

Free to Love

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 March 2024

Preacher: Lee Roberts

[0 : 00] We're continuing to work our way through Galatians chapter 5 and in Galatians chapters 5 and! Paul reminds the Galatian churches how to live out their doctrine. Tonight's passage illustrates! Let's read Galatians chapter 5 verses 13 through 15.

Paul said, For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. Here's the main idea for tonight's text.

Released from bondage to sin and the law, true believers should model God's love. Once again, released from bondage to sin and the law, true believers should model God's love.

Charles Spurgeon said, The apostle had been urging the Christians of Galatia to stand fast in the liberty in which Christ had made them free and never to be entangled again with the yoke of legal bondage.

He warned them against that error into which many have fallen. But you know that it is often our tendency, if we escape from one error, to rush into another. So the apostle guards these Christians against that antinomian spirit, and that's the spirit that ignores God's law, and falsely teaches us that freedom from the law allows indulgence in sin.

[1 : 44] We'll break tonight's passage into three sections, starting with just the first sentence of Galatians 5.13. Paul gives the Galatians a reminder of freedom.

So reminder of freedom is your first section. Look at the first sentence of verse 13. Paul wrote there, For you were called to freedom, brothers.

A true believer's freedom in Christ has been a consistent theme of this letter. That theme started from the opening greeting. Look all the way back at Galatians 1.3-5.

Paul said in Galatians 1.3-5, Paul said there that believers have been delivered, and of course that's another word for redeemed or set free from the present evil age.

And then just one verse later, Galatians 1.6 told us, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

[3 : 03] Then moving on to chapter 2. In Galatians 2.4, Paul warned the believers about how the Judaizers' false teaching impacted their freedom.

So here are Galatians 2.4-5. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus so that they might bring us into slavery, to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

Then we won't read these verses, but in Galatians 4.21-31, that's where Paul presented the analogy illustrating the believer's spiritual lineage from Abraham's wife Sarah, the free woman. And then the first verse of chapter 5 is where Paul wrote, For freedom, Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

The first sentence of tonight's passage, Galatians 5.13, summarizes all those things, and that is where Paul said, for you were called to freedom, brothers. In Galatians, the primary freedom to which Paul refers is freedom from being bound to law as a system of government that regulates daily life, including the Old Testament ceremonies.

[4 : 28] He speaks about freedom from the frustrating, oppressive, condemning tyranny of a legal system that was impossible to keep. He's talking about the freedom of knowing that someone is accepted by God because of Christ's sufficient merit.

It's the freedom of a total cleansing that even the most godly Old Testament saints never fully understood. Their consciences were never completely clear because they never could totally satisfy

God's demands in the law.

The rituals and ceremonies were outward temporary acts that were symbolic of a reality that they never experienced permanently. It wasn't until the work of Christ that believers had the sense of complete righteousness being imputed to them once and forever making them right with God. Said more simply, Christian freedom is freedom from the awful bondage of having to merit the favor of God. Christian freedom is freedom from the awful bondage of having to merit the favor of God. According to the Christian gospel, no man is truly free until Jesus Christ has rid him of his burden of guilt. Paul tells the Galatians that they had been called to this freedom.

[5 : 47] That, of course, is equally true of us. Our Christian life began not with our decision to follow Christ, but with God's call to us to do so.

God took the initiative in his grace while we were still in rebellion and sin. And in that state, we neither wanted to turn from sin to Christ nor were we able to, but God came to us and called us to freedom.

Paul almost seems to be beating a dead horse here. He circles back to the same theme multiple times. But put yourself in the place of the Galatian believers.

Remember that some of them were Jewish and some of them were pagan. Now, neither the Jew nor the pagan would have wanted to admit this before their conversion, but Judaism and the various pagan religions had many similarities.

Even after their conversions, both former Jews and former pagans would have struggled to let go of their previous religious practices. So let's remind ourselves first of what the former Jews may have been thinking.

[6 : 57] Because the traditions and the revering of God's law ran so deep in their minds, Paul's relentless proclamation of Christian freedom was a stumbling block to even the most sincere believing Jews.

