

Moments *for* You

Volume 60, Number 3

Theme: Liberty

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”
2 Corinthians 3:17

LIBERTY IN THE BIBLE

Christian liberty is found in the Bible in several concepts. In some passages, liberty for the Christian means that he or she has been freed from the penalty of sin by faith in Jesus Christ (John 8:31-36; Romans 6:23). Other times, Christian liberty refers to being freed from the power of sin in one's life by daily faith in Jesus Christ as Lord of one's character and conduct (Romans 6:5-6).

Another aspect of Christian liberty shows that Christians are freed from the Jewish Law of Moses (Rom. 6:14). Lastly, believers have the liberty to engage in activity that is not expressly forbidden in the Bible—as long as it doesn't "stumble" or "offend" another Christian (Romans 14:14-21).

The ultimate goal for the Christian should be to glorify God, edify fellow believers, and have a good reputation before unbelievers (Psalm 19:14; Romans 15:1-2; 1 Peter 2:11-12). "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Galatians 5:13).

—Adapted from GotQuestions.org

GOSPEL LIBERTY

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18).

The Son of God came down from Heaven to make us free. Let us look into the nature of the liberty Jesus Christ offers you and me.

LIBERTY FROM THE SLAVERY OF SATAN

When we give ourselves like slaves to obey someone, that person is our master (Romans 6:16). Who does man obey? Does he obey God? Certainly not, for the Bible says, "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6), and "there is none that seeketh after God ... there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Romans 3:11-12).

The lusts and passions of fallen man easily submit to the subtle suggestions of the wicked one. This archenemy deceives and blinds, lest the glorious gospel should shine into the hearts of men (2 Corinthians 4:4). Jesus, however, came to destroy the works of the devil and by His death, and resurrection from the dead, He led captivity captive, and triumphed over principalities and powers (Ephesians 4:8; Colossians 2:15). All who believe in His name are made free.

LIBERTY FROM THE GUILT AND DOMINION OF SIN

How can anyone know pardon and peace, who never felt condemnation and guilt? The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick (Mark 2:17). Why do some people not feel guilt? Because they do not properly consider what they are in God's sight. The divine sentence has gone forth, and all the world stands "guilty before God" (Romans 3:19). Jesus came to give us deliverance from this dreadful guilt by offering Himself on the cross. There God made Him to be sin for us; there our iniquities were laid upon Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). Not only have our sins been judged on the cross, but our "old man" has been crucified, too (Romans 6:6). By faith in the Son of God we have liberty from the guilt and dominion of sin.

LIBERTY FROM THE BONDAGE AND CURSE OF THE LAW

The law of Moses is described by Peter as a yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1). It made righteous and holy demands on fallen, helpless sinners. Man needs power, and he needs life. By Christ, “all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).

This is liberty indeed! We have all merited God’s curse by breaking His law. But Jesus, the Redeemer, came forth and rescued us: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

LIBERTY FROM THE FEAR OF DEATH

Nothing can enable us to meet death with composure and peace, but the sheltering power of the blood of the Lamb. In Christ we have the blessed knowledge that we have passed from death unto life, and the assurance that though the physical body may fall asleep, death can have no claim upon us. Jesus has gone through death and judgment in our place. The true language of faith is, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law” (1 Corinthians 15:55-56).

LIBERTY OF SERVICE

The believer is a servant of God, and the Lord’s service is perfect freedom. Jesus says, “My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). A Christian works not *for* liberty, but *in* liberty; not *for* life, but *from* life. This is happy service which flows from the love of a cheerful heart. There are no cares or burdens connected with such service—its only aim is to exalt Him who ransomed us with His own blood.

DO YOU HAVE LIBERTY?

Can you rejoice in this blessed liberty wherewith Christ has made us free? Or are you fearing, doubting, and trembling as to your eternal prospects? Lift up your eyes to Calvary’s cross, and see in Christ’s death God’s love to sinners. Think of the value of your soul. It is high time to flee from the wrath to come!

Oh, that the Spirit of God might graciously fasten these eternally important thoughts upon your conscience, so that the sincere cry of your heart may be, “What must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:30-31).

—Adapted from *Streams of Refreshing from the Fountain of Life* by H. H. Snell.

LICENSE, LEGALISM, AND LIBERTY

When you preach the gospel of grace in Christ Jesus, there is always a risk that people who do not fully grasp it will think you are preaching **license**. Why? Because the grace of God results in **liberty**. And to some, this “looks” or “sounds” like **license**.

