

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Christian Liberty

A Thesis Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

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Lynchburg, Virginia

January 2021

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Christian liberty is freedom from the law, made possible through the finished work of Christ. This project seeks to present a biblical and theological explanation of Christian liberty and develop concepts that apply to the believer's everyday experience. It is important to address the ever-present dangers of legalism and libertinism and their impact on the Christians and churches. The project focuses on a New Testament explanation of Christian liberty, drawing lessons from both the deliberations of the Jerusalem Council of 49 A.D. and the Pauline thesis to the Galatians. What happens after a person has been freed from the demands of the law? Critics believe that advocating for Christian liberty could send the wrong message that libertinism should be embraced. A faulty understanding of Christian liberty sends the wrong message that legalism or libertinism is welcomed, but that is far from the truth of the scriptures. Freedom from the law is not freedom to sin, but the freedom to serve God without the restraints of the law.

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>
ICGC	<i>International Central Gospel Church</i>
CLP	<i>Central Leadership Program</i>
SIAD	<i>Social Intervention, Action, and Development</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

Christian Liberty

Christian liberty is both a foundational Christian privilege and God-given reality, which has often been misunderstood and misrepresented. The misunderstanding results from a wrong interpretation of what Christian liberty entails. How should the liberty provided in Christ be expended in the life of the believer? Most human beings rank freedom amongst the highest of ideals. Any attempt to deny people their freedom is regarded as a crime against the dignity of what it means to be human.¹ The pursuit of freedom has resulted in military conquests, philosophical debates, and religious persecutions; all aimed at reinforcing the innate human desire to be free. Church history succinctly emphasizes Martin Luther's religious war with the Roman Catholic Church, centered on the limits of Christian liberty. This religious war continues even today amongst denominations, mainline churches, theologians, clergy, and laity. How should a Christian use the freedom provided by Christ? This question forms the content of this project.

The scriptures speak volumes about the freedom of the Christian in Christ and how believers should conduct their lives within such freedom (John 8:36; Rom. 8:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1, 13; 1 Peter 2:16). When people think about Christian liberty, their initial thoughts center on the freedom that Christ provides. The Christian is no longer shackled to the chains of legalism. The finished work of Christ on the cross provides the basis for the believer's freedom.

¹ John C. Lennox, *Determined to Believe: The Sovereignty of God, Freedom, Faith, & Human Responsibility* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 22.

Nonetheless, this freedom ought not to be taken for granted. The liberty provided by Christ is not a license to sin but an opportunity to demonstrate righteousness. Whereas on the one hand, Christians have been set free from a legalistic orientation, conversely, Christians have also become slaves of righteousness. Believers are free from the yoke of sin and enslaved to the demands of righteousness. This underscores the implications of submitting to the Lordship of Christ.

Understanding Christian Liberty

Timothy George describes Christian freedom as “the precious birthright of every believer,”² yet no other Christian vocabulary has been abused more than this one. What did Paul mean by freedom? The Apostle Paul understood freedom as a spiritual reality made possible through the death of Christ, and everyone who places their faith in Christ has access to this freedom (Col. 2:11-15). Timothy George also explains the Pauline ideas about freedom, first, Paul is not referring to political freedom. From time immemorial, human beings have fought for the inalienable right to personal freedom, including political liberty, but Paul was not referring to freedom in a psychological sense.³ Emotional health is a necessary component of human health and wellness. However, Christian liberty is not “an innate quality or state of being which the individual discovers (or recovers) by sorting out past experiences and relationships. It is a gift bestowed as a result of Good Friday and Easter.”⁴

Finally, Paul did not understand Christian liberty as the opportunity for theological anarchy within the community of believers. This is one of the prominent issues facing the facing

² Timothy George, *Galatians* Vol. 30 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers), 353.

³ *Ibid.*, 354.

⁴ Charles B. Cousar, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching Galatians* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), 109.

today's church. Timothy George warns, "We can err either by drawing the boundaries too tightly or by refusing to draw them at all. On the one hand, we lapse into legalism; on the other, into relativism."⁵ According to George, legalism or libertinism should not be the goal of an authentic Christian experience since neither promotes what Christ accomplished on the cross. Boundaries that suffocate the freedoms the believer has in Christ are unnecessary burdens that can lead to legalism and the refusal to set these boundaries can lead to licentiousness.

Freedom from Sin

Freedom from sin does not indicate freedom from righteousness. John MacArthur alludes to the idea that true freedom starts when slavery to sin ends, and slavery to sin ends only when Christians become the slaves of God.⁶ The Christian should interpret their freedom from sin as only a change of masters, with sin being the previous ruler and Christ becoming the new master. It would be incorrect for Christians to assume that freedom from sin connotes freedom to live without restraints. Chris de Wet describes freedom as a transitory status where a person is set free from one master to be enslaved to another. According to de Wet, the only freedom a person perhaps has is the freedom to choose one's slavery.⁷ He further advises that freedom should not be perceived as the opposite of enslavement but as a necessary part of its operation.⁸

The decision to live for God and honor him is a partnership between the believer and the Holy Spirit. It is possible to live a holy and sanctified life, and this takes place when Christians make the conscious effort to obey God's word and remain submitted to the dictates of the Holy

⁵ George, *Galatians*, 354.

⁶ John MacArthur, *Slaves: The Hidden Truth About Your Identity in Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 142.

⁷ Chris L. de Wet, *Preaching Bondage: John Chrysostom and the Discourse of Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 49

⁸ *Ibid.*, 70

Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that enables believers' manifest Christian character (Gal. 5:16). The Apostle Paul describes the life of the Christian as bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20); the price is the precious blood of Jesus shed on the cross by his sacrificial act. This puts a considerable amount of responsibility on Christians to "glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20).⁹ Therefore, it would be selfish and self-centered on the part of Christians to interpret a person's freedom from sin as a choice to live as an individual pleases.

Libertarian doctrines espouse the idea that since people are independent and have the right to decide for themselves, they should be the best judges of what is right for themselves. There is a proposal which advocates that the way to maximize everyone's welfare is to allow people to make their own choice.¹⁰ Jacqueline Isaacs describes Christianity as fundamentally about freedom or a person's ability to choose to have a relationship with God. An individual has a choice to believe in God. She explains freedom in everyday life as the free exchange of goods and ideas, the freedom to speak one's mind, the freedom to travel and pursue happiness, the freedom to reap what one sows, and the freedom to come to one's terms with God.¹¹

The Problem of Christian Freedom

The problem of Christian freedom is the thought that freedom from the demands of the Mosaic law indicates freedom from moral restraints; this is not just selfish but also troubling. Christians do not dictate the terms; God sets the conditions for how Christians should relate to

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New King James Version (Thomas Nelson, 1982).

¹⁰ Paul Spicker, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (Queen's Road, Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2006), 14.

¹¹ Jacqueline Isaacs, "A Christian Libertarian Part 2," *Values and Capitalism*, 2011
<http://valuesandcapitalism.com/a-christian-libertarian-part-2/>.

him by becoming slaves of righteousness. Christians are not liberated from sin to self but from sin to slavery (1 Peter 2:16). The freedom Christians experience is the product of the selfless and sacrificial acts of Christ so that humanity will be free to serve God, not open to debate about their service to God. Freedom from sin is slavery to Christ.

