceptance and that sonship begins at the instant of faith—and never can be removed.

Paul was a son of God. And he recognized the Galatians as fellow sons. He calls them *brethren*. And all who believe in Christ have the privilege of sonship and freedom. Every one of us. But every privilege carries with it a responsibility. And Paul quickly warns, "...only *do not turn your* freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." (vs13b).

*The flesh* is a term that we see frequently in the writings of Paul. And it is another word for the fallen, sinful nature which we inherited from Adam—and which is driven by self-centeredness. It is inclined towards sin. We are new creatures in Christ; We have a new heart; We have a new disposition, new desires. But we have a new capacity to understand spiritual things we didn't have before, and we have the ability, we have a new will, as it were, to act upon the things that we have come to understand in the Word of God.

But still, there is within our members, as Paul said in Romans 7, "a law of sin". And that word *law* is the same word used here, the word for "the Law of Moses"—*nomos* is the word that's used here, 'the law of sin'. It's something completely different

but it's there in Romans 7, it's a principle, it's a power, an influence, that regularly works within us to fight against us. It is active, this "law of sin", (vs25), and we will deal with it till the day we die—and struggle against it. So Paul tells the Galatians, don't let your freedom become an opportunity for it—for the flesh; for this "law of sin" within us. Don't give opportunity for that.

That word, *opportunity*, is an interesting word. It means *a starting point*; and it was used in a military context as a base of operations for an expedition. So, when the Roman legions went to conquer a land they would set up a 'base of operations'. They would camp on the Rhine or the Danube, and then they would, from there, go into a military adventure, seek to conquer the Germans, or whoever else they were fighting.

That's the idea here. And Paul is warning them not to allow this great blessing of freedom to become a kind of 'base of operations' for doing things that are wrong. Don't use it for a pretext for sin, as an excuse for self-indulgence and an excursion into sin.

The mind, under the influence of the flesh, is good at doing that—taking a blessing that we have and making it a pretext for something completely different, and justifying it. It's very skilled, the heart of man, at rationalizing its way into sin—and Paul is warning them not to allow that to happen.

We are easily deceived by ourselves and our desires. That's what we struggle with. That's why Augustin used to pray, "LORD, deliver me from that evil man—myself." It can be very easy to turn privilege and blessing into an occasion for sin. But Paul said, 'Don't do it! Don't be fooled! Don't turn your liberty into license.' Instead he said, "Through love serve one another." (vs13b). Overcome a negative influence with a positive one. That's how our freedom is to be used, not to sin, but to serve.

So after telling the Galatians that they are free from the Law, and after warning them not to become slaves to it again, he now tells them to 'become slaves to one another.' You can sense the irony in his words here. But that's what Christian freedom is—freedom to serve and be a blessing to others. That's real freedom because it's freedom from selfishness, it's freedom from the tyranny of the ego.

Outside of Christ, every man is a slave. He is in bondage to his passions and pleasures. He lives to promote and satisfy self—that is the natural man. He cannot free himself from that. Sin, in all its forms, is enslaving. Only Christ can break the bonds of sin. And only the Holy Spirit can give us the power to overcome the strength of sin that's still in us: that law; that principle of sin; that's in our members. He enables us to overcome that. He enables us to serve one another. We never do it perfectly, but we have the power within us. We have the faculties within us, a new heart, a new capability to understand and act upon what we understand—and the Spirit of God within us to energize us to do that, and to guide and direct us in doing that.

And so, that being the case, we must act! We must do it! And it's by doing that, as Paul explains, that we will fulfill the very law from which we have been freed. Verse 14, "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' "

The Law of Moses is not bad. In Romans 7, where Paul talks about the Law and how the Law killed him; he says, 'It's not bad'. In fact he says, "The Law is holy, righteous, and good." (vs12). It's *holy*, *righteous*, and *good* because it reveals my sin and my need of a Savior. It's holy, righteous, and good because it reveals the righteousness of God.