Of course, **liberty** isn’t **license**. Ever. Neither is it **legalism**. But what is the difference between these three? How can we be sure that we are walking in the **liberty** and truth of Jesus Christ?

LICENSE

License or “lasciviousness” is a Biblical term. In fact, Jude shows us the possibility that people would turn the grace of God into license: “Certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Jude 1:4).

License is nothing more compli-

cated than saying that because all is forgiven, I can sin. It is saying that when Jesus stamped my debt to God “paid in full,” that He was issuing me a license to keep on sinning. After all, if all my sin is permanently paid for, then why obey God? Why not sin, if grace covers it?

Most people who practice license have never truly seen they are sinners. They think Christianity is a religion, or a list of teachings to follow. They know little of real repentance and conversion. Thus, they say they believe, but new birth has never taken place (John 3:3).

LEGALISM

Legalism is a term not found in the Bible. The Bible uses the phrase “under the law,” which means that I try to use my rule-keeping to make myself righteous, or to maintain or enhance God’s attitude toward me. In a nutshell, I am walking in **legalism** when what I do supercedes what **Christ has already done** for me.

The issue is this: Where is my faith? Not my “on paper” faith, or my “said” faith, but my real, operative, daily faith. Is it solely in Christ for salvation and for daily living? Or is my faith really in my works—in myself—in what I do and what I think I am?

There is an amazing self-deception about **legalism**. Most legalists usually say, “It is all by God’s grace, but God requires obedience for His grace.” Incredibly, this statement demonstrates exactly what legalism is! God cannot “require” anything for His grace. That is why it is **grace**! It is free. There are no conditions or requirements. Obedience is not a **requirement** for grace, it is the **outcome** of grace. Until we see this, and understand why, we are never going to see the truth.

Notice how **legalism** is at the opposite end of the moral spectrum

from **license**. Legalism is attempting to be righteous **by works**, and license is claiming righteousness **without works**.

LIBERTY

What is real Christian liberty? It is the reality that **nothing** we do determines anything about our standing before God. Salvation is a free gift, given by God’s grace and received through faith in Jesus Christ. **Liberty** is freedom from sin and its penalty—but also freedom to obey God out of simple **love** for Him. No person can give themselves the ability to obey God for only love’s sake. Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and will grow to dominate us the more we walk with Christ. God is love, and we are to be conformed to His image.

—Adapted from “Legalism, License, and Liberty in Jesus Christ” by David A. DePra.

LIBERTY AND LORDSHIP

“Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8).

In other words, you are light in Christ. Now live that way! The “gospel” of license, the “gospel” of legalism, and Paul’s gospel represent three very different postures when it comes to matters of sin and morality. For the sake of illustration, let’s take the issue of lying, which the New Testament condemns. (Feel free to insert any other sin that the Scriptures clearly address.)

Concerning the practice of lying, the message of license essentially says, “This issue is irrelevant. We live in a different world than the people of the Bible did. Our values are different and more advanced. God loves us all and understands our needs. We all sin. Everybody lies. You are judging others if you tell them that they are wrong or immoral for lying.”

The legalistic message says, “God will judge those who violate His commandments. Christians must not lie or else God will punish them.”

In contrast, Paul’s gospel exhorts, “Let me remind you that you are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Jesus Christ lives in you, and you are in Christ (Colossians 1:27). As such, your old fallen nature is dead. Christ exterminated it by His cross (Romans 6:6). Therefore, put off the old lifestyle of lying. Such is the conduct of a fallen creation. It’s not your conduct. Live according to who you really are and by the higher life that dwells within you.”

Paul’s gospel is built on the understanding that the key to spiritual transformation is not found in trying to improve oneself. It’s found in being reminded again and again of who we are in Christ and who Christ is in us.

For Paul, the Christian life is becoming what you already are. Our behavior as Christians stems from our identity. Paul’s gospel is one of liberty and lordship—the lordship of Christ and the liberty of the Spirit. It provides freedom from the fruitless attempt to keep a moral standard. It also sets us free from practicing evil. It is a liberty that brings us into a living knowledge of the One who indwells us—the One who happens to be the greatest Liberator in the universe as well as the Savior and Lord of the world.

—Condensed from *Revise Us Again*, © 2010 by Frank Viola. Published by David C. Cook.