The proliferation of libertarian ideas into Christian doctrine and literature is a danger to the biblical perspective of freedom. Rather than understanding Christian liberty from the scripture's perspective, believers are gradually leaning towards contemporary ideas such as the political and philosophical theology of Jacqueline Isaacs that have no biblical basis and only appeals to the senses. There is a need to provide clarity and adequately describe what biblical liberty entails. J. Paul Sampley advises believers to be ever-increasingly conformed to Christ, not this eon. The refurbished believers' minds are a gift from God to Christians as a part of the new creation. Christians should function so that they can be responsible moral agents and can choose one thing or another. Believers are free to avoid conforming to this world.¹²

Ministry Context

The International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) is an Evangelical, Charismatic Christian Church officially inaugurated on the 26th of February 1984 in Accra, Ghana. From 1986 to 1996, the church settled in a rented scout hall, the Baden Powell Memorial Hall in downtown Accra which it renovated to enable her to accommodate its fast-growing membership.¹³ From 1987, the ICGC began the process of establishing local churches in all the regions of Ghana. Its network of churches now reaches to other parts of Africa, Europe,

¹² J. Paul Sampley, *Walking in Love: Moral Progress and Spiritual Growth with the Apostle Paul* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 54.

¹³ International Central Gospel Church, "Our History" accessed March 22nd, 2020 <https://www.centralgospel.com/74>.

Australia, and North America. In 1988 the ICGC established a ministerial training institute to train a new generation of leaders to carry out its vision.

The vision of the ICGC is to establish God's house through the development of model New Testament Christians and Churches.¹⁴ The Body of Christ, also called the Church, is the most vital institution on earth. The purpose and desire of ICGC are to influence the world through authentic Christian living and conduct continuously. As the salt of the earth, the church is committed to the preservation of godliness. As the light of the world, Christians must transform society through the influence of a Christ-centered life.

The philosophy of ICGC centers on practical Christianity, human dignity, and excellence.¹⁵ ICGC believes Christianity is not a myth or fable but a practical, pragmatic, and enjoyable life ordained by God for all humanity to experience his goodness. ICGC believes that God is the God of the natural world and the spiritual world. The church encourages preaching that exposes Christians to truths applied in everyday life. ICGC is committed to the holistic preaching and demonstration of God's plans and purpose for humanity revealed in the Holy Scriptures. The core of the church's message is the reconciliation of man to God. This message includes

1. Salvation from sin (Romans 6:6-7),
2. Acceptance for the outcast (Romans 5:10; Jer. 30:17),
3. Liberation for the mind (Romans 12:2),
4. Freedom for the captives (Luke 4:18),

¹⁴ "VISION OF ICGC (ACTS 2:42)." International Central Gospel Church, accessed March 22, 2020, <https://www.centralgospel.com/81>.

¹⁵ "OUR PHILOSOPHY," International Central Gospel Church, accessed March 22, 2020, <https://www.centralgospel.com/79>.

5. Hope for the future (Jer. 31:17; 29:11), and
6. Dominion over the flesh (Col. 3:5).¹⁶

The church trusts God to present the eternal truths of the Bible to the world in a form that are doctrinally sound, spiritually inspired, mentally challenging, and socially relevant. The Gospel of Christ should be seen as an answer to man's real-life questions.

Sunday services at ICGC of North Dzorwulu start with a pre-prayer service at 7:00 am. Members of the intercessory ministry lead the service, and the congregation is encouraged to participate in the service. The time is dedicated to praying for the church, the service, its members, and the community. The mid-week teaching service is the least attended and is held on Wednesday at 6:30 pm. The service lasts an hour and a half, after which an offering is taken. This researcher is designated to speak at the mid-week service unless unavailable. Fridays at 7:00 pm is a time of corporate prayer, led by both a church leader and a pastor.

Discipleship is a fundamental aspect of Christian ministry. Chris Shirley describes discipleship as an internal condition and active manifestation of the believer's relationship with Jesus Christ.¹⁷ The International Central Gospel Church developed a discipleship model for both new and existing members. The discipleship training program is designed to help members grow and develop into the image of Christ.¹⁸ This program lays the foundation for new members. It helps them assimilate into the ICGC family, guide them to grow and mature in the faith, and identify and develop their specific roles in the church's development. The program is divided

¹⁶ "OUR MESSAGE (JEREMIAH 31:17), "International Central Gospel Church, accessed March 22, 2020, <https://www.centralgospel.com/78>.

¹⁷ Chris Shirley, "It takes a Church to make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Church," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 211.

¹⁸ In ICGC this program is called the ABC program. ABC is an acronym which stands for Adult Bible Class.

into four levels: New Beginners Module, Membership Module, Maturity Module, and Ministry Module.

These modules are vital in the spiritual growth of new members and the needed orientation for new converts to be grounded in the faith. However, Christians are increasingly taking the grace of God for granted. Some believers are not putting in the effort to ensure that their lifestyle and conduct is above reproach, and the church must pay attention to this trend and design initiatives that would help mitigate it.

Problem Presented

This project will address the problem that the members of the International Central Gospel Church may not have a clear understanding of the concept of Christian liberty. Christian liberty is the freedom from obedience to the law made possible by Christ's death. It is important to distinguish between the soteriological and ethical implications of Christian liberty. There is a growing chasm between Christians who perceive their freedom as a license to sin and those who advocate that Christian conduct be regulated, an idea that can lead to legalism. However, the freedom in Christ must not be abused, and equally important is the danger of setting rules of conduct to define Christian behavior.

Some members of ICGC are on one end of the spectrum where legalism is praised, binding themselves with rules and rituals that frustrate an authentic expression of their faith. There are others on the opposite end of the spectrum who are so fascinated with the freedoms that are in Christ and have become reckless and irresponsible in their behavior.¹⁹ There is the need to strike a biblical balance that advocates neither legalism nor licentiousness but a

¹⁹ Andrew Hassler, "Ethnocentric Legalism and the Justification of the Individual: Rethinking some New Perspective Assumptions," *JETS* 54.2 (2011): 314.

responsible Christian lifestyle. This lifestyle is not regulated by rules but results from a personal relationship with the Trinity.

The scriptures counsel Christians to “stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1). This statement summarizes Paul’s arguments in Gal. 3 and 4, where the theme is bondage and freedom. The freedom given by Christ liberates believers from the law. The image of the yoke was used to describe how the law was a mechanism for guiding people in righteousness (Matt. 11:29-30). The Apostle Paul “redirects this imagery to clarify the law’s effect now that Christ has come: It does not lead or teach people anymore, but instead enslaves them (Gal 4:3, 8).”²⁰ Paul appeals to the Galatians to stand firm in that liberty. After being delivered from slavery to heathenism, they were in danger of becoming entangled in slavery to the Mosaic Law.²¹

The “hyper-grace”²² message has ravaged the Charismatic church with a distorted doctrine that misinterprets the believer’s freedom in Christ and how much freedom ought to be expended. Some members of ICGC are always seeking clarity about what the believer’s freedom entails. Their minds are filled with questions about the nature of sin and how the believer can responsibly walk in Christian freedom.

Although the discipleship program is an excellent ministry intervention, the researcher does not find any additional benefits to Christians related to the proper exercise of Christian

²⁰ John D. Barry et al, *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

²¹ Douglas K. Campbell, “Galatians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J.F. Walvoord & R.B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 2:605

²² This is a term coined by some pastors in the Charismatic movement describing a doctrine that emphasizes solely on the grace of God and the freedoms the believer has in Christ and conversely denounces the need for repentance when a believer sin. This doctrine disregards the need for a disciplined lifestyle and encourages believers to live life without the need to seek forgiveness when a person sin.

liberty. This author's goal would be to implement a system that would complement the discipleship program of ICGC and properly structure its ministry intervention.

