



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 5:13-15

Galatians 5

"Liberty, Not License"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] And we're back in the book of Galatians this morning. We're going to look at Galatians chapter 5 – relatively brief text – verses 13-15, but I want to spend some preliminary time on the subject of the law of the Christians.

Galatians 5, beginning with verse 13, "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. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for this time together and this opportunity that we have to gather on this Lord's day as believers in Jesus Christ and open up Your inherent word, read it together, and then spend time in study together. This is an important moment in our week. It's a time of worship, but a time of instruction as well, a time in which we learn about You and learn how we are to live our lives. It's a time to be equipped in order to go out into the world and live faithful lives, lives in which we honor You in our behavior and we tell others about Your grace. May our lives be a testimony to that grace. And may we, through our time this morning, come to understand in a clearer way Your grace. We thank You for it, Father. It saves

undeserving sinners, of which we all are. We have nothing to boast in, except the cross of Christ; nothing to glory in except Your grace, which is to say we have nothing in and of ourselves to exalt ourselves in.

All that we have is from You. All that we have spiritually is from You. All that we have materially is from You, and we come before You at this moment seeking blessing, both spiritually and materially. Bless us spiritually with an understanding of the things we've read. Build us up in the faith and bless us as we go out from this place back into our neighborhoods and our homes, back to our places of work, back into our social settings, and bless us, Lord, that we would be men and women well equipped to live in the world as Your ambassadors.

Bless us materially, Lord. We are a weak and a frail people physically. We're made of dust and we so easily return to dust. We depend upon You for every breath of air we take. And so, Father, we thank You for another breath of air. We thank You for the lives that You've given us. We thank You for the constant care that You give us. We thank You for our health and our employment and our friends and the many, many good things we have.

We pray for those that are experiencing difficulties. We pray for those who are sick, those who are recovering from surgery, those who are grieving. We pray that You'd give comfort. We pray that You'd give health. We pray that You'd give the ability for men and women to turn to Your word and Your promises and be encouraged by the truth that You're in control and that You are working good out of even difficult circumstances. And so encourage Your people, Father, and bless them.

Where there is strife in the home, we pray that You'd bring peace. Where there's unemployment, we pray that You'd lead the unemployed to places of work. The problems are many, Father, and we can look to You, because You're on the throne, in control, and Your

desires are for our good. We thank You for that. We thank You for Your grace.

Bless our nation, Father, You blessed us with us in this land, and we pray that You would continue to do that. Bless our leaders with wisdom. We pray that You would prosper this land, but not so that we can accumulate things and live lives of luxury, but so we'll enjoy peace and the gospel might go out and that we would be used of You to do that and to avail ourselves of the opportunities to strengthen ourselves in the Lord in places like this, in a Sunday morning and the Wednesday night ministries and the weekly ministries. Bless all of that, Father.

We thank You for those who are involved in these ministries, for the men and women who sacrifice their time to teach classes for the men and women who give up their time to work in the radio and tape ministries and the other ministries we have, the mercy ministry and then the nursery, many ways in which people serve this assembly. We thank You for them and pray that You'd bless them and prepare our hearts for a time of study together. And may this be a time of worship and learning. We pray these things in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] The Anglican scholar and writer 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 almost 40 years ago, but it is as true now as it was then. Freedom is on the lips of our president and politicians. It's a word that's in the news almost daily.

But that's nothing new. Decades ago it was on the lips of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who spoke before Congress in 1941 and gave his vision of a post World War with his famous four freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. Long before that, 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 by our politicians. Paul has written about it several times in the book of Galatians, in chapters 2, 4, and 5. Chapter 5 begins with the statement, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free."

And now in verse 13, he writes again, "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 what he referred to in chapter 4 as the elemental things.

But does that mean that we are now free to do whatever we want? Does Christian freedom mean freedom to sin? That is the warning that is very often raised against the doctrine of grace, the warning that freedom from the Lord will result in moral chaos. Grace produces moral chaos. Therefore we need the Law as a kind of fence, a wall around our lives in order to keep us from sinning. That's what the Judaizers taught the Galatians. They were fencing them in with the Law, enslaving them, as Paul puts it, all over again to the elemental principles from which they had been delivered when they came to Christ.

But the problem is the Law does not keep people from sinning. It doesn't have that kind of power. The problem is not with the Law itself. The Law is a written expression of God's will. The problem isn't with the Law. It's with us. But the Law doesn't have the power to change us and give us the ability to obey it. So it has no power, and the Galatians who were seeking to protect their lives, seeking to protect themselves from sin by the Law, were in fact doing just the opposite. We read that they were falling into sin.