I'll give you some examples from what may seem rather peculiar aspects of the Law and the Old Testament—the laws of diet and dress. Both of those taught holiness in separation. In fact, to understand the word holiness, and what it is to be holy, you must understand that basically the idea is *separation*. And so you have implements, utensils in the tabernacle; like forks and spoons and various pieces of furniture in the tabernacle that are called *holy*. That doesn't mean they're morally pure. They're inanimate objects. But they're *holy* because they've been *separated* from common use, and *separated*, dedicated, to the service of God in the tabernacle. And that basically is the idea of holiness. —It's separation.

And so you see this principle of separation in the Law in every aspect of a person's life—separation from certain kinds of animals that could be used for food: 'There's the clean and the unclean.' We want to often explain that as a health reason; or



hygiene. That's not the purpose of the Law. It may be an offshoot of it, but the purpose is to teach the people the principle of holiness by teaching them separation in everything, every aspect of their lives; in the food they ate: 'Don't eat this, only eat this.' 'This is unclean, this is clean.' —Separation.

In the clothes they wore; they couldn't mix materials. They couldn't wear a coat that was wool and cotton mixed together. They had to be pure, as it were, *separated*. And that was the principle that the Law was teaching the people to be a separate people—to be holy. It was, again, the work of the pedagogue, the tutor, the teacher; it was to teach Israel holiness, to be separated from sin, to be separated from the world and unto God to be devoted to Him in every way, every aspect of life. They were taught that; from their diet to their dress to the days of the week. The seventh day is separated from the others.

And we learn from that. It instructs us. You read the Law and you study it, and you learn God wants holiness in His people. It's an object lesson for us, just as they were object lessons for Israel. But, the Law can't make us be holy. It can teach us about it. It can't make us holy. We have that power only through the Holy Spirit. Paul elaborates on that in the rest of the chapter, but the work of the Spirit is behind all that he writes here —everything that he's saying.

Love fulfills the Law. And love is the fruit of the Spirit. And we'll see that later in the chapter in verse 22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." All of that is the fruit of the Spirit. But it's interesting, the first statement that he makes, the first virtue that he explains there is that of **love**. That is the product of the Spirit of God.

And so, the divine author of the Law of Moses, the Holy Spirit, comes into the heart of the believer, takes up residence there, permanent residence, becomes there our guide through life, in true freedom, freedom from the Law's condemnation, and freedom to obey in love. We do that by loving our neighbor. We do that because we want to do that. It's a new desire that we have, not to serve self, but to serve others:

What we want to do because we have a new nature and we have the Spirit of God creating the right disposition within us. And that's what love does. It serves.

Warren Wiersbe explained, "That's why a father who has a day off decides to spend it fixing his daughter's bicycle in the morning, and taking his son to the museum in the afternoon. If someone comments, 'Fixing a bike and visiting a museum doesn't seem like an exciting way to spend a day off.' (*I would agree with that. But he answers*), It is exciting if you love your kids." And that's true. Those who love are glad to serve. It's not a burden. And it always does what is best for others. And so, in that way, it fulfills the Law. As Paul writes later, in verse 23, "...against such things there is no law."

Paul gave cases of this, examples of this in other places. For example, in Romans 14, verse 13 he wrote, "Let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way." Well, to avoid doing that takes a sacrifice on our part. We may have the freedom to do something, but if it's going to cause the brother to stumble, don't do it. —Sacrifice. He adds in verse 19, let us "pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." Well, these are ways that we love others; it's by putting them first; it's by doing what is best for them.

Paul's command to fulfill the law by love makes it clear that he does not mean, does not mean as many modern moralists teach, that if we love a person we can break the law in the interest of love. And in the 1960s, (and I remember this well and some of you will, too), that notion was put forth in what was called 'Situation Ethics'. And it was called 'The New Morality'. We used to hear about 'the new morality'; and what it meant was that in certain circumstances, 'it's good', 'it's right' to break the moral law in the interest of love.