Purpose Statement

This Doctor of Ministry study aims to teach the biblical principles of Christian liberty to the members of the International Central Gospel Church. The benefit of having members of ICGC demonstrate a scriptural appreciation of their understanding of Christian freedom and apply its principles in their lives would be a better representation of Christ in private and public spaces. The church benefits from this by equipping its congregation to live by the standards enshrined in the Bible and responsibly use their liberty to glorify God in their endeavors. Helping the congregation appreciate the purpose and parameters of Christian liberty properly will help them develop the necessary disciplines to live godly. The result is that members of the International Central Gospel Church will become an example of Christian witness in their community. When the church uses its discipleship process to clarify erroneous ideas about Christian liberty that its members might have or affirm their biblical ideas on the subject, the resultant effect of that intervention is its congregants would begin to exercise Christian maturity.

Basic Assumptions

There are four underlying assumptions associated with this thesis project. 1. There is a theological divide amongst Christians concerning a proper understanding of the concept of Christian liberty. This division is demonstrated in the deliberations of the Jerusalem conference of 49 AD (Acts 15). In that conference, a dispute arose between Paul and some of the Pharisees who had converted to Christianity. Is circumcision necessary for justification (Acts 15:1-2)? This question caused a severe schism in the church, which continues today, although the debate has morphed into other strands about legalism and Christian liberty. Some Christians understand

Christian liberty as a license to live as pleased without any rules, regulations, or restraints. Others stress the need to abide by laid down legislation so that Christian conduct can be regulated. The biblical perspective on Christian liberty is that when a person receives Christ by faith, that individual is set free from the bondage to sin and the law's requirements (John 8:36).

2. This study assumes that churches play a role in providing a sound biblical interpretation of the concept of Christian liberty. The church in Jerusalem had to grapple with this theological conundrum. The believing Pharisees advocated for circumcision whereas, Paul and Barnabas opined that this requirement did not apply to the Gentile converts (Acts 15:3-6). The contention was finally brought before the Jerusalem church and elders to provide a clear doctrinal position that settles the debate (Acts 15:6-9). Toussaint writes, "The issue of whether to accept Gentiles was settled then and there. God made no distinction between believing Jews and Gentiles. All are accepted by faith."²³ The church is described as the pillar of truth (1 Tim. 3:15). It is expected that through the teaching of the unadulterated Word of God, members of the International Central Gospel Church will be adequately educated on Christian liberty. The assumption is that the church has something worthwhile to share with its congregation.

3. A proper biblical and theological explanation of Christian liberty will free members of the International Central Gospel Church from the shackles of legalism and the deception of licentiousness. Also, it will help members of the church appropriately use the liberty in Christ, not as a cloak of covetousness but develop a lifestyle that brings glorifies God. Churches owe their congregation the truth, and it is the truth that sets people free (John 8:31-32). The truth is neither a concept nor an idea, the truth is a person, and his name is Jesus. It is Jesus Christ who

²³ S.D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J.F. Walvoord & R.B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 2:393.

can set people free from the oppression of sin, which is made possible by faith in his name.

When the church points people to the person of Jesus, it allows them to experience freedom only he can provide.

4. This study assumes that liberty leads to slavery, but instead of becoming slaves of sin, Christians should be slaves of righteousness. Sin leads to slavery, but so does righteousness. The slavery that comes with sin is bondage to vices, character traits, and a disposition that fails to please God. It is servitude to a lifestyle engineered by the sinful nature and antithetic to all that God expects from his children. On the other hand, a person who gets saved is free from sin and is expected to become a slave of righteousness. Being a slave to righteousness is made possible because Christ lives in the believer's heart, thereby changing the person's nature and inclinations. A person's pre-conversion experience makes that individual susceptible to the ways of sin, and their post-conversion experience makes them predisposed to acts of righteousness. For the believer, these acts are not an automatic response; instead, they must be intentional. Paul admonishes believers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).²⁴

Definitions

The words "Christian liberty" and "Christian freedom" will be used interchangeably, so will "Christian" and "believer." For this study, liberty or freedom would be described as independence from demands of the law made possible by Christ's death (Gal. 2:16; 3:26; Col. 2:11-14). The requirements of the law held people in bondage and made it difficult to live a righteous life, but Christ, through his death on the cross, satisfied the law's requirements. Whereas political, economic, and historical perspectives of freedom contribute to the broad

²⁴ This scripture is a warning to believers about their role in living out their faith. Christian example is not an automated act but a conscious effort to live out the principles in the Bible.

understanding of the concept, that is not the focus of this study. The following terms would need to be defined: **Christian liberty**: it is the theological concept that explains the purpose and implications of how Christ, through His sacrifice on the cross, frees a person from the indictment of the Law (Colossians 2:13-14). It is not freedom to sin but freedom from sin, and the implications of freedom should be dispensed.

Law: “The religious, ceremonial, civil, and moral instructions of the Lord regulated the entire community life of Israel.”²⁵ The laws of God were written down in the book of the Law by Moses. It is a legislation given by God to be obeyed by Israel. It includes what is often called ceremonial, civic, and moral laws; but there is very little indication in the Bible that these classifications are recognized. The law or torah, has also been described as the centerpiece of Judaism.²⁶

Legalism: The Tenth Edition of the Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary defines legalism as “strict, literal, or excessive conformity to the law or a religious, moral code.” Timothy S. Morton defines legalism as “conformity to arbitrary moral codes, rules, or laws to remain in God's will, favor, or blessing after one receives Christ.”²⁷

License: This refers to “freedom that allows or is used with irresponsibility.”²⁸

Libertinism: “A form of abuse of Christian freedom which refuses to acknowledge any obligation for Christians to obey the law or to restrain sin.”²⁹

²⁵ E.E. Carpenter & P.W. Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 111.

²⁶ D. Mangum, *The Lexham Glossary of Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

²⁷ Timothy S. Morton, “From Liberty to Legalism: A Candid Study of Legalism, Pharisees, and Christian Liberty” accessed August 21, 2020, https://www.biblebelievers.com/Morton_legalism-liberty.html

²⁸ I. Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary Eleventh Edition* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

²⁹ M.H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

Christian liberty frees the believer from the need to adhere to the demands of the Mosaic Law, but this freedom still requires a responsible way of living a life that is devoted to Christ.³⁰ This definition of freedom runs contrary to some of the libertarian ideas espoused today.³¹ When an individual chooses to believe in Christ, that action is a qualifier for the freedom that Christ provides. The liberty that Christ provides does not automatically apply to everyone. Although it is God's intention that all will be delivered from the bondage to sin, that intention would only be actualized if a person places their faith in Christ. Faith provides access to the freedom that Christ supplies.

Slavery: is a voluntary or forced servitude to an individual or institution.³²

Theological terms will be defined broadly for this project. The biblical view of slavery will be taken to mean both slaves to sin and righteousness. The transition from the former to the latter is only made possible by Christ (2 Cor. 5:21), who alone has the authority to set a person free from sin. Human beings left alone to their proclivities, and inclinations will not choose righteous acts. Freedom must be understood not as consisting of a person being neutral towards a specific set of actions from which a choice is made, but rather an individual's nature (character, habits, and disposition) inclines that person towards a course of action.³³

Surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus also frees a person from the bondage to sin and the law and empowers that individual to live in righteousness freely (John 8:36). Unlike unbelievers, who of necessity must obey their inclinations, Christians have free choice to do good and evil.

³⁰ Chris L. de Wet, *Preaching Bondage* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 70.

³¹ For a better understanding of how the libertarian concepts of liberty and Christianity converge, see Elise Daniel, *Called to Freedom: Why you can be Christian and Libertarian* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017).