THREE DOGS

Dr. A. T. Schofield used to point out that there were three sorts of dogs in his city. The wild dog that roamed the streets at will, stole meals from garbage cans, and often came to an inglorious end in the lethal chamber

of the humane society; the chained dog, which could not be trusted for more than a few feet; and the dog that knew and loved his master and responded obediently to his voice.

All people seem to be like one of these three dogs. Some are utterly lawless when it comes to the authority of God. They are dominated by sin, “walking after their own lusts” (2 Peter 3:3). Then there are many who are like the dog on the leash—they are those in the religious realm who, “going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3). But the Christian who has experienced the truth of New Testament deliverance is like the third dog: he needs no chain, but is guided by his Master’s eye and his Master’s voice. —C. Ernest Tatham

FREE INDEED

“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

A man on death row might be free without knowing it; a pardon may have been issued, but the news has not yet reached his ears. All the while, the prisoner is wringing his hands, fearing death. He is already pardoned and free by the word of the Governor, but not yet set at liberty—not “free indeed.”

How many of the dear people of God, pardoned and having everlasting life, are at this moment subject to bondage through ignorance! Even though deliverance from the power of sin is theirs according to the divine counsels, the word of God has not yet reached them. They are not yet conscious of their freedom, and they remain downcast in their current condition.

The Lord said, “Ye shall know the

truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). He spoke of what the truth should bring about: that we should be in perfect liberty. Jesus Himself has broken the bars of the prison, and has opened its doors and vanquished the power of sin. He, the Victor, snaps asunder the chains of each individual believer by giving to each heart the conscious knowledge of His resurrection power, and of eternal life which secures the believer beyond the law, sin, and death.

Where the freeing hand of the Son of God has touched us, there is not only conscious liberty, but great joy in Himself, for salvation is of the Lord, and He has triumphed gloriously. Sin has been suffered for, and put away for all who believe. Satan has been overthrown—the Victor has risen from among the dead! Jesus is our strength and song.

—Condensed from *The Child of God* by H. Forbes Witherby.

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

The Christian has freedom to make decisions about matters that are not revealed in Scripture without fear of sinning against God.

In Genesis, before the Fall, Adam was given freedom to name the animals, however he saw fit (Genesis 2:19). Regarding his food, God told Adam, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17).

God gave Adam both liberty (“thou mayest freely eat”) and moral guidance (“thou shalt not eat”). Clearly Adam had the freedom to eat at will, at his discretion, from whatever trees seemed pleasing to him at the time. The forbidden tree was God’s

revealed moral law and rightfully restricted Adam’s freedom. He was told that seeking autonomous freedom would lead to death.

In this world there are many sinful desires and potentially sinful choices. We have God’s Word to guide us in those matters. But we also have myriads of choices that God allows us to make at our own discretion and for our own enjoyment of His creation. Paul wrote: “God ... giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17). That everything is not dictated by moral law leaves us with freedom to enjoy human diversity. One can choose to fill his yard with flowers and another with green grass, and another with both.

How do we find out God’s will in matters of Christian liberty? By making an informed choice and living out all the ramifications of that choice to God’s glory by His grace. If that choice does not transgress anything revealed in Scripture, then it cannot be a sinful choice unless we make it with evil motives. Examples of choices that the New Testament expressly says are within the realm of Christian liberty are things like marriage, food, circumcision, and holy days to be observed. What we are not free to do is judge others on matters that God has not dictated in Scripture.

The Bible commands us to work (2 Thessalonians 3:10), but does not tell us at which job. The Bible tells us to pray (Romans 12:12), but does not tell us for how long and where. The Bible tells us to do acts of kindness to widows and orphans (James 1:27), but does not tell us where and when. Even when doing what the Bible commands us to do, we still have Christian liberty.

—Condensed from “God’s Will and Christian Liberty” by Bob DeWaay.

LIMITED BY LOVE

Please read Romans chapter 14.

Have you ever used the right thing in the wrong way? Think of perfume or cologne. If you use it in the right way, a small amount actually makes you somewhat appealing to most people. But use it in the wrong way—use too much—and you will be appalling to people.

The apostle Paul, likewise, argues that it's possible to use Christian Liberty in the wrong way. In Romans 14:1-12, he stated that we are absolutely free to decide for ourselves on non-essential issues (like eating, drinking, dancing, music, movies, etc.).

