

**“Don’t steal my freedom!” (15)**

A man and a woman were married for a few years. The woman believed in freedom of speech, and spoke her mind. The man thought she was dominating the house and wanted that to change, so one day he says, ‘I just want you to know that I have rules. I will go drinking with my friends whenever I want, go to the strip club whenever I want, go golfing whenever I want, and guess who’s going to take the shoes off of my feet when I get home?’ The woman, annoyed, says, ‘The funeral director.’

When it comes to freedom, especially the freedom in Christ we have, there will always be those Christians who exploit that freedom to their own benefit. Paul says in **Galatians 5:13-15** “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”

Paul reminds the Galatians that they have been rescued by God out of the bondage of legal justification. They’re now free from trying to be right with God through law-keeping and meritorious deeds. Which also implies that they shouldn’t allow anyone else to come along and put the shackles of law keeping that Jesus removed from them, back on them. Paul knew all too well, that some Christians would take advantage of their freedom from the law as an excuse to sin. Paul knew all too well that some Christians would sin in order to supposedly increase the grace of God in their lives as **Romans 6:1** tells us.

In fact, we know this was a problem for the early church because tells us in **Jude 4** “For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”

Loved ones, I’ve lost count of the Christians that I know, who have lost their appreciation for their salvation and believe that they can sin however and whenever they want because God’s grace will cover their sin anyway. That was Paul’s point when he asked that very question in **Romans 6:1+2** “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”

You see, as Christians we have been set free from trying to be right with God through law keeping, but we aren’t free from the law of Christ. Peter says in **1 Peter 2:16** “Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves.” Paul says in **1 Corinthians 8:9** “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.”

Yes, as Christians, we’re not under the Old Testament laws but we’re still under the law of Christ. We obey God and His commandments not because we have to but because we want to. And we want to please God because of His grace, it’s His grace that motivates us to do things. It’s our love for God that motives us to submit to His will and His ways.

And you can always tell the Christians who appreciate their salvation and God’s grace. They are the ones who are always working hard for the Lord whenever the opportunity arises, they’re always serving the Lord in some capacity. They are ones who come to worship, come to studies and get involved in everything the church is doing. **Why?** Not because they have to but because they want to.

Paul’s is saying, grace doesn’t produce a license to sin. God calls on us to produce a faith that works through love, and it’s by this love of one another that the world will know we belong to Christ. Paul says, the very foundation upon which law stands is love, in other words, law governs our interaction with one another. Loving our neighbour motivates us to act in a lawful manner, whether it be in our relationships with one another as a church or with society as a whole.

Paul says, the problem with legalism is that everyone ends up ‘biting and devouring each other.’ Instead of loving each other, the church ends up divided because everyone’s having a go at each other. **James 4:1+2** “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.”

When one person’s opinion becomes law, the debates and tension that causes will suck the joy right out of the church. When Christians bind where God hasn’t bound, churches will digress to senseless debates over issues that have no reference to salvation.

And I know from first-hand experience that any church that digresses into such debates will eventually consume itself. The whole situation ends up being a mess, even to the point of some Christians leaving the church and end up being lost again. The church is so busy fighting, they forget what the real goal is in reaching out to the lost.

I heard a story about how Satan shot a poisonous dart at his heel, but the Christian was unharmed, because his feet were protected with the Gospel of peace. Next, Satan shot an arrow at his sides, but the Christian fended off this easily because his sides were protected with truth. Unsuccessfully, the devil tried a shot at the breast, but there was the breastplate of righteousness. The Christian knocked away another dart with his shield, and the helmet of salvation fended off another arrow, but the devil wasn't defeated. He slipped around behind the Christian and shot him in the back and killed him dead.

You see, the devil will use anything he can to destroy the Christian, even if that means using Christians to cause division. No wonder Paul says, 'watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.' This's why Paul is so harsh in this letter against the legalistic teaching and behaviour of those who would bring the church into legalistic bondage. Paul knew where this legalistic mind set would end up, it would be disastrous. Loved ones, it cost God a great price to bring us to freedom and we must remember the price of redemption that God paid in order to set us free.