Paul writes that their problems here in our text in chapter 5, of loveless strife among them and immorality – take care, he writes, in verse 15, "that you are not consumed by one another." The Law is

powerless to prevent that, powerless to prevent sin. It cannot save and it cannot sanctify – can't change us.

Now Paul stresses that here in the book of Galatians. The main themes of this book can be said to be how to be saved and how to be holy, how to have a righteous standing and a righteous walk. Both are through faith in Christ apart from the Law of Moses, apart from the works that we do.

Believers are free from the Law's condemnation and from the Law's supervision. But that raises a question among Christians. It raises a question among many of you, I'm sure. It's raised questions with me over the years. And that is if we're not under the Law, what does that say about the Ten Commandments? What does that say about our relationship to the Ten Commandments? Are we still obligated to keep them?

Many Christians today argue that we are. Many good Christians today argue that we are. This issue I think in some ways is a simple issue, but in other ways it's a complicated issue, so I want to give some time to explain it as a kind of preliminary to the text that we'll look at.

The idea that we are under the Ten Commandments and an idea that I will argue against is an idea that's based largely on the belief that the Law of Moses is divided into three parts: the civil, the ceremonial, and the moral. We're no longer, it's argued, under the civil and the ceremonial laws, but we are under the moral law.

The problem is that distinction is a relatively modern one. It's not a division that the Jews held to or one that the apostle Paul taught, or any of the apostles. Now, it's true that when we look at the Law and when we study it in its parts, we can analyze it in those ways. It has civil and ceremonial aspects to it. The moral aspects are the Ten Commandments. The civil aspects are the laws that regulated the daily life of the Israelites. It was an agrarian society and so there were laws about how to plant their crops and there were laws about what to do with the livestock, if any animal got loose, how it was to be taken care

of, and what happened if a bull gored a neighbor, and things like this. That's the civil aspects of the Law that governed the order of Israelite society.

And then there's the ceremonial aspect, such as the aspects of worship and sacrifice and purification, which were designed to train Israel in what was coming, train the Israelite in the person and work of Christ who was to come, prepare the nation for His coming.

There are these three aspects of the Law of Moses, but the Law was 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 law. It is simple the Law. It is a unit. It's like a seamless garment. It can't be divided up. You try to divide a seamless garment up, you ruin the garment.

We can't pick and choose ten laws out of 613. If you choose one, you choose them all. That's what Paul says earlier in this chapter in verse 3 when he says that the man who receives circumcision is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You can't just have that one law of circumcision and be exempt from the rest of the Law if you adopt that law as binding upon you. Then you have thereby adopted the entire Law of Moses.

James says something very similar when he writes, "Whoever stumbles in one point of the Law has become guilty of all." It is an all or nothing proposition. So when Paul says that we are not under the Law, he means the whole Law, not just part of the Law. The Law of Moses is not given to the church. It was given to a specific people, Israel, for a specific period of time, from Moses to Christ, for a specific purpose, to prepare Israel for Christ. It did that in three ways.

First of all, it did that negatively. It exposed sin. The Law was not given as a means of salvation. It was given to show people that they need salvation. It imprisoned people under their sin, as Paul has explained it earlier – imprisoned them under their guilt, causes them to see their guilt, whereas they may not have it in any other way than by their failures to keep the Law and their sin kept showing itself to

them. And it did that in order that they would flee in faith to God for His mercy and long for the Messiah, the coming of Christ.

Secondly, and positively, the Law revealed God's holy character. I'll say more about that in a moment.

Thirdly, and positively, the Law was a safeguard for the people. It supervised Israel under the old covenant to preserve the nation and keep it distinct from the other nations, keep it pure until the Messiah came. The Law was a tutor, a guardian, as Paul has said, and we can put that in our nomenclature, our own language, by saying it was like a babysitter. That's how Paul describes it in chapter 3:24.

It was like an ancient pedagogue, a slave who supervised a child, but only did that until the child came of age, became mature. And the Law supervised Israel for a limited period of time, until the date set by the Father, the fullness of time, as Paul describes it in 4:4. Then its control seized when Christ came.

Now that does not mean that the Law has ceased to have value and that Christians have no relationship at all to the Law. The Law is God's perfect revelation. It reveals His holiness and we still learn from it. It teaches us about God's character and about God's ways and what He expects from us.