³² D. Mangum, *The Lexham Glossary of Theology*.

³³ John P. Safranek, *The Myth of Liberalism* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 199.

While the slave of sin is free to commit evil acts, no one is free to do good unless that individual has been set free by Christ, who said: If the Son shall set you free, then you will be free indeed (John 8:36).³⁴ People can become truly free by becoming sons of God by faith in Christ, the Son.³⁵ Observance of the law is not a condition for becoming free in Christ, rather believing in who Christ is, qualifies a person to walk in liberty (Gal. 3:26).³⁶

Limitations

Several factors limit the scope of this project. First, this paper is not a comprehensive study on freedom since freedom is a broad concept with multifaceted perspectives. Several scholars, such as Guy Loubser and Timothy Morton have widely covered the concept of freedom. Their writings focused on the philosophical, historical, cultural, religious, and even psychological perspectives of freedom and its relation to the ancient, medieval, modern, and postmodern worlds. Secondly, this project limits the thesis to the subject of Christian liberty. It examines how Christian liberty should be understood within a disciplined biblical framework.

Delimitations

The first delimitation is that this research is written with members of the International Central Gospel Church in mind. Although its application is universal, the researcher has identified a worrying trend within the church and aims to address it. The second delimitation is that this study is purely an academic study.

³⁴ Gerald Bonner, *Freedom and Necessity: St. Augustine's Teaching on Divine Power and Human Freedom* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

³⁵ Edwin A. Blum, "John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J.F. Walvoord & R.B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 2:305

³⁶ John D. Barry et al, *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Thesis Statement

A proper understanding of Christian liberty gives the believer freedom from the demands of the law. Christ helps the believer to be free, but that freedom should not be abused. If the members of ICGC are taught the concepts of biblical Christian liberty, they are likely to demonstrate a disciplined and responsible lifestyle within a biblical Christian framework. This project is needful now more than ever before. The researcher is a pastor who regularly interacts with the congregation of ICGC and is concerned about the congregants' views on Christian liberty.

Chapter 2 – Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

The problem with Christian liberty is that some believers live under the flawed assumption that the freedom Christ provides absolves them of any responsibility on their part to uphold godly standards. Therefore, this research project intends to explore relevant literature that addresses the subject under discussion and use it as a foundation for developing this research project. Literature is abundant on the subject of Christian liberty. Several authors have taken time to examine the theological implications of the believer's freedom in Christ.³⁷ There are only a few that touch on developing a disciplined biblical framework for the Christian.

This thesis relies on various original sources, secondary sources, critical works, and peer-reviewed journals and anchors its message in scripture. The sources engaged are briefly examined in the following pages.

Original Sources

Although there was an intention to focus on more recent sources published at least ten years ago, some older sources were also relevant in elucidating the subject matter. These were included in the literature review and study.

Freedom from the Law

Freedom from the Law is the freedom from pursuing requirements of the Mosaic Law as a means to attain righteousness. This generation stresses much on personal freedom, and this thought appeals to those who seek to live all kinds of personal and moral restraints and moral

³⁷ See e.g. Gys, M.H. Loubser, "Life in the Spirit as Wise Remedy for Folly of the Flesh: Ethical Notes from Galatians," *Neotestamentica* 43, no. 2 (2009).

restraint. Howard Vos, in his book, *Galatians: A Call to Liberty*, explores the Pauline ideas on freedom by underscoring the fact that salvation is in no way based on human effort. This book is essential to the research because it explains how Galatians does not open the door to lawlessness. Howard Vos also comments on the Apostle Paul's plea for Christians to renounce a legalistic pattern of living and embrace the freedom that Christ provides. The contemporary relevance of Galatians attacks the ever-present desire of people to achieve salvation by their effort and the tendency of Christians to live in their strength.³⁸ In the book of Galatians, Paul explains the dangers of a legalistic orientation (Gal. 2:11-16) and that faith in Christ is the means of justification, not the works of the law (Gal. 2:16-18). In fulfilling the requirements of the law, Christ provides the means of salvation and now resides within the person who has been justified by faith. The deliverance from sin comes through the work of Christ, not through human effort.

A believer who attempts to live the Christian life in a legalistic fashion will not enjoy the Holy Spirit's power to free that individual from their sinful self to live a life pleasing to God. Some of the Galatian Christians yielded to the temptations of legalism and ended up embracing it as a means of salvation. Paul confronts this conundrum and chastises them for this action (Gal. 3:13). In his book *Freedom and Necessity*, Gerald Bonner, describes the freedom of choice Christians possess as a gift from God, and it is that which makes it possible to abstain from sin.³⁹ The Christian who is properly related to Christ lives by the Holy Spirit's power, and the fruit of that decision is good works.⁴⁰

³⁸ Howard F. Vos, *Galatians: A Call to Liberty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 8.

³⁹ Gerald Bonner, *Freedom and Necessity: St. Augustine's Teaching on Divine Power and Human Freedom* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 2007), 67.

⁴⁰ Howard F. Vos, *Galatians: A Call to Liberty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 14.

The Dangers of Legalism

Legalism can be described as “having a strict outward conformity to moral and religious practices and an expectation that others have the same.”⁴¹ Merrill C. Tenney, in his book, *Galatians: The Charter of Christian Liberty*, explains Christian liberty using the germinal teachings of Galatians.⁴² This work is a valuable addition to the development of the thesis. It expounds on the idea that Christian liberty results from God’s work on the cross and not humanity’s obedience to rules and regulations. The author examines how faith in God freely bestows salvation in the human heart.

The author describes human freedom as the source of human limitation. True freedom comes from God and should be used in a way that honors him. Christian liberty is explained as a product of God’s revelation, which defines both human weaknesses and makes God’s saving power available. It is in this truth that people find true liberty. This liberty does not consist in the ability to disobey God with impunity but in the ability to obey him spontaneously without any hindrance.⁴³

In the opening chapter of his book *Earthen Vessel*, Matthew Anderson expresses the believer's frustration in balancing legalism and liberty. He mentions how believers alternate between playing the legalist card when boundaries are drawn for Christian conduct and the libertine card when others endorse their immoral lifestyle with the gospel.⁴⁴ Matthew Anderson’s work expounds on one of the concepts of Christian liberty, which is that legalism and libertinism

⁴¹ Stanley J. Grenz and J.T. Smith, “Legalism,” in *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 69.

⁴² Merrill C. Tenney, *Galatians: The Charter of Christian Liberty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 15.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁴ Matthew Lee Anderson, *Earthen Vessels* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2011), 28.

are not features of Christian liberty. Believers are called to use their freedom, not selfishly but responsibly (Gal. 5:1). Both Tenney and Anderson are concerned that Christian liberty, if misunderstood, can become a yoke of bondage. How should the believer express his or her freedoms without getting entangled in legalism or sinful conduct?

In his book *Paul and Jesus: A True Story*, David Wenham argues about the weakness of the law and its failure to produce a right relationship with God, coupled with an obedient and ethical lifestyle.⁴⁵ According to Wenham, Paul saw the issue of the Gentile Christians being circumcised as unnecessary for salvation (Gal. 6:12-13). In Paul's letter, his critics had appealed to the Old Testament, particularly to Abraham, and to the circumcision as a sign that God gave to Abraham, indicating his special relationship with God and as a mark of God's people.⁴⁶ Circumcision is further argued as an indispensable guide for ethical living and any advocacy to abandon the law is tantamount to moral anarchy.⁴⁷

Wenham highlights several of Paul's responses to his critics, and these responses are vital to the development of the thesis. Paul insists on the God-given nature of his gospel; he further argues that the law's reinstatement is a contradiction to the good news, with its focus on grace, the cross, and faith.⁴⁸ According to the author, the centrality of the cross contradicts those who boast in circumcision. Contrary to the hesitations of Paul's critics, Wenham argues that Paul's law-free gospel is not a recipe for moral anarchy since the Holy Spirit is at the heart of the Christian experience.⁴⁹ In the classic Christian literature, *Galatians: A Call to Liberty*, Howard

⁴⁵ David Wenham, *Paul and Jesus: A True Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 58.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁹ Wenham, *Paul and Jesus*, 58.