We could give a number of examples that are given of that: but the reality is, we can never fulfill the law (*of Christ*) by breaking the law (*of Christ*). And violating any of God's moral principles can never be good for another person. So we can never, ultimately, act in love by violating the principles of God's morality and His will. I said they called that 'the new morality.' Well, that's now 'the old morality' and it's 'the standard

morality' in which we live. We cannot conform to this world and adopt that kind of principle.

Paul's instruction here does not lower God's standard for us, nor present us with an excuse to sin. If anything, what Paul does here is give us a higher standard and calls us to a more demanding life. We are to live a life of service for others. We are to live a life of self-sacrifice. Surprisingly, that's a life of freedom, to serve one another. Literally, we can translate verse 13 as "serve as slaves."

Well now why would Paul choose to describe the believer's mutual love for one another as another form of slavery? It may be because of the difficulties in maintaining human relationships. It's very difficult in the best of times to maintain good human relationships. —It's a difficulty. And it's considered here, perhaps, in order for that to be done, to require enslavement to one another, because it is so difficult. That's been suggested, and it makes good sense in this context, because verse 15 speaks of the difficulty that they were having with their relationships. The Galatians were fighting each other.

It is difficult in the best of times to keep unity in the church. The flesh is strong and selfish, so we must be enslaved to one another so that we will not be enslaved to it—that is to the flesh; to ego. That's possible.

But I think there's a better reason for this description that Paul gives, and it's found in the LORD's example in John 13, when He, The Master, became a servant—became a slave to His 12 disciples: He washed their feet. It was an act of love and it illustrates two things about love—one outward and one inward. Outwardly, love is active. It serves others. It does something beneficial for others. And inwardly, love is humble.

A person can do acts of service, great acts of service, even sacrifice one's own life and do it out of pride; a person's self-interest. True love is humble and gladly takes the servant's role. That's how we are to be. Later Jesus told the disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that

you also love one another." (Jn 13:34). This is what Archbishop Ussher called "The 11th Commandment." It is the commandment that fulfills the ten, and fulfills the whole Law. We are to obey this command toward everyone. Luke, chapter 10, verse 29, and the parable of the good Samaritan defines for us what our neighbor is. And it is anyone, he or she, is anyone who may cross our path in life.

And we can apply that to this, but I think probably, from the context here in Galatians, Paul is thinking of fellow Christians—that's specifically in view. They would apply to non-believers, but he's concerned about the church and unity within the church. And so that's probably the scope here—fellow Christians.

How do we do this? How do we love one another and serve one another? (to get very practical in our application of all of this.) Well, first of all, you have to know one another. We can't have a concern for each other and show it if we don't know each other. And so, we can't know each other if we don't meet each other. So if you're a member here, and you don't know the person near you, introduce yourself. Show an interest in those around you and you may have the kind of conversation that a number of us have had: "Hello. I'm Dan." "Hi, I'm Bob." "Hello, Bob. How long have you been here?" "Oh, 10, 15 years." [Laughter] "We meet at last!" Well, better that, than not to introduce one's self and meet others. We can't have a concern for those we don't know.

Pray for people. Pray for this congregation and its ministry: That it will remain true to God's Word. I think we have remained true to God's Word from the beginning, but we can only do that by the grace of God. We always have these dangers, and we read that throughout the New Testament. —Read it Acts, chapter 20, (vs29), 'the danger of wolves arising from your very midst', he tells the Ephesian elders.

We've always got to be cautious and seeking God's protection in that way. So pray. It's a very important effort on our part. And I say effort, it is an effort. I think it was Spurgeon or someone who said, "The devil trembles every time the humblest believer is on his knees." And so he seeks to keep us off our knees, keep us out of prayer. But

prayer is essential for spiritual growth; and for the blessing and protection of the congregation. So it takes effort. But it's an act of love and it is effective.