And so, Paul continues and says in Galatians 5:16-18 "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires, what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."

Now how do we walk by the Spirit? Well simply put, if we live in a spiritual manner, then we're living in the way the Holy Spirit wants us to live. And how do we know how He wants us to live? We have to read the Word, the Bible.

Hebrews 4:12 "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." We wouldn't even know that the Holy Spirit existed if He didn't reveal Himself to us through the Word. Likewise, Christians wouldn't have a clue about how to live godly lives if we didn't have the Bible. And so, when a Christian follows the inspired Word, it's then that they are truly walking by the Spirit.

You see, the Christian walks by the Spirit but the legalist walks by the law. The Christian lives a life which pleases God, motivated by love but the legalists walk by the law motivated by a list of tick boxes. Paul says, the legalist is motivated by the flesh but the free Christian is motivated by grace. And he says, the life that is directed by the Spirit is opposed to the life that has been given over to fulfil the desires of the flesh.

In other words, we all have a choice to make, will we live to please God or will we live to please ourselves? And Paul knew all too well what he meant when he talked about this choice and he understood that it takes self-discipline to please God. He said in 1 Corinthians 9:27 "I keep on disciplining my body, making it serve me so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not somehow be disqualified." In other words, it's all too easy to live life to satisfy our own desires but it takes time and self-discipline to live our lives in a way which pleases God.

And so, Paul says, Christians aren't only to 'walk by the Spirit' but they must be 'led by the Spirit'. Now I love driving and sometimes I just go for a drive around the town with no purpose other than just because I love it so much. But everyone who drives will agree with me, that there is nothing worse than a back-seat driver. 'oh, you're driving too slow or too fast'. 'You should've turned left at that junction not right'. 'I told you to take the third exit at the roundabout'. 'If you had gone the direction I told you, we would have gotten here ten minutes earlier.' And the crazy part is, as drivers, even though we know where we're going and how to get somewhere, we listen to them and we think to ourselves, 'I should have just gone the way I know and we wouldn't have never got lost in the first place.' And sometimes in our frustration we ask them if they want to drive, whether they are qualified to drive or not. And when we do get lost, we would rather drive around for another twenty minutes trying to guess the direction we're supposed to be going in, rather than swallowing our pride to stop and ask someone for directions.

You see, that word 'led' is an interesting word because it carries with it the idea of being driven. And Paul is saying, through the vehicle of God's Word, we need to let the Holy Spirit lead us. Because all too often we end up getting lost because we want to take over the steering wheel, we want to drive because like most back-seat drivers, we think we know best. And when we find ourselves lost, we need to stop and ask God what direction we should be going in.

**Have you ever seen a pigeon walk?** If you look carefully you'll see that they take one step, stop, focus and then take another step, stop, focus and take another step and so forth. You see, that's what Christians are supposed to do, we're supposed to stop regularly and focus on what God wants us to do. We're supposed to pray and read His Word regularly because this helps us keep our lives going in the right direction.

**Corrie Underwood** once sang a song called, '**Jesus take the wheel**'. It's all about a woman whose relationship with God had been neglected and she was driving home in her car with her baby in the back seat. She was driving too fast and because it had been snowing, she lost control of her car on black ice. In her fear, she saw her life and her baby's life flash before her eyes and so she threw her hands in the air.

**Listen to chorus.** '**Jesus take the wheel, take it from my hands. Cause I can't do this on my own. I'm letting go, so give me one more chance, save me from this road I'm on. Jesus take the wheel.**'

**Why is she throwing her hands in the air?** She's praying, she wants Jesus to take over but for that to happen, she needs to let go of the steering wheel. Loved ones, if your life is heading in the wrong direction or your life is filled with chaos, maybe it's time to let go. If there's a sin that's getting out of control in your life, maybe it's time to let go. Maybe it's time to stop being a backseat driver and it's time to let go and let Jesus take the wheel. Maybe it's time to realise you can't make it on your own and you need to allow the Holy Spirit to take the lead.