Let me give an example. I'll try to be brief, but explain how I think we still relate to the Law. The Law has, as a fundamental feature, the idea of separation. And the word "holiness" has this basic idea, the idea of separation. That's fundamentally what it means to be holy, to be separate. And all through the Law God taught Israel to be a separate people, and He did it in every aspect of their life, in the days of the week, in the months, and the years. There were days that were separated. The Sabbath was separated from the other six days. There were special days during the year, and the months were separated from the others.

The food that people ate taught this idea of separation. There were clean animals and unclean animals. It's not that a horse is an evil animal, but it was declared unclean, as were other animals, as opposed

to sheep, which were clean, in order to make a separation and teach the people in their diet that there is to be separation.

In the clothing that people wore. This was maintained as well. A garment could not be worn of mixed materials. They couldn't mix wool and cotton together. They were to be separate. This idea of separation was taught in every aspect of the Israelite's life in order to teach them that they were to be a separate people, a holy people. They were not to be like the nations. They were to be unique. They were to be separated unto God.

Now, we're not under these dietary laws. Read the book of Acts, it's very clear, Acts chapter 10, that that's been done away with. We are not under these laws governing the kind of clothing we wear. Those laws have been done away with. But the instruction that was given, the teaching to be holy, that is a lesson that is for us. We can still learn that lesson in a very graphic way by studying the Law and seek to obey that and conform to that righteous of the Law that is taught in those various ways.

So the Law does apply to us indirectly, but not directly, not as the code of our life, not as a set of rules that direct and regulate our behavior. We are not under the Law as our guardian. Does that mean then that the Christian is lawless? Does that mean that we have no moral or spiritual principles to guide us? No. We have the Holy Spirit. He is our guide, and in 6:2, Paul writes of the law of Christ. That is our law.

The Law of Moses was the law of the old covenant. The law of Christ is the law of the new covenant. We will elaborate on that in chapter 6, but if I could say briefly, the law of Christ is not a detailed list of rules that regulate every aspect of our life from our diet to our clothing to the calendar of the week and the month and the year.

It is a set of principles taken from the teachings of our Lord and the apostles. It's a set of principles found in the New Testament. It's the New Testament with the central demand of love and the guiding influence of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit.



That's the law of Christ. And in fact, as we study the law of Christ, as you study the New Testament, it's very clear that nine of the ten commandments have been taken up into the law of Christ. The fourth commandment, the Sabbath law, being the exception. And it is the exception because the Sabbath was the sign of God's relationship to the nation Israel and the covenant that He had made with that nation at Sinai. This is how the Sabbath is explained in Exodus 31:13-17: It's a sign between God and Israel.

Well, the other nine are expressions of God's holy nature. The Sabbath is a covenantal expression, an old covenant expression. And the other nine are what we could call eternal and universal expressions of God's holy nature. So they have been repeated in the law of Christ.

Now all of this is simply to say Christian freedom is not freedom to sin. It is freedom from the Law, which means the whole Law, not just parts of the Law. That's how Paul speaks of the Law, as the whole Law. Christian freedom is freedom from the Law's condemnation. It is freedom from the guilt of sin, which the Law exposes. It's freedom from the constant struggle to gain God's acceptance that the Law demands of the person who seeks to live by it.

Christians who put themselves under a regiment of rules and taboos – and oftentimes Christians do that by inventing their own dos and don'ts. But people who do that, Christians who do that in order to within God's approval, fall into a legalistic life. They have, as Paul said earlier, fallen from grace, meaning fallen from the grace principle and fallen into legalism and they missed the message of Galatians. It is about freedom. It is not freedom to sin. It is freedom from sin. It is freedom from selfishness and the freedom to serve God and others as love requires us to do and as the Holy Spirit empowers us and leads us to do.

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 the book, which is grace. God called them to freedom. And He did the same for us. We didn't fight for our freedom. We didn't win

our freedom. We were called to freedom. Before we called to God, God called us. He took the initiative when we were in sin and in rebellion and when we had no thought of God and no interest in coming to Him at all.

Why did you have an interest in coming to the Lord? Because He created that interest within you. That's when you came, and you came because He called you. You didn't even hear the call, but you responded by His grace. And that's it. That's God's grace. It is His electing grace. It is His irresistible grace, His sovereign grace, that called us out of spiritual darkness and into His light and life.

Paul knew this from his own experience. He knew it from his own freedom. Back in 1:15, he wrote that God sent him apart from his mother's womb "and called me," he said, "through His grace." From his mother's womb, which is a way of saying from all eternity, God has set His love upon the apostle, and in a moment of time, called him through His grace.