Vos agrees with Wenham and argues that salvation is provided by the sovereign act of God, who becomes the Christian's father only by grace. Believers stand in a filial relationship with him through no effort of their own.⁵⁰ Both Wenham and Vos provide useful concepts on Christian liberty necessary for the development of the thesis.

Christian liberty is a well-known concept amongst evangelicals. This liberty the believer enjoys in Christ does not create the opportunity for impiety; self-restraint and proper boundaries must be appropriately demarcated. Whereas self-governing rules are necessary to guard the believer against pursuing their passions, the believer and the church must not slip into legalism. Merrill C. Tenney cautions against this tendency to interpret the redemption from the penalties of the law as an opportunity to take for granted the law's standard of holiness. This might make a person assume that people are saved by grace and may now do as they please.⁵¹ Tenney warns believers from using the grace of God as a justification for indiscipline.

The law could not produce the righteousness that God expected (Gal. 3:21). People felt powerless to the allure of sin and ultimately only emphasized their vulnerability and surrendered to the flesh.⁵² The law could govern actions but failed to address motives. Loubser provides the perspective that righteousness is not just the external expression of morally upright actions but the internal transformation of the believer's inner convictions. He further explains the foundation of Christian morality vis-à-vis the demands of the law. The Christian needs to make a decision not to submit to the law. The Pauline phrase "Against such there is no law" (Gal 5:23) stresses that Christian morality is not centered on regulation by law but rather about living an ethically responsible life without law requirements. The law's ethical requirements can be fulfilled

⁵⁰ Howard F. Vos, *Galatians: A Call to Liberty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 23.

⁵¹ Tenney, *Galatians*, 28.

⁵² Loubser, "Life in the Spirit as Wise Remedy for Folly of the Flesh," 356

through the agency of the Holy Spirit, and in Gal. 5:22-24, the law does not regulate the fruits of the Spirit, which are examples of Christian character. A relationship with the Holy Spirit produces characters that the law could not develop in a person. It constitutes doing good as a result of obeying the Spirit and loving as Christ did.⁵³ He emphasizes the importance of obedience to the expression of Christian morality rather than regulations of the law that tend to frustrate the Christian experience.

In the *Eerdmans Companion to the Bible*, Gordon Fee and Ron Hubbard, who are editors of the companion, expound on the relationship between faith and the law in Galatians chapter 4. This exposition is essential to the project; it is crucial to explore how faith and the law work together to understand Christian liberty. The editors explain how Galatians received the Holy Spirit by exercising faith in Christ, not by performing the works of the law.⁵⁴ Fee and Hubbard extend the metaphor of the law as a guardian for spiritual minors whose moral immaturity delays the receipt of their rightful inheritance and relegates them to the status of a slave (Gal. 4:1-11).⁵⁵ The authors explain that in the fullness of time, the heir comes to maturity when through the redemption from the law effected by Christ, God made the mature heirs qualified to receive the covenantal promises through faith.⁵⁶ It is against this backdrop that Paul questions the reasoning behind the Galatians' decision to revert to the rudiments of the law (Gal. 4:10).

Paul uses an allegory from the very law, which the Galatians were reverting towards to end his argument. Hagar represents the covenant made at Mount Sinai, headquartered at Jerusalem and perpetuated by Hagar's descendant slaves of the law that were left out of the will.

⁵³ Loubser, "Life in the Spirit as Wise Remedy for Folly of the Flesh," 362.

⁵⁴ G.D. Fee, and R.L. Hubbard, eds., *The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 668.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 669.

⁵⁶ Fee, and Hubbard, *The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible*, 669.

On the other hand, Abraham's wife, Sarah, who is a free woman, represents Christianity, the covenant of faith.⁵⁷ Sarah's free heirs alone will inherit the promises made to Abraham because of his faith. This allegory reveals the irony of the Galatian's intention to return the enslaving effects of the law.

In his paper, *Ethnocentric Legalism and the Justification of the Individual: Rethinking some New Perspective Assumptions*, Andrew Hassler explains the dangers of transferring from the impartial grace of God to the performance of the law; such action creates a lifestyle that disregards the freedom Christ purchased for all.⁵⁸ Hassler differs from some of the previous authors and views the relationship between the law and righteousness as mutually-inclusive, and this defines God's dealings with human beings. For Hassler, obedience comes from the recognition of how the relationship between work and righteousness ensues.⁵⁹

Secondary Sources

Literature from this source adds a layer of interpretation and analysis to the discussion on Christian liberty. The literature explored provides a biblical interpretation of the ideas of Christian liberty in the scriptures and how they are relevant today. The published sources examined in this project were found useful and relevant to the review of the literature and study. This project focuses on how Christians should live responsibly with their freedom in Christ, literature concerning itself with the themes of slavery to Christ, self-restraint, and limits on Christian liberty and legalism. Christian liberty is a vast field, and it would be impossible to go through the vast amount of literature within the time constraint available for the project.

⁵⁷ Fee, and Hubbard, 669.

⁵⁸ Andrew Hassler, "Ethnocentric Legalism and the Justification of the Individual: Rethinking Some New Perspective Assumptions," *JETS* 54 no.2 (June 2011): 315.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 321.

Slaves of Christ

In the book, *Slaves: The Hidden Truth About Your Identity in Christ*, John McArthur unveils the essential information that may keep the believer from a fulfilling relationship with God. McArthur explains how the most profound reality of every believer's relationship with Christ. His book positions the doctrine of the believer's slavery to Christ in its proper place in a person's thinking. This book helps this study as it provides a catalyst for discerning the relationship between Christian discipleship and Christian liberty. MacArthur employs the concept of slavery in the Greco-Roman era to explain the believer's true identity in Christ.⁶⁰ During this period, personal freedom was prized, slavery was vilified, and self-imposed slavery was scorned and despised. However, for Paul, whose singular ambition was to be pleasing to Christ, there could not have been a more appropriate self-designation. Paul's life revolved around the Master.⁶¹ Nothing else—including his agenda—mattered.⁶² In an era where slavery was such a disparaged experience, Paul, as an expression of his commitment to Christ, voluntarily chose to become a slave, submitting to the Lordship of Christ and forgoing his freedom for a more worthy pursuit. Christian liberty is freedom from the law that provides believers with the ability to live for Christ.

Murray Harris, in his book, *Slaves of Christ*, reveals that in the New Testament, freedom is presented as a voluntary surrender to God's will. Unlike slavery in the Greco-Roman, which was forced servitude, slaves of Christ willingly offer themselves in service and submission to God.⁶³ This book is a necessary contribution to the development of the thesis by providing a clear

⁶⁰ McArthur, *Slaves*, 36.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶³ Murray J. Harris, *Slaves of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 36.

scriptural idea about how Christians ought to conduct themselves and use their liberties to serve Christ rather than their selfish interests. Slaves of Christ do not own themselves; it is the duty of the slave to obey his master's dictates.⁶⁴ This suggests that we give ourselves up in order to pursue a higher calling, which is service to God. Paul and other disciples describing themselves as “slaves of God” and this word is used as a privilege, not an obligation placed by some “overlord” who forces his will on his subjects. There are Christians who believe that since the book of John (John 15:12; Gal. 4:7) describes believers as sons, how can this description be reconciled with the slavery metaphor. The biblical description of believers as “sons” does not invalidate the metaphor of slavery to Christ but rather demarcates its boundaries and limitations. Believers should understand themselves as both sons and slaves.