Now in 14:13-23, Paul presents the “other side of the coin” in our Christian liberty. Those who are free to enjoy their liberty are responsible for not having an adverse effect on other people. Rights bring responsibility. Liberty must be limited by love. Paul provides three warnings against abusing your Christian liberty.

DON'T HARM YOUR FELLOW BELIEVERS

Paul commands you to limit your Christian liberty because not all believers have the same freedoms in non-essential issues. In 14:13 he writes, “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.” Paul is concerned that those who have liberty protect those who don't.

Paul is confident that nothing is unclean of itself, “but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean” (14:14). This verse leads to a shocking truth: some things are wrong for you that are right for others, and some things are right for you that are wrong for others. This

statement means that you can't always know in advance what will be “right” or “wrong” for another Christian. It is a matter of one's conscience.

In 14:15 Paul explains that it is possible to “grieve” and “destroy” a fellow believer. When another Christian sees you doing what his own conscience condemns, it causes him pain. When he then proceeds to do himself what his conscience condemns, he commits sin. If we are believers we ought to love one another. Remember, liberty must be limited by love.

DON'T HARM YOUR TESTIMONY

Since the world is always observing Christians, we ought to be wise in our use of freedom. Paul writes in 14:16: “Let not then your good be evil spoken of.” However much we wish it were not so, the world watches what we do. When we use our liberty indiscriminately, the world watches and shakes its head. Many unbelievers' biggest reason for ignoring God is what they have seen a Christian do. Now certainly, sometimes they have a wrong perspective on what it means to be a Christian, but many times our liberty can harm our ability to tell the world about the Lord.

In 14:17 Paul explains where true life is for the Christian: “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” We are prone to think that God's kingdom primarily involves what a person does or does not do. But the kingdom of God is not mainly a matter of *externals* but of *eternals*. “Righteousness” refers to behavior pleasing to God. “Peace” refers to the horizontal harmony that believers should manifest. The result of these blessings is “joy.”

When we embrace kingdom priorities, our service to Jesus is pleasing

to God and vindicated in the sight of people, even people who disagree with us. Our self-control may also open the door of ministry and witness to the unbelieving community.

DON'T HARM THE CHURCH

Your highest priority is the building up of the church. In 14:19 Paul states: "Follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." What are some steps we can take that will help keep other believers from stumbling over us? Paul gives two practical steps.

Be considerate. In 14:21 Paul writes, "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth." We willingly alter our pace of walking while leading a small child by the hand so he or she will not stumble. How much more should we be willing to alter our Christian walk for the benefit of a weaker brother or sister in Christ whom we are leading? We must learn the sensitivities of other believers and we must respect differing convictions.

Be convinced. In 14:22 Paul states, "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." If we are engaged in certain activities that are not clearly prohibited by the teaching of Scripture, then we should be confident in our thinking that they are right. If we entertain any doubts about the goodness of these activities, then we should give them up, because whatever is done without the conviction that God has approved it is by definition sin.

What Christian liberty is God calling you to give up either indefinitely or at appropriate occasions? God wants you to prioritize other believers and follow Christ's sacrificial example. Liberty must be limited by love.

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LIBERTY TO LET IT ALONE

Some years ago when I was preaching in Detroit, I met a former Muslim from India who had been brought to know the Lord Jesus Christ. When I was chatting with this brother, Mr. Ali by name, a young girl came by passing out sandwiches. She said, "Won't you have a sandwich?"

"What kind are they?" he asked.

"There is fresh pork and ham."

"Have you any beef?"

"No, I do not."

"Have you any lamb?"

"No."

"Fish?"

"No."

"Thank you, my dear young lady, but I won't take any."

She said, "Why, Mr. Ali, you surprise me. Are you so under law that you cannot eat pork? Don't you know that a Christian is at liberty to eat any kind of meat?"

"I am at liberty to eat it," he answered, "but I am also at liberty to let it alone. You know I was brought up a strict Muslim. My old father, nearly eighty years of age now, is still a Muslim. Every three years I go back to India to render an account of my business, of which my father is really the head, and to visit with the folks at home. Always when I get home I know my father will ask, 'Son, have those infidels taught you to eat their filthy hog meat yet?' 'No, Father,' I will say. 'Pork has never passed my lips.' Then I can go in and have the opportunity to preach Christ to them. If I took one of your sandwiches, the next time I go home I would have to answer my father's question honestly and as a result I would not be able to go in and preach the gospel."

—Condensed from *Addresses on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* by H. A. Ironside.