Now, if he had just called us to life and to service, that would have been enough. That would have been an immeasurable blessing. We who were dead in darkness have been called to light and life. What a blessing that is. But He did more than that. He called us to freedom. That is what it means to be a Christian. We are free. The yoke of the Law that Peter describes in Acts 15 as something that neither we, those Jews in the company of Peter at the Jerusalem council, nor our fathers could bear. That yoke has been broken off of us. We've been freed from it.

But many do not understand that. When many think of Christianity, those within the church, those without the church, they often think of a life under law. John Stott makes that point. He writes, "It is tragic that the average man does not know it, does that know that we've been freed from the Law. The popular image of Christianity today is not freedom at all, but a cruel and cramping bondage."

That's true, but that is not Christianity. It's not a life of prohibitions and rule keeping. That's not to say there are no rules and

there are no prohibitions. There certainly are. But that's not what characterizes the Christian experience and the Christian life. That's not Christianity. It's not a life of striving to please God, to win Him over, and gain His approval and never, ever achieve that, because if we have to gain God's approval by the things we do, we can never have the assurance that we've succeeded. In fact, we will always lack that assurance, because we'll know it if we're honest with ourselves that we've not done our best and we've not certainly measured up to perfection.

Well, that's not Christianity. It's not this sense of striving without the sense of assurance and acceptance. It's just the opposite. Through faith and Christ alone, we are fully and completely accepted by God as His sons and daughters at the moment of faith, because at the moment of faith we have been justified. We have been forgiven of all of our sins and declared righteous, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and we stand before the Lord God as absolutely righteous, and sons and daughters. And Paul knew that of himself and he recognized that all of the Galatians were also fellow sons, fellow children of God. He calls them brethren at the end of the verse. All who believe in Christ have the privilege of sonship and freedom.

But as mentioned earlier, people have often drawn the wrong implications from that declaration of liberation and have interpreted freedom as an excuse for sin and self-indulgence. That's what those opposed to the gospel claim. That's what they say grace leads to. That's what they said salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, and Christ alone apart from the works of the Law. That's what it leads to. It leads to license, and Paul was often accused of promoting that. He was accused of antinomianism, a word that simply means "against law." But it has the sense of promoting lawlessness, of being a libertine, a promoter of sin and license of every kind.

I think it's fair to say that it may be true to say that if a preacher isn't at some point being accused of antinomianism, then he probably isn't preaching sovereign grace or isn't preaching grace very clearly.

Our Lord was accused of that by the legalists of His day, the Pharisees. They called Him a glutton and a wine bibber. He dined with sinners. They were calling Him an antinomian. Paul was frequently called that and deals with that in Romans chapter 6.

They say, "Well, if this is what you're teaching, Paul, that grace abounds where sin abounds, then let's sin all the more that grace might abound." And Paul's answer to that in Roman 6:2 is, "May it never be." God forbid. That cannot be for the Christian. Believers in Jesus Christ are dead to sin so we can no longer live in it. Sin is not an option for the Christian. It doesn't mean we don't sin. We certainly do. But it is contrary to the people that we are, the new creatures that we have become.

Here in Galatians, Paul immediately defines Christian freedom as being righteous be warning against any false conclusions that sin is an option of or an implication of freedom. He warns, "Only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

The flesh is a word that is quite prominent in Paul's writings. It's another word for the fallen sinful nature which we inherited from Adam and which is driven by self-centeredness. It is the inclination toward sin that we all have. We are new creatures in Christ. We have a new heart with a new disposition, with a new capacity to understand truth. We are new creatures in Christ, but still there is within our members, there is within our body, as Paul puts it, in Romans 7, a law of sin, a principle of sin, and it's active. It's active within us.

So he tells the Galatians, don't let your freedom become an opportunity for it. This word "opportunity" is interesting. It means a starting point and it was used in a military context of a base of operations for an expedition. So Paul was warning them not to allow this great blessing of freedom to become a pretext and excuse for self-indulgence, a sort of base of operation for excursion into sin. The mind under the influence of the flesh is very good at doing that, at ceasing the opportunity to sin and justify the doing of it. It's very

skilled in rationalizing ways to sin. "Well, everybody else is doing it."  
"Well, we're going to get married anyway." All kinds of ways to  
rationalize sin.