Christian liberty frees believers from the law’s demands and consequently presents the opportunity to impose self-restraint on themselves to serve God's will.⁶⁵ This is a decision every Christian must commit to pursuing. Since slavery connotes ownership, the Christian must see his or her life as owned by God, and their freedom must be used in service to God. The Christian's intention is subject to the will of Christ, and in moments of conflict, the Christian must choose God’s will over personal interest. The Apostle Paul was writing to the Corinthian church about the dangers of disregarding God’s grace. He cautioned the church with these words, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Cor. 6:12). Paul warns the Corinthian Christians against the permissive culture of the Greco-Roman world.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Murray J. Harris, *Slaves of Christ*, 31.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁶ Adewale J. Adelokun, “Re-reading 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 in the Context of Nigerian Pentecostals’ Theology of Sex,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37(1): 1, accessed February 27, 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v37i1.1560>.

Jane Martin Soskice, in her book, *The Kindness of God*, explains the reason for the scarce usage of the term slavery in the Bible. The description slave of Christ or slave of God was a badge of honor, which enjoyed some popularity in the Pauline Epistles and the early church. Despite its biblical warrant, some contemporary Christians have little understanding or sympathy with the institution of slavery and the figures of speech it generates.⁶⁷ There is a difference between the Pauline ideas of slavery and sociopolitical notions of slavery. The Christian description of slaves of righteousness must not be understood from a cultural perspective but a theological viewpoint. Matthew Lee Anderson advocates the need to “guard against conflating our understanding of Christian freedom with our culture's premise that freedom is our absolute right to do whatever we want without harming others.”⁶⁸ It is essential to decouple the Christian perspective of freedom from culture’s libertarian understanding of freedom as a license for an unbridled expression of an individual’s desires. Christian liberty should be expressed within the bounds of scripture, not culture.

Throughout the scriptures, believers have referred to each other as slaves of Christ and have also been described as slaves of God.⁶⁹ Unlike the contemporary notion of slavery as a forced servitude against the individual’s will, believers are slaves of Christ not out of coercion or compulsion but love (Gal. 5:13). For the believer, slavery to Christ is the self-determined choice to devote one’s life in service to Christ. The description slaves of God were one that the believers were proud to be identified as (1 Cor. 7:22). They were not offended by the description; neither were they coerced to accept such a label but proudly identified themselves as Christ’s servants.

⁶⁷ Jane Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 68.

⁶⁸ Matthew Lee Anderson, *Earthen Vessels: Why Our Bodies Matter to our Faith* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2011), 29.

⁶⁹ See Murray J. Harris, *Slaves of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 20-24.

Dale B. Martin expounds on the metaphor of slavery in the Bible. In his book, *Slavery as Salvation*, he explains Paul's description of himself as a slave of Christ and as a slave of all. According to him, Paul's slavery does not represent self-abasement.⁷⁰ Slavery in Christ is not a humiliating experience; it is not a description that denounces a person's worth but acknowledges the believer's service and submission to Christ. It is a decision that every believer should make. Paul saw himself as a servant of Christ. He believed that his entire life's purpose was to fulfill the will of his Master and do His bidding; this is what Christian liberty entails.

Christian liberty celebrates freedom from sin and the law and the voluntary commitment to become Christ's slave. Paul in Gal. 4:22-31 explains how God had reversed the original conditions of the Gentiles who were considered outsiders of God's covenant with the Jews. Through the grace of God, freedom is now available to them by faith.⁷¹ As such, the decision to voluntarily commit one's life to Christ from the idea that Christ sets a person free from serving sin to serving him, and anytime the believers find themselves reverting to their sinful ways; this betrays the freedom that Christ purchased on the cross (Gal. 3:10-13). The believer should not understand slavery to Christ as submission and subversion of an individual's will to please a tyrant. The modern understanding of slavery can cloud the believer's interpretation of what slavery to Christ entails.

John McArthur observes that if a Christian persists in disobedience and yet claims to belong to Christ, that person betrays the reality of their profession.⁷² Obedience produced by the Holy Spirit's inner workings is a better guarantee of the Christian profession than obedience

⁷⁰ See Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1990), 117-35.

⁷¹ John D. Barry et al, *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Gal. 4:22-31, notes.

⁷² Barry et al, *Faithlife Study Bible*, Gal. 4:22-31, notes.

provided by the law (Gal. 3:23-24; 4:3). The law was a pedagogue. Its purpose was to serve as a guardian until the promised Seed, Christ, came.⁷³ The law provided moral training until Christ came, and people could be justified by faith in him. It is worth noting that the Law did not lead anyone to Christ but was the disciplinarian until Christ came.⁷⁴

Believers should understand their position in Christ as life above sin and reproach, a reality that helps Christians to continuously walk by faith, trusting only Christ as their source and sufficiency (2 Cor. 3:5). John MacArthur asserts that individuals who call themselves Christians must proclaim to the world that everything about them, including their self-identity, is found in Jesus Christ since they have denied it and obeyed Him.⁷⁵ The expression of a believer's liberty should serve as an example to other believers and draw unbelievers to Christ. If Christian liberty, which ought to set a person free from sin, entangles that individual with the yoke of bondage, then is that person truly free in Christ?

In his book, *Preaching Bondage*, Chris L. de Wet notes that the idea of slavery should not be the concern of the believer since real slavery is when an individual is bound to sin.⁷⁶ Real slavery is when an individual is shackled to fetters of sin and does not possess the strength of will to live a righteous life (Romans 7:14-19). The effect was the need for a perfect response to the canker of sin, which necessitated the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross as the perfect remedy for sin. What the Mosaic law failed to accomplish was realized in Christ. To be

⁷³ Michael J. Smith, "The Role of Pedagogue in Galatians," *Faculty Publications and Presentations Paper 115* (2006): 213, http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/sor_fac_pubs/115.

⁷⁴ D.K. Campbell, "Galatians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J.F. Walvoord & R.B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 2:600.

⁷⁵ McArthur, *Slaves*, 11.

⁷⁶ Chris L. de Wet, *Preaching Bondage: John Chrysostom and the Discourse of Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

unrestrained and bonded does not qualify as freedom, but to be subject to every parlous passing whim and fancy. In short, it is to be a slave to one's passions.⁷⁷

Safranek notes that freedom is not an abandonment of restraints or responsibility. It is the ability to gain independence from the enticement of sin and pursue righteousness. To be subject to one's passions and yet claim to be free is an illusion that has blinded some people. Safranek's thoughts reflect this project's focus: to advocate for the use of Christian liberty as a guide to living a disciplined and responsible Christian life. J. Paul Sampley agrees with the thoughts of Safranek. In his book, *Walking in Love*, he posits that people would have no option but to continue under sin with the predictable consequences of enmity with God without the God-given renewal of minds. The renewed mind would prioritize pleasing God above personal pleasure (Romans 12:1-2); it would responsibly apply the liberties made available by Christ. Christians would be conformed to this world/eon/age and do things that are not appropriate.⁷⁸ The sacrifice of Christ is expressed in a renewed mind that is no longer subject to sin's consequences.