There's much more that we could say about all of this, and Paul will develop this in the remaining chapters of the book. This is the third portion of the book, and it is the ethical section of the Book of Galatians, the application part. But the principle is clear: We are free to love one another by serving one another, and we're to do that. That's not an option. This is the sign that we are Christian disciples, that we are Christ's disciples, that we have love for one another. So we must do it, which means we must make an effort to know the body and serve it.

When we don't do that, when love escapes us, then bad things happen. 'Self' raises its ugly head. We become jealous of one another, selfish toward one another and we begin to fight. That's what happened in Galatia. They had these 'Legalizers' come in there who were telling them, 'You got to do this to be right in your behavior, and to be godly and holy and accepted by God. You've got to follow this.' And it was dividing them. They were putting themselves under the yoke of the Law, thinking that that was the way to a holy and acceptable life with God.

But it didn't prevent sin. In fact, it inflamed the flesh. Verse 15, "But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another." Quarrelsomeness is what Paul will later describe as being among "the deeds of the flesh"; "strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger." (vs19). It's the opposite of serving one another in love. And it evidences that people are not walking by the Holy Spirit. The Galatians weren't. They were, in fact, behaving like a pack of wild animals.

A person or a church can adopt all kinds of rules and regulations to be 'a fence around their lives', and to protect themselves from bad behavior. But it won't guarantee godliness. Rules and taboos can restrict a person's behavior, but they cannot change a person's heart and cause a person to love the LORD and love others. Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

So we must look to Him. He does not work in a vacuum. He cultivates virtue in our lives, and in a congregation, through the Word of God—through the study of Scripture; through prayer and worship and fellowship with believers—we need one another. Paul will later talk about that in chapter 6, "Bear one another's burdens," he says.

So, all of these things come together, converge together, to enable us to do the things that Paul says, 'To live our life in freedom.' The person who spends time routinely in the study of God's Word and in prayer—not as a requirement and a rule, (though I will say it is necessary). but doing it as a desire, and who yields to the Spirit's leading—that person will enjoy freedom, and that person will serve.

Let me summarize what Paul has been teaching here. Repeatedly, he has stated that believers are "free from the Law of Moses." And he has repeatedly told the Galatians to "preserve their freedom." 'Don't give it up!' 'They must fight for that freedom by not putting themselves under the bondage of the Law.' Now he tells them to 'Serve one another in love, and by doing that they will satisfy the requirement of the Law.'

The Law is good. It is an expression of God's will. It's an expression of God's holiness. But the believer who is free from the Law is the only one who fulfills the Law. The way we do that is not by meticulously observing rules and regulations of this external code—but by the new way of love which is produced in the believer by the Holy Spirit. I've said it many times, I'll say it again; the Christian life is not a natural life—it is a supernatural life. And God the Holy Spirit keeps us and directs us; and we're to follow Him.

So, believers in Jesus Christ are free: not to sin but to serve—to love one another. That's the essence of this text. There's an old tradition that when the apostle John was very old and had very little strength, all he could do when he was carried in to the congregation or to meet with fellow Christians was repeat the great command, "Little children, love one another." May God help us to do that.

But to do that, you must first be one of God's children. And we become that, as Paul has emphasized throughout this Book of Galatians, through faith in Christ. It is not by works, it is through faith—believing that Christ is God's eternal Son, who became a man and died for sinners, bore the penalty of their sins in our place. Those who trust in His work and not their own, are saved. So look to Christ. Believe in Him and receive eternal life and true freedom.

Father, we thank You for that great mercy that You have shown us, poured out upon us, applied to us through the cross of Christ. Thank You for the sacrifice that He made so willingly. A willing substitute for us, willing to obey You, because of Your great love for us. We thank You for that. Help us to live in light of that, to live as men and women who are free by Your grace, free to serve You, free to serve one another, free to be men and women who love one another. So we look to You to bless us.

And now, the LORD bless you and keep you, the LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

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