And it was a total scandal to the hypocritical Judaizers who merely professed to believe in Christ. Jews believed that the law was the only restraint that kept sin from running rampant and bringing God's destruction on the earth.

And apart from divine provision, they would have been right. The Jews thought that because of man's natural inclination to sin, the only way to prevent man from totally unleashing his worst passions was to establish a system of laws that set boundaries on behavior and then carried penalties severe enough to promote conformity to that law.

The Galatian Gentile believers also came from a background of needing to appease their so-called gods. Like the Jews, the pagans' religious practices were motivated by fear that they would anger their gods.

The common denominator was that both Jewish traditions and pagan religions centered in a man-made system of works. Both were filled with rules and regulations, the obeying of which was thought to make a person right with their deity.

[8 : 25] The elemental things of all human religion, whether Jewish or Gentile, ancient or modern, inevitably involve the idea of achieving divine acceptance by our own efforts.

They are all elemental in that they're only human. They never rise beyond the mundane to the divine. Some of the believers failed to realize that becoming a Christian involves having Christ's own nature and spirit in personal residence within us.

Motivation to obey the commands and the restrictions of the New Testament becomes internal rather than external. The Christian has the glorious privilege of living under the internal guidance, restraint, and power of the Holy Spirit who energizes him to obey the will of God.

And as we get further into Galatians, we'll see that even more. We know that Paul is addressing believers because of how he refers to them in the last word of verse 13's first sentence.

He refers to the people as brothers. So despite being upset with them and concerned about them, Paul still identifies himself with the Galatian believers.

[9 : 44] That title, Brothers, signifies that the apostle is speaking to the church, to those who are in covenant with God through Christ. They have received justification and adoption as sons.

And the liberty of the gospel is the freedom that comes from that justification and adoption. Romans 5.1 tells us, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We no longer need to work to earn that peace with God. We already have that peace. And Paul told the Galatians something similar back in Galatians chapter 4, verses 4 through 7.

Here are Galatians 4, 4 through 7. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if a son, then an heir through God.

[11:02] The good news for us and all believers is that we're no longer bound to religious systems that try to force us to earn a right standing with God.

We're free from that bondage because God has adopted all believers, male and female, as sons. Every believer has the same privileges that a son in biblical times would have had.

But think about the popular image of Christianity today. The popular image of Christianity today is a cruel and cramping bondage. But Christianity really is a call of grace into freedom.

That's the common inheritance of all Christians without distinction. Every Christian brother and sister has been called by God and has been called to freedom.

Christian freedom is an unrestricted liberty of approach to God as his children, and that is the freedom that Paul continues to remind the Galatians about. And of course, he's reminding us of that as well.

[12:09] So our Christian freedom is a great thing. We should celebrate it, and we should be thankful for it. But with that freedom comes some great responsibilities.

And now that we've seen the reminder of freedom, we'll move to the second section of tonight's passage. And in that section, Paul shows us the responsibilities of freedom.

So responsibilities of freedom is your second section. Look at the last sentence of Galatians 5.13 all the way through verse 14.

Paul wrote there, Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

So let's look at the first thing that Paul says there. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. The flesh, in the language of the apostle Paul, is our fallen human nature, which we inherited from our parents, and they inherited from theirs.

[13:21] It's twisted with self-centeredness, and therefore prone to sin. Paul's anticipating the argument of the Judaizers and other legalists here.

He's also guarding against believers taking their freedom in Christ too far. He says there, Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh.

So this is the first responsibility that we see. Christians have a responsibility to avoid using our freedom as a license to sin. The Greek word that's translated opportunity there in the ESV is used in military context for a place from which an offensive is launched.

You can think of it as a base of operations. So the word means an advantageous position or an opportunity or pretext. And the message there is that our freedom in Christ is never to be used as a pretext for self-indulgence.

The New English Bible is a translation that's hard to find, but it translates Galatians 5.13 as, You were called to be free men, only do not turn your freedom into license for your lower nature.