Sin is what enslaves the human mind and reveals its purpose in the actions of people. True freedom is liberation from sin made possible by Christ, and Christian liberty is anchored in the redemptive work of Christ (Romans 6:6). The preservation of that liberty is necessary for a healthy Christian lifestyle.

Limits of Christian Liberty

The freedom found in Christ is a priceless reality that frees the believer from the demands of the Mosaic Law and legalism. Christian liberty is an outstanding experience that unburdens the believer and provides the freedom to serve Christ without the fear of failing. The freedom

⁷⁷ John P. Safranek, *The Myth of Liberalism* 195.

⁷⁸ J. Paul Sampley, *Walking in Love* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 63.

enjoyed by the believer has also been abused and grossly misunderstood. The Apostle Paul was writing to the Corinthian church about the excesses of Christian liberty penned down these words as a caution against the tendency to slip into and disregard God's grace. He writes, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any (1 Corinthians 6:12)."

The concept of freedom is an interesting concept about the human condition. It demands that a person must restrict and restrain himself in order to be free (Romans 6:11). The clarion call for people to be free to do as they please comes with consequences; so when Christians understand their liberty as an opportunity to act as they please, that idea is flawed and cannot be validated by the scriptures. An individual who accedes to every desire is neither admired nor emulated. This truth is validated by human experience. Perpetually drawn from the object to object, the person is the subject rather than the master of spontaneous desire.⁷⁹ Restraints placed on Christians are not intended to coil the expression of their liberty but to serve as a deterrent against reverting to legalism.

Gys Loubser, in his paper, *Paul's Ethic of Freedom*, warns that the pneumatological ethics of freedom is not an advocacy for sinful behaviors but a well-ordered life in the absence of the law's dictates and is aligned with the divine and loving guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁰ This paper is vital to the project by admonishing believers to understand their liberty as a calling to a well-behaved lifestyle. Christian liberty does not require the law to produce a disciplined life since the Holy Spirit, through His leading, ensures that believers order their lives within the

⁷⁹ Safranek, *The Myth of Liberalism*, 194.

⁸⁰ Gys, M.H. Loubser, "Paul's Ethic of Freedom," *Neotestamentica* 39, no. 2 (2005): 327.

boundaries set by the scriptures. Some Christians willfully sin, having the preconceived notion that Christ will forgive them of any sin committed.

People speak volumes about the weakness of humanity, the individual's vulnerability to mistakes and failures, the impossibility of perfection. Although these are significant concerns, the Holy Spirit's power in the believer guarantees victory over the passions of the flesh (Gal. 5:16-18). It strengthens the will to resist the allures of sin. The decision to conjecture excuses for one's failures is the deception that sin produces. It presents human beings as weak and disregards the work of the Holy Spirit. Believers should not be compared to the unregenerate who are subject to the dictates and manipulations of sin but have the remedy over sin, which is the power of the Holy Spirit.

The believer's liberty must be exercised at the expense of weaker Christians (Rom. 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 10:29b). Weak Christians refer to those who are still committed to observing certain parts of the law. Paul's message urges the Roman Christians to withhold judgment of their fellow believers and avoid behaving in a manner that causes others to stumble in their faith (Rom. 14:13-23). In his paper, *Slaves of Christ or Willing Servant*, John Byron explains how Christian liberty ought to be used, not to the detriment of the weaker community members. Paul advocates the giving up of one's rights for the good of others.⁸¹ Christian liberty is not the insensitive expression of the believer's freedom in ways that undermine a weaker Christian; it is the respectful adherence to the Holy Spirit's guidance in the believer's lifestyle. The Apostle Paul warns that although the expression of a Christian's liberty may be deemed lawful, it does not legitimize the actions produced if it seeks to undermine others' faith or disregard the instructions of scripture.

⁸¹ John Byron, "Slaves of Christ or Willing Servant" *Neotestamentica* 37, no.2 (2003): 189.

Loubser further warns that the believer's primary responsibility is doing fulfilling God's will in every situation. There might be guidelines of which the Christian is mindful or not. Whatever the guidelines, the believer's responsibility is to love their neighbor and concretely prove it. The believer is duty-bound by the scriptures to ensure that their liberty does not become a yoke of bondage for weaker Christians (Romans 14:1-3). Love for each other sets the limits for the expression of a Christian's privilege. Paul Spicker agrees with Loubser, and he describes the idea of freedom as being considerate of the liberty of others who are weak and vulnerable.⁸²

Critical Works and Peer-Reviewed Journals

Several peer-reviewed journals lay out a biblical and theological foundation on Christian liberty. Scripture teaches that believers are free from the shackles of sin through the redemptive acts of Christ and have become slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:20-22). M.H. Loubser, in his paper, *Life in the Spirit as Wise Remedy for Folly of the Flesh*, explains that Christ's victory guarantees human freedom.⁸³ Christian liberty is not an intellectual, cultural, or philosophical aspiration but a spiritual reality made possible by the finished work of Christ. The scriptures describe sin as a tyrant who suppresses the will of its subjects.⁸⁴ Since the fall of Adam, humanity has experienced bondage to sin and its debilitating effects. The Mosaic law and its several interventions could not bring the needed freedom to help humankind serve God in righteousness.

The libertarian notions of freedom that champions the need for people to pursue their desires without restraint fail to consider the enslaving power of sin (Romans 6:15-17; 7:14-20),

⁸² Spicker, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*, 14.

⁸³ Loubser, "Life in the Spirit as Wise Remedy for Folly of the Flesh," *Neotestamentica* Vol. 43, no. 2 (2009).

⁸⁴ Romans 6:14-16

which feigns freedom and holds people hostage to their passion inclinations. John Byron describes freedom as an opportunity for slavery. Byron explains that Paul's description of himself as a slave of Christ operates only within the sphere of divine obligation but consequently claims freedom of choice.⁸⁵

The Call for Self-Restraint

The discipline to live within the scriptural instruction of how the believers ought to conduct themselves is a function of a proper understanding of what Christian liberty entails. Richard Bauckman, in his book, *God and the Crisis of Freedom*, advises that an authentic Christian lifestyle is an antidote to the compelling desires and addictions of contemporary life.⁸⁶ When Christians chose to obey God, this is not an alienating loss of freedom but rather liberation from compulsions that are detrimental to our faith.⁸⁷

The Corinthians lived with the impression that they were free to live life as they deem fit, and while Paul does not argue that with that logic, he provides a restraint: all things are lawful, but he will not be subjected to his passions (1 Cor. 6:12). Timothy Saleska, in his paper, *Epiphany 2*, proposes that the phrase 'All things are lawful' suggests that Paul was only reechoing slogans used by the Corinthians to justify their behavior.⁸⁸ Paul makes a counterpoint to the slogan. He refuses to be brought under the power of anything that undermines his liberty. Paul's response to the Corinthian slogan echoes the lesson that Christians must apply wisdom

⁸⁵ John Byron, "Slaves of Christ or Willing Servant: Paul's Self-description in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 and John 9:16-18" *Neotestamentica* 37, no.2 (2003): 194.

⁸⁶ Richard Bauckman, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 2002), 17.

⁸⁷ Bauckman, *God and the Crisis of Freedom*, 17.

⁸⁸ Timothy Saleska, "Epiphany 2: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20." *Concordia Journal* 40 (January 2015): 2, accessed February 27, 2020, <http://scholar.csl.edu/cj/vol40/iss4/16>

and discernment in their daily dealing. The intelligence in Paul's warning is still relevant to the contemporary church. The freedom that Christ provides should not become the lynchpin for an unbridled lifestyle faulted with the assumption that Christian liberty endorses every kind of behavior.

