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Christian Liberty And How To Use It

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"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye hate and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:13-16).

In Galatians 5:1, Paul exhorts the Galatians and us to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. And now in Verse 13, he warns against the abuse of this Christian liberty. Here is ample proof that the doctrine of justification by faith apart from any works is true. Otherwise, this exhortation should not be needed. If Paul had been preaching justification by works, he would have had no reason for such an exhortation. We who preach salvation by grace through faith, without works, should also warn against the abuse of the doctrine. The man who pretends to be saved by grace, and then uses the truth as an excuse for sinning, shows that he is not in grace. In Paul's day, as in our day, there were those who said, "If the law is satisfied by Christ, and we are saved by faith in Him--so saved that we cannot be lost--then we can go on in a life of sin." To such an objector Spurgeon once said, "Man,

you talk like that because you have not been born again." And we might add, that this is a beast-like argument. To say that because God is good I may act like a devil--that because He saves me at infinite cost to Himself without any cost to me, I may feel I owe Him nothing--that chosen in all eternity in Jesus Christ to be holy, I should see how unholy I can be--that being born again I should show no spiritual breeding. Surely, no man who has been born again, and is in a state of grace, thinks or argues like that.

Paul gives us the antidote for such reasoning in another place when he says: "We thus judge that if One died for all, then all died: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him Who died for them and rose again."

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN LIBERTY?

It is a state or condition the believer has before God in Christ, and a feeling that corresponds to this condition. "Free from the law, O happy condition; Jesus has died and there is remission." It is a state of justification and freedom from condemnation which we have in Christ. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1). "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made

us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

The feeling one has will be determined somewhat by the particular system of slavery he was under before he trusted Christ. The man who has been trying to be saved by keeping the Ten Commandments will feel relieved from the feeling of uncertainty and uneasiness he had while trying that way of salvation. The person who was in slavery to a heathen system in which he tried to appease the gods by self-torture will be happy to see the truth that salvation is the one sacrifice of Christ. Heb. 9:26. In my own case, a terrible load was lifted off my conscience when I saw that I did not have to establish my own righteousness by living a sinless life and that Christ is made unto the believer wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. II Cor. 5:21. There has been much said and written about political freedom. All nations of people are freedom loving in regard to human laws and human rulers. American Colonies could not stand any degree of slavery under England's laws, so they declared their independence and fought a war to win it.

Hungary tried to free herself from Russian bondage and was crushed in the effort. And there are millions today in political bondage.

Religious bondage is any system of religion that offers salvation at the price of human merit or works. Now Christ has made us free from bondage to any law that has a price tag on salvation. There was a price tag on salvation, but Christ took it off when He paid for it with His own precious blood.

HOW TO USE CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

Now the question is: How are we going to use this liberty? A judicious interpreter says that Christian liberty is one thing and the way we use it is another thing. Christian liberty is an internal feeling we have in the presence of God; the use of it is the way we manifest it before men. The believer comes to God as Father, rejoicing in Christ, confessing his sins, happy in assured forgiveness, and hoping and longing to be perfectly whole. We enjoy our liberty in communion with God, happy that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, and that sin cannot have dominion over us because we are not under law but under grace. The Galatians were being pressured to give up their liberty in Christ and go into bondage to the law of Moses.

In telling the Galatians how to use their liberty in Christ, he says, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." We shall try to lead you into the meaning of this exhortation and then discuss the motives by which Paul enforces it.

Don't use your freedom to gratify fleshly lusts,

but by love serve one another. The flesh stands for human nature in man's fallen and depraved condition. It does not mean the body, but human desires as a fallen creature. The body is never the source of sin, but may be used as an instrument of sin. The human heart as the source of sin is never the physical organ. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man" (Matt. 15:19,20). Just as the heart is the receptacle of physical life, so the moral heart is the receptacle of spiritual life. Saving religion is heart religion in which there is love to God and man. And the way to use Christian liberty is to serve one another by love.

The two motives by which Paul enforces this exhortation:

1. Love is the fulfillment of the law. As long as one is trying to be saved by keeping the law, he is not acting from love but purely from fear. But in liberty from the law as the way of salvation, the believer in Christ can act from the motive of love. And the way to fulfill the law as a rule of conduct is to love your neighbor. Paul quotes Leviticus 19:18, but does not use it just as Moses did. "Neighbor" with Moses is defined as "one of the children of thy people," that is a Jew or Israelite. But "neighbor" with Paul is equivalent to every man. Paul learned from Christ who our neighbor is. Christ tells us who our neighbor is in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Luke 10:27-37. And in Romans 13:10 Paul tells us how love fulfills the law: "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."

Another motive is drawn from the evil consequences of an opposite temper and disposition. "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." The language here is highly figurative, although not obscure. By biting and devouring one another, the apostle refers to violent strifes and debates then going on among the Galatians because of the new views the Judaizing teachers had introduced. And the result was that they were only hurting one another and also hurting the churches.

A quaint old writer says, "When dogs and wolves bite one another, that is according to their nature, but it is sad indeed when sheep take to biting one another." And he also says, "I would rather be bitten by a dog outside the fold, than by a sheep in it. The bite of a fellow Christian is sharper than any other." This sort of behaviour will rend a church in pieces quicker than all the assaults of men and devils from the outside. Strife and contentions prevent edification within and conversion without. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up

into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:15).

"How sweet and heavenly is the sight
When those who love the Lord,
In one another's peace unite
And so fulfill His word.

"When each can feel his brother's sigh,
And with him bear a part,
When sorrows flow from eye to eye,
And joy from heart to heart.

"Love is the golden chain that binds
The happy souls above;
And he's an heir to heaven who finds
His bosom glow with love.



CHRISTIAN AND THE EASY THINGS

Christians are doing the easy things. It's easy to go to church Sunday morning. After all, what else is there to do? Everything's closed up.

Of course some find it hard to be in church from 9:30 until noon so they come to Sunday School and then go home; or they come to worship and are not in Sunday School. It's hard to go to church Sunday Night because there is so much else going on. So a lot of Christians are not in church Sunday Night.

It's easy to read a few lines from the Bible; but it's hard to dig in and study; so many don't study the Bible.

It's easy to say your prayers, but it's hard to pray. So many Christians don't pray.

It's not easy to go to church after a long day's work. It's so much easier to relax at home. So many

Christians stay home from prayer meeting.

It's easier to keep still when they are talking against Christian things in the office; so Christians keep still.

It's easy to drop a dollar in the offering plate, but it is hard to tithe; so we don't tithe.

It's easy to sit in a class and enjoy the lesson; but hard to be a teacher, so we "sit and soak."

It's hard to win souls for Christ; so we don't win them.

It's hard to fill a place of leadership; so we let someone else do it.

It's hard to visit regularly; so we don't visit.

Christians are doing the easy things — that's the trouble. And all the time a voice is saying to us, "Take up thy cross and follow me!" When we choose comfort instead of the cross we forfeit the crown.



COLERIDGE'S GARDEN

The poet, Coleridge, was once visited by a skeptic named Thelwell. Thelwell insisted that children should not be taught about God. He said that their minds should be left free from all prejudices. He wanted their minds to grow naturally.

Coleridge had a garden but he loved to study his books much more than to dig in the garden. So it had become a mass of weeds. Thelwell was fond of gardening and he said: "I wonder, Mr. Coleridge, that your garden is in such a state. Why don't you weed it and plant flowers?" Oh, replied Coleridge, "I want my garden to grow naturally. I want it to be free from all prejudices."