[14:37] An unbridled license is not true liberty at all. It's another and more dreadful form of bondage, a slavery to the desires of our fallen nature.

Jesus said to the Jews in John 8.34, Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. And Paul described us to Titus in our pre-conversion state as slaves to various passions and pleasures. That comes from Titus 3.3. Christian freedom is very different from having freedom to do whatever we want to do.

And we'll see that as we go through the next few lessons in Galatians. In the meantime, here's a preview of what Paul will show us in our future studies. Far from having liberty to indulge the flesh, Christians are said to have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

We'll see that when we get to verse 24. And we are to have totally repudiated the claim of our lower nature to rule over us. And Paul borrows from Jesus when he says, We have crucified that nature, nailing it to the cross.

[15 : 55] After that, we seek to walk in the Spirit and are promised that if we do, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh. We'll see that next week when we look at verse 16.

And instead, the Holy Spirit will cause his fruit to ripen in our lives, culminating in self-control. And we'll get there eventually when we get to verse 23. The Judaizers and others failed to understand the change that occurs in believers after they are saved by grace.

They thought that Paul was encouraging believers to sin. It's hard to imagine that Paul was considered to be a liberal back in that day, but he was because they thought he was telling people they could do whatever they wanted once they were saved.

But Christian freedom is freedom from sin, not freedom to sin. And that's an important distinction. Christian freedom is freedom from sin, not freedom to sin.

Here are a couple of John Stott quotes. The Judaizers who were legalists and some of the immature Jewish believers considered Paul to be an antinomian, a lawless libertine.

[17 : 11] Because the opposite extremes of legalism and antinomianism are both man-centered, they have always been attractive to sinners. The legalist satisfies himself and presumably God by adhering to a strict external code of do's and don'ts, which he imagines demonstrate his self-righteous suitability for heaven.

The antinomian, on the other hand, satisfies himself by rejecting all codes and living completely according to his personal lust and desires. He then went on, someone has pictured legalism and libertinism as two parallel streams that run between earth and heaven.

The stream of legalism is clear, sparkling, and pure, but its waters run so deep and furiously that no one can enter it without being drowned or smashed on the rocks of its harsh demands.

The stream of libertinism, by contrast, is relatively quiet and still, and crossing it seems easy and attractive, but its waters are so contaminated with poisons and pollutants that to try to cross it is also certain death.

Both streams are uncrossable and deadly, one because of impossible moral and spiritual demands, the other because of moral and spiritual filth.

[18 : 38] But spanning those two deadly streams is the bridge of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the only passage from earth to heaven. The two streams that lead to death do that because they are man's ways.

The gospel leads to life because it is God's way. Now that Paul has shown us that we have a responsibility to avoid doing something, he next reminds us that we have a responsibility to do something.

Look at the end of verse 13 and all of verse 14. He says, But through love, serve one another.

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Christian freedom is no more freedom to do as I please, regardless of the good of my neighbor, than it is freedom to do as I please in the indulgence of my flesh.

It is freedom to approach God without fear rather than freedom to exploit my neighbor without love.

John Calvin said, The method here explained of restraining liberty from breaking out into white and licentious abuse is to have it regulated by love.

[19 : 59] Let us always remember that the present question is not in what manner we are free before God, but in what manner we may use our liberty in our interactions with men.

One interesting thing here is that the Greek word translated as serve actually can be translated as serve as a slave. Far from having liberty to ignore, neglect, or abuse our fellow men, we are commanded to love them and through that love serve them.

We are not to use them as if they were things to serve us. We are to respect them as persons and give ourselves to serve them. So think about that.

We are even through love to become each other's slaves, sacrificing our good for theirs, not theirs for ours. Christian liberty is service rather than selfishness.

From one point of view, Christian freedom is a form of slavery, not slavery to our flesh, but slavery to our neighbor. We are free in relation to God, but slaves in relation to each other.