And evidently one of the ways Paul was thinking of is, "Well,  
I'm forgiven of everything. I'm already forgiven, so if I do this, I'm  
already forgiven." Well, that's the danger that we face. The sin that's  
within us is like a living creature that is conniving, and when we fall  
prey to that influence of the flesh, we rationalize. That's why  
Augustine 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." 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. There's some irony in that, but that is what Christian  
freedom is. It is freedom to serve and be blessing to others. That's real  
freedom, because it is freedom from selfishness. It is freedom from  
the tyranny of the ego. It is freedom from that rule that we all  
naturally live by, which is look out for number one.

Outside of Christ, every man is a slave. He is in bondage to his  
passions and pleasures. He lives to promote and satisfy self. He cannot  
free himself from that. That is his nature. That's the way he or she is.  
Sin, in all of its forms, is enslaving. Only Christ can break the bonds  
of sin, and only the Holy Spirit can give us the power to overcome  
sin's strength and enable us to serve others.

And it's by doing that, as Paul explains, that we 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. Romans chapter 7, Paul makes  
that explicit. He says it is holy and righteous and good. It reveals the

righteousness of God. As I explained earlier, it reveals the holiness of God. It illustrates His character. It impresses that upon us and we are able to fulfill the righteousness of God. We're able to exhibit that holiness in our life, the holiness that the Law promotes through its many commands by doing one thing: loving our neighbor.

The Law cannot enable us to do that. It can't enable us to be obedient and produce the righteousness that it reveals. The Law can't, because it's weak in itself. But we have the power to do that, through the Holy Spirit who lives within us. Paul elaborates on this in the rest of the chapter, which is all about life in the Spirit and walking by the Spirit.

But the work of the Holy Spirit is behind what Paul says here in our text. Love fulfills the law and love, as Paul will explain, is the fruit of the Spirit. It is the product of the Spirit. It's not something that we can produce in our own strength. It's what He produces in us.

So the divine author of the Law of Moses comes into the believer's heart to become our guide through life in true freedom, freedom from the Law's condemnation and freedom to obey in love. Christian liberty, then, is not licensed. It is freedom from sin, not freedom to sin. It is freedom to serve. We do that by loving our neighbor and we do that because we want to. We serve others because we want to, not because we have to. It's an obligation, that's true, but it's an obligation that we desire to take on. That's what love does. That's how love is seen. It desires to serve.

Warren Wiersbe explained it this way: He illustrates the point by saying that that's why a father, who has a day off, decides to spend his day off fixing his daughter's bicycle in the morning and taking his son to the museum in the afternoon. And if someone comments fixing a bike and visiting a museum doesn't seem like an exciting way to spend the day off, the father answers, "It is exciting if you love your kids."

Those who love are glad to serve. It's not a burden. It's an obligation, but it's not a burden. And it always does what is best for

others and so fulfills the Law. As Paul writes in 5:23, "Against such things there is no law." You can't break the law by loving others.

Paul gives examples of this all through his writings. Romans 14:13, he writes, "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." He adds in verse 19 of Romans 14, "Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." In other words, look out for the other's interests. Do that which is for the other's best. These are the ways in which we love others – putting them first.

Paul's command to fulfill the Law by love makes it clear that he does not mean, as many modern moralists teach, that if we love a person, we can break the law in the interest of love. That's the teaching today. In fact, it goes back some decades to the 1960s. Back when I was in college, it was a popular idea called situation ethics. And the new morality, the teaching, is that in certain circumstances, it's good to break the moral law in the interest of love. If our goal is good and the result will be good, then breaking the law is the right thing to do.

But we can never fulfill the law by breaking the law. And breaking the law by violating any of God's moral principles can never be in the best interest of another person, and so can never ultimately prove to be an act of love.

Paul's instruction here does not lower God's standard for us, nor present us with an excuse to sin. If anything, it gives us a higher standard and calls us to a more demanding life. We are to live a life of service to others. We are to live a life of self-sacrifice. We noted earlier, as some commentators have, the irony of Paul instructing us to serve one another in a passage that's all about freedom.

Literally we can translate verse 13 as serve as slaves. Why would Paul choose to describe the believers mutual love for one another as a form of slavery? Well, I think it's because of our Lord's example that's given to us in John 13, when He, the master, stripped down and took on the appearance of a slave, a household slave, knelt

down before His disciples and 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. Love involves affection. I cannot imagine loving someone and having no affection for that person. But basically love is active, not emotive. Love is an action that serves others. It does something beneficial for others.