Christians must subscribe to the appropriate boundaries that preserve the liberty provided by Christ. According to Safranek, restraint, obedience, and docility do not challenge the concept of freedom but are required because they allow the individual to order his life to those goods that constitute his telos.⁸⁹

A Higher Standard

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus presents a reinterpretation and exposition of the Mosaic law. Righteousness was not a matter of keeping externals of the law. Righteousness is a matter of the heart, as described in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:20). The disciples are held to a higher standard of showing what Christian character should be. A fair and measured understanding of Christian liberty is that Christ sets people to empower them to live as God intended before the Fall. When a person gets saved, not only is their freedom from sin celebrated, but demand is also placed on them to live up to a higher standard: God's Word. Jesus warns that the disciples described as salt can lose their saltiness and become ineffective in their Christian witness. This notion sets the disciples apart from the popular religious culture and practice of the time.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Safranek, *The Myth of Liberalism*, 198.

⁹⁰ Ranko Stefanovic, "The Meaning and Message of the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount," 181.

Theological Foundations

The theological ideas governing the concept of Christian liberty are anchored in the deliberations of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and Paul's rebuke to the churches in Galatia. Both passages address the dangers associated with legalism and the practical applications of Christian liberty. The biblical principle of this project is that Christian liberty frees the believer from the Mosaic Law's demands but does not exonerate that person from maintaining high moral standards.

The believer's freedom in Christ must be used responsibly. The project researcher intends to examine how the concepts of biblical Christian liberty will help the members of the ICGC avoid the dangers of legalism and libertinism. Many scholars consider Christian liberty to be the primary theme in Paul's letter to the Galatian churches. Samuel Vollenweider describes the letter as the "Magna Charta of Christian freedom."⁹¹ Paul uses terms such as set free, deliver, rescue, liberate (Gal. 1:4; 3:13), and even describes people as no longer slaves (Gal. 4:7).⁹² Paul focuses on Christian liberty because of a report he received about the troubles in the Galatian churches. There is some indication that the church was being encouraged to follow the Mosaic law (Gal. 4:10, 21).

⁹¹ Samuel Vollenweider, *Freiheit als neue Schöpfung: Eine Untersuchung zur Eleutheria bei Paulus und in seiner Umwelt*, FRLANT 147 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 285.

⁹² See also Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 320.

The Jerusalem Council

In Acts 15, the early church was in conflict over the law and deeply held assumptions and traditions. It was a visceral reaction against Paul in his witness to the Gentiles.⁹³ The Jerusalem Council of 49 A.D. was convened to discuss the appropriateness of placing limits on the liberties of Gentile Christians after complaints from the Jerusalem brethren. The problem of the Jerusalem Council was the conflict over the law (Acts 15:1). The New Testament Scholar F.F. Bruce sees the church's state at that time as full of people who were the righteous remnant of Judaism. To advocate for any relaxation of the terms of the Abrahamic covenant, which is sealed in the flesh by circumcision, would be to disregard all the claims of the righteous remnant.⁹⁴ The Mosaic law was to serve as a guardian that disciplined the nation of Israel and prepared them for the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:23-25).

The story of the Jerusalem Council of 49 A.D. affects a person's understanding of Paul's confrontation with Peter (Gal. 2:11-13). The resolution from the Jerusalem Council conflicts with the Galatian Christians' decision to revert to legalism (Gal. 3). When the Judaizers led the Galatians back to legalism, they were not just leading them into bondage but moral and spiritual infancy.⁹⁵ The principle from the passage is that Christian liberty is a departure from adherence to the Mosaic law. The law had its purpose, but when Christ came, the law's purpose was made redundant (Gal. 3:25).

This appeal to religious legalism was of grave concern for Paul. Reverting to the Mosaic law was not a step toward maturity but a step back into childhood, which troubled the Apostle.

⁹³ Bishop Sally Dyck, "Open Letter to the Northern Illinois Conference," November 19, 2003. <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Bishop-Dyck-s-Open-Letter-to-NIC.html?soid=1101858679078&aid=9DAyXoMc100>

⁹⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 287.

⁹⁵ W.W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* Vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 705.

W.W. Wiersbe acknowledges that the law was not God's final revelation but a preparation for Christ's final revelation.⁹⁶ Andrew Knowles describes Paul's reaction to the Galatian churches' challenges, "The Jewish teachers are paying the Galatians a lot of attention, but they aren't doing them any good. Paul may not be impressive, but at least he is telling them the truth. He feels like a pregnant mother enduring a spasm of pain. He is straining to bring the Galatians to birth in the image of Christ."⁹⁷

The lessons from the Jerusalem council of 49 A.D. are evident in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Paul begins his letter by presenting a series of masterful illustrations and arguments to prove the law's inferiority to the gospel (Gal. 3:10-14) and to establish the true purpose of the law (Gal. 3:19-25).⁹⁸ Paul's letter to the Galatian is still relevant today. The same kind of perversion of the gospel that Paul addresses in his letter is seen today. Legalism, which teaches that justification depends on a person's efforts, is "the most persistent enemy of the gospel of grace because it denies the sufficiency of the Cross."⁹⁹

Christian liberty must be used responsibly (Gal. 5:1). This liberty must be cherished and appropriated responsibly. In the New Testament, the concept of Christian liberty is succinctly explained by Paul the Apostle, "Standfast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."¹⁰⁰ The freedom that Christ offers to believers is the freedom to serve God without the entanglements of sin. From the Garden of Eden, sin has always impeded man's relationship with God. The result of Adam and Eve's

⁹⁶ W.W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* Vol. 1, 705.

⁹⁷ Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide*, ed. 1st Augsburg books (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 610.

⁹⁸ NKJV Spirit-Filled Bible, 1694.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Galatians 5:1

disobedience ushered sin into the world (Rom. 5:19-21). It is against this backdrop that Christ had to pay the price for Adam's transgression. Fred Sanders has argued that Christian salvation is not a separate affair where God conducts further activities in the believer's life that somehow parallel with God's activities in Christ's life. Instead, salvation denotes being included in Christ so that what happened in Christ is also made to apply to believers.¹⁰¹

The Curious Case of the Corinthian Church

The principle is that Christian liberty is a right that should be exercised responsibly (1 Cor. 10:23). Paul's letter to the church at Corinth had already addressed Christian liberty and advised the church that although all things are lawful, they are all not profitable (1 Cor. 6:12). Paul explains that the exercise of a person's liberties is secondary to their neighbor's wellbeing.¹⁰² The Christians in Corinth emphasized their freedom; their catchphrase was "Everything is permissible," which explains their perspective.¹⁰³ The Corinthians viewed their freedom as an opportunity to pursue their interests, but Paul understood it as an opportunity to benefit and build up others.¹⁰⁴ Christ has set them free from pagan superstition and Jewish legalism, and now they can do what they like because everything comes from God.¹⁰⁵

As the church in Corinth tried to grapple with the implications of eating foods dedicated to idols, Paul agrees with them to an extent and appealed to the Scripture to explain that any food

¹⁰¹ Fred Sanders, "Wesleyan View" in *Five Views on the Extent of the Atonement* (ed. Adam J. Johnson; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 166.

¹⁰² Lumina Bible Study, "1 Corinthians," accessed 17 June 2020, <http://netbible.org/bible/1+Corinthians+10#>

¹⁰³ B. Winter, "1 Corinthians," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, eds. D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Motyer & G.J. Wenham (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 4:1177.

¹⁰⁴ Robert L. Plummer, "Eating Idol Meat in Corinth