[21 : 14] So let's move on to verse 14 now. Here is Galatians 5, 14 again. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

It's almost as if Paul is saying, if you want a law to live by, here it is. And that law is love. But the difference in Paul's exhortation is that it is fueled by the spirit.

It's not done in an effort to earn righteousness with God. When it comes to loving our neighbors as ourselves, we have to remember that keeping the entire law for our justification is impossible and unattainable, but Jesus fulfilled the law for us.

And now because of our faith in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are free to live out the moral teaching of the law. The spirit is what changes us and empowers us to obey God.

We have to be careful anytime we want to speculate about what the Bible omits. But we need to address something that is missing here.

[22 : 23] And turn over to Luke chapter 10, verses 25 through 28. Luke chapter 10, verses 25 through 28.

These verses are the beginning of the exchange between Jesus and the lawyer. They are the verses that lead into the parable of the Good Samaritan.

So here are Luke chapter 10, verses 25 through 28. And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him, Jesus, to the test, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

He said to him, what is written in the law, how do you read it? That also could be translated, how do you recite it? And he answered, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself.

And then Jesus said to him, you have answered correctly. Do this and you will live. Jesus said something nearly identical to the Luke passage in Matthew chapter 22, verses 35 through 40.

[23 : 43] So listen to what he said in Matthew chapter 22, verses 35 through 40. Starting in Matthew 22, 35, it says, And one of them, a lawyer, asked him, and again that him is Jesus, a question to put him to the test.

Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? And he said to him, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.

And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. So the question that comes up with Galatians 5, 14, is why Paul mentioned only the need to love your neighbor as yourself.

Why did he omit the part about loving God when Jesus clearly said that we are to love God and love our neighbor? Well, this could be Paul's shorthand, or maybe he has the Galatians specific setting in mind and just wants to mention love because of the context.

But more likely, Paul has in mind the idea that love for God manifests itself in love for neighbors.

The two are inseparable. So once again, more likely, Paul has in mind that love for God manifests itself in love for neighbors.

[25 : 11] John Calvin wrote, Piety to God, I acknowledge, ranks higher than love of the brethren. But as God himself is invisible, so piety is a hidden thing from the eyes of men.

And though the manifestation of piety was the purpose for which ceremonies were appointed, they are not certain proofs of piety's existence. It frequently happens that none are more zealous and regular in observing ceremonies than hypocrites.

God therefore chooses to make trial of our love to himself by that love of our brother, which he enjoins us to cultivate. In 1 John 4, 7-12, John also showed the link between love for God and love for our neighbor.

Listen to 1 John 4, 7-12. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son in the world, so that we might live through him.

[26 : 32] In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us. Just a few verses later in 1 John, John makes the connection between love for God and love for our neighbors even clearer.

Listen to 1 John 4, 20 and 21. Here's what John wrote in 1 John 4, 20 and 21. If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar.

For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, whoever loves God, must also love his brother.

The apostle James sounded a lot like John in what John said in 1 John. Listen to James 2, 8. [27 : 48] James 2, 8 says, If you really fulfill the royal law according to scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. You are doing well.

And royal here in James carries the idea of supreme and sovereign indicating the absolute and binding authority of the law. When a sovereign king gives an edict, it's incontestably binding on all that king's subjects.

There's no court of appeal or arbitration. When he says, according to the scripture, that indicates that God's sovereign royal law and his biblical commands are synonymous.

So what James calls the royal law here in James 2, 8 is in essence the sum and substance of the complete word of God that's summarized in Matthew 22, 37 through 40 that we looked at earlier. And those are the verses where it said it's summarized by perfectly loving God and loving our neighbor. Listen to what Paul himself wrote to the Romans.

[28 : 55] These verses are Romans 13, 8 through 10. In Romans 13, 8 through 10, Paul said, Oh, no one anything except to love each other.

For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and any other commandment are summed up in this word.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. When somebody loves God with perfect devotion, he doesn't break any of God's commands.

And when somebody loves his neighbor perfectly, he never violates that person. Perfect love keeps all the commands and thereby fulfills the whole law.