You see, what Paul is doing here is contrasting a life led by the Spirit and a life led by the flesh. These legalists were focusing so much on being right with God through law keeping, the whole emphasis ended up being on the flesh and performance. But those who seek a spiritual relationship with God, will seek God's direction through the inspired word of God.

Now when Paul says, '**you are not under the law,**' the word, '**the**' isn't in the original Greek text, it should read '**not under law**'. **What difference does that make?** Well, it helps understand that Paul isn't just talking about the Law of Moses, but law in general, any law. His point is that anyone who's trying to be right with God, through any kind of legal requirement is still under bondage. But those who trust in the grace of God for their salvation and have faith in Christ and what He did at Calvary are not under bondage.

You see loved ones, the legalists will always depend on themselves, they depend upon their own ability to keep the whole law. Legalists fail and some won't admit it but **James 2:10** says, "**For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.**" James says if a person breaks one law, they are guilty of breaking all the law. But in contrast, the real Christian, will depend solely upon God, for their salvation. **Why?** Because they know that they can't keep the law perfectly, they know they will mess up and fail, they see their need for grace. In other words, perfect law keeping demands obedience to law but grace motivates obedience to law.

**Have you ever wondered what the purpose of law is?** Let me try and explain it this way. **When was the last time you went to the dentist?** Most times when we go to the dentist the first thing they do is get a small mirror and stick it inside our mouths. **Why?** Because with the mirror, they can detect any cavities or any other problem. But if they do find a problem, notice that they don't use that mirror to drill with or pull our teeth out. In other words, the mirror can show them the decayed area or any other problem but the mirror itself can't provide the solution.

**How many of you played with a torch when you were younger?** We all know if there's a sudden power cut in the middle of the night, we can use that torch to help us find the electrical box. When you point it toward the fuses, it helps you see the fuse which has blown. But after you've removed the bad fuse, you don't try to insert the flashlight in its place, no, you put in a new fuse to restore the electricity.

**And maybe some of you were builders by trade and you used a plumb line.** When a builder wants to check his work, he uses a weighted string to see if it's true to the vertical. But if he finds that he has made a mistake, he doesn't use the plumb line to correct it. He gets out his hammer and saw.

The point I'm trying to make is that the law pointed out the problem of sin but it didn't and doesn't provide a solution. The solution is Christ crucified, the solution is grace. You see, God knew that mankind could never live up to the high standards of law keeping without breaking it. And so, He sent His Son to live here on earth to show us that we can live without sin in our lives.

He knew we could never be right with God by obeying the rules and so Jesus deliberately and lovingly went to the cross to die for each us. That's what grace means, God's Riches At Christ's Expense. It's God's unmerited favour upon a people who deserve to go to hell. We're saved because of what Jesus did, not because of how good we've been. We're saved not because of how we perform here but because He performed like no man could at Calvary.

Loved ones, don't let anyone steal your freedom in Christ, don't let anyone put laws on you which God never requires. Yes, we're still under law but it's God's New Testament law, James calls it a law of liberty. **James 1:25** "But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do." Later in **James 2:12** he says, "Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom."

The point is your free from the Old Testament way of being right with God through law keeping. But now because of God's grace and what Christ has done for us, we're free from those rules and regulations such as circumcision. We're blessed because salvation isn't based upon how well we stick to the rules without breaking them. We're blessed because God knew that mankind in our sinfulness, could never keep the rules without breaking them, so He offered us a solution.

**Titus 2:11-14** "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

You see loved ones, the law taught us that we were sinners, it pointed out our sin and taught us that sin leads to death as **Romans 6:23** tells us. But grace teaches us a few things too, it teaches us to say no to sin and encourages us to live right for God. Grace teaches us to walk by the Spirit and allow Him to lead us through the Word.

Grace teaches us to cherish our freedom but don't abuse it and use it as an excuse to sin. Grace teaches us to stop trying to be right with God through our own efforts but to totally rely on the One who redeemed us. Grace teaches us to be eager to do good, not because we have too but because we want too, because we know it pleases the One who redeemed us from our sin.