And inwardly, love is humble. A person can do great acts of service, even sacrifice his or her life, but do it in pride. That's not true love. True love is humble, as illustrated in our Lord's appearance in what He did. He humbled Himself. It gladly takes the servant's role, and that's what we're to be –servants. This is to be a place of servants, not a place of ambitious men and women. It's to be a place where we, in effect, wash each other's feet. When people come to this place, they should see a house of servants.

Later Jesus told His disciples, "A new commandment that I give to you – that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." This is what Archbishop Usher called the 11th commandment. It's the commandment that fulfills the Ten and fulfills the whole Law. We are to obey this command toward everyone. The parable of the good Samaritan in Luke chapter 10 makes that clear, where the neighbor is defined as anyone who may come across our path in life. That's our neighbor, but here it seems Paul's narrowing the focus. That would certainly be true of what Paul's saying, but He's narrowing the focus here to our fellow Christians.

We're to serve one another. So how do we do that? How do we love one another and serve one another? Well, first of all, we have to get to know each other. Can't have concern for each other and show it if we don't know each other, if we're not familiar with who we are in this place.

So if you're a member here, you should meet the people who you're sitting near. And if you're like most people, you're sitting there every Sunday in the same place and you should be getting to know the people who are sitting with you, or the visitors that come here.



We have to know each other before we can have anything to do with each other and be servants. But apart from that, there are other ways to serve, and one very basic way is simply to pray for one another. Pray for this church, this congregation, that we will remain true to God's word and to God's purpose. Don't take that for granted. Church is almost inevitably at some time, if they exist long enough, stray from the truth.

Go to the last book of the Bible. Go to Revelation chapters 2 and 3 and read about the seven churches of Asia Minor. Philadelphia seem not to have a problem, but all of the others were straying. We're susceptible to that. We need prayer. We need to be praying continually.

The principle here is clear. We are free to love one another by serving one another, and we are to do that. It's not an option. This is the sign that we are Christ's disciples, that we love one another. So we must do it, which means we must make an effort to know the body of which we are a part, 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 had happened in Galatia. They were putting themselves under the Law, under the yoke of the Law, thinking that it was the way to a holy life and acceptability with God. But it wasn't keeping them from sin. Verse 15, "But if you bite and devour one another" – that's what they were doing. These people who were putting themselves under the Law, biting and devouring one another. Well, Paul warns them if that's happening, "take care that you're 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. It is the opposite of serving one another in love and it is evidence that people are not walking by the Spirit. The Galatians weren't. They were walking by the Law, not by the Spirit. As a result, they were 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 to keep them from doing certain things and engaging in certain kinds of behavior, but it doesn't change their mind in their heart and it won't guarantee spiritual maturity.

Rules and taboos can restrict a person's behavior, or at least set up rules that are intended to restrict behavior, but they cannot change the person, cannot change the heart and cause the person to love others. Only the Holy Spirit can do that, so we must look to Him. We must walk by Him.

Now the Holy Spirit doesn't change us 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. The person who spends time routinely in the study of God's word and in prayer, and not doing it as a requirement, as some legalistic rule, but doing it because he or she desires to do that and who yields to the Spirit's working and leading, that person will enjoy freedom and will serve and will grow.

Well, let me summarize what Paul has been teaching here. Repeatedly he has stated that believers are free from the Law of Moses and has repeatedly told the Galatians to preserve their 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 requirements of the Law, the holiness, the righteousness of the Law.

The Law is good. It is an expression of God's will and holiness, but the believer who is free from the Law is the only one who fulfills the Law. So believers in Jesus Christ are free, not to sin, but to serve, to love one another.

That's the burden of this text. There is an old tradition that when the apostle John was very old, tradition has it that he lived into his 90s and had very little strength. All he could do when he was carried in to meet fellow Christians, was to 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 emphasizes throughout the book of Galatians, by grace, through faith – faith alone, in Christ alone. It's not by works. It's through faith, believing that Christ is God's eternal Son who became a man and died for sinners, bore the penalty of our sin in our place.

Those who trust in His work and not their own work, they are saved. So look to Christ. Believe in Him and receive life and freedom. That's what you have the moment you believe. May God help us all to live in that freedom, as God intends us to. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for the instruction that we have in the book of Galatians on freedom, on grace. We thank You that we who have believed in Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by Your grace have been called to that faith and called to that position, we thank You that we have that freedom. Help us to understand it and to live in it and to be affective witnesses for You in the world.

We thank You for Christ, thank You for forgiveness and freedom in Him, and it's in His name we pray. Amen.