To love others that way reflects our Heavenly Father's own nature and character. Reflecting God's character when we love others shows that we love God.

[30 : 09] So now that we've spent some time pondering why Paul omitted something from verse 14, let's talk about what Paul actually wrote in that verse. He said in verse 14, for the whole law is fulfilled in one word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

We already have looked at several New Testament cross-references for that verse, but the Judaizers had enough information from just the Old Testament to know about God's command to love our neighbors.

The first ordinance given to Moses after the Ten Commandments is a beautiful picture of serving the Lord out of love rather than mere duty. That ordinance stipulated that if one Hebrew bought another Hebrew as a slave, the slave had to be freed after serving his master for six years.

These verses are Exodus chapter 21, verses 2 through 6. Exodus 21, 2 through 6 say, When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh, he shall go out free for nothing. If he comes in single, he shall go out single. If he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her masters, and he shall go out alone.

[31 : 39] But if the slave plainly says, I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go out free, then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost, and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.

Exodus 21, verses 5 and 6 are the verses we need to home in for our purposes tonight. Listen to those verses again. But if the slave plainly says, I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go out free, then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost, and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever. The purpose of Christian freedom is for believers to do exactly as the Hebrew slave did who permanently surrendered his freedom to the master that he loved. Believers willingly give up the freedom to serve themselves, which is freedom to serve the sinful flesh.

Instead, believers willingly become slaves of God because he is such a wonderful master. Other places in the Old Testament also taught about loving God and loving our neighbors.

Twice every day, devout Jews recited Deuteronomy 6, verses 4-5 in Leviticus 19.18. That's why when Jesus asked the lawyer, how do you read it, it could also be translated, how do you recite it?

[33 : 19] Here are Deuteronomy 6, verses 4-5. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

And then here's what God said in Leviticus 19.18. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

I am the Lord. We could go to other Old Testament passages that say something similar. The point is that Paul's teaching here in Galatians should have been nothing new to the Judaizers and the former Jews in the congregation, but some of them failed to make that connection.

Fulfilling God's law is more than participating in external ceremonies. Fulfilling God's law involves loving others from our hearts. Even under the old covenant of law, God demanded heart service, not mere lip service.

The inner motive of love has always been the only acceptable motivation for serving God or others. Here's another quote from Martin Luther.

[34 : 38] Luther said, The false apostles, which were the most earnest defenders of works, did not teach or require the works of charity, but only they required that circumcision should be kept, that days, months, years, and time should be observed, and other good works they could teach none.

So Paul seems to be saying here, if the Judaizers want to promote keeping the law, let me help you understand what the law really requires, and the law really requires you to love your neighbor as yourself, not just to participate in ceremonies.

None of the Judaizers' pet ceremonies and rituals showed love for their neighbors. Those ceremonies and rituals were things that they wanted to use to reintroduce their neighbors to bondage.

True believers beat the Judaizers at their own game because the only good works in God's eyes are works done with the proper motive. Only people who are truly saved can do those works with the proper motive.

That's because believers' good works are prompted by and enabled by the Holy Spirit. Here's Martin Luther again. All these things show that charity or love ought to be preferred before all laws and ceremonies, and that God requireth nothing so much at our hands as love towards our neighbor, the same thing Christ also witnesseth.

[36 : 37] So far, we have seen the reminder of freedom and the responsibilities of freedom. In our last verse for tonight, we see the risk of freedom.

So the risk of freedom is your last section. Look at Galatians 5.15 one more time.

Paul said, but if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. Reemphasizing the need for Christians to use their freedom to serve each other, Paul stresses the negative side of that truth here.

And it's in the form of a warning about what happens when believers do not love and serve each other. They become destructive and bite and devour one another.

Bite and devour speak of wild animals who are engaged in the fury of a deadly struggle. Legalism always produces schism. And apparently in the Galatian congregation, the believers were chewing up each other.

[37 : 46] They were acting like animals biting and devouring. Just think about when you've seen a pack of wild dogs turn on each other and get into a terrible dogfight. That's what they were doing in the congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This behavior was destroying the people of God. And Paul clearly says that if we abuse our liberty in this way through selfishness, we will be consumed and we will consume.

When you think about it, is this self-centeredness not the cause of so many church splits? Of course, there are times when churches divide over doctrine, but even when the cause is righteous, we must be careful to act out of love.

If we live together striving to serve one another in love, we will live together in harmony. Here's another quote from Charles Spurgeon.

Spurgeon said, when dogs and wolves bite one another, it is according to their nature. But it is sad indeed when sheep take to biting one another.

[38 : 58] If I must be bitten at all, let me rather be bitten by a dog than a sheep. That is to say, the wounds inflicted by the godly are far more painful to bear and last much longer than those caused by wicked men.

When the bite comes from a brother, from a child of God, then it is peculiarly painful. I have lived long enough to see churches absolutely destroyed, not by external attacks, but by internal contention.

This man finds fault. The other must have his own way. A third is for something quite new. A fourth is for nothing but what is antique.

And so they fall to squabbling and quarreling. Spurgeon said that a long time ago, but it's still true today, isn't it?

Even the world knows that personal freedom cannot be unlimited. The most libertarian societies of history have been forced to recognize that they could not survive if each individual had the right to run roughshod over others while gratifying his own whims and ambitions.

[40 : 13] Anarchy is obviously destructive and one person's rights are necessarily restricted by the rights of others. It was said of early Christians, even by the heathen about them, behold how they love one another.

Can that always be said of us? Or must it be said, behold how they quarrel, behold how they criticize, behold how they backbite one another, behold how they scandalize one another.

What a shame if we let those things ever be said of us. Remember that all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, which is, thou shalt love.

We need to remember that the Old Testament governmental law was abolished altogether in Christ. The purpose of that form of the law was to set Jews apart as God's distinctive chosen people and to picture the sacrifice of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ.

When Christ came, the symbols of his sacrifice ceased to be necessary because the completed and final sacrifice itself was fully and eternally made. Tonight's passage speaks to the contemporary situation in the world and the church and it's concerned with the relationship between liberty, license, law, and love.

[41 : 42] The passage tells us at the outset that we're called to freedom, the freedom which is peace with God, the cleansing of our guilty consciences through faith in Christ crucified.

It tells us about the unutterable joy of forgiveness, acceptance, access, and sonship, the experience of mercy without merit. Then the passage goes on to describe how this liberty from systems of merit expresses itself in our duty to ourselves, our neighbor, and our God.

It is freedom to control the flesh, freedom to serve our neighbor, freedom to fulfill the law. Everyone who has been truly set free by Jesus Christ expresses his liberty in these three ways.

First in self-control, next in loving service of his neighbor, and thirdly, in obedience to the law of God. This is the freedom for which Christ has set us free and to which we were called.

We are supposed to stand firm in it, neither relapsing into slavery on one hand or falling into license on the other. Remember the main idea, release from bondage to sin and the law, true believers should model God's love.

[42 : 59] love. So here's a question to ponder as we close tonight. This is for self-reflection, not for anybody to answer. I don't think anybody will want to answer it once you hear it, but here is the question.

Are you as a person modeling what it means to serve and love others? Are you as a person modeling what it means to serve and love others? If we can model that behavior individually, we will model that behavior as a church.

Regardless of your answer to that question, pray for the Holy Spirit's help. If your answer to that question is yes, pray that the Holy Spirit continues to empower you to love and serve others and be thankful that you have been empowered to do that.

If your answer is no, ask the Holy Spirit to enable you to live out Galatians 5, 13, and 14. And those, of course, are the verses that say, for you were called the freedom brothers, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another, for the whole law is fulfilled in one word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the reminder that we are free in Christ. But we also thank you for the reminder for the proper way that we are to use that freedom in Christ.

[44 : 35] We ask that your Spirit continue to enable us to be more and more willing to love and serve our neighbor. Let us be a model to this church and to this community.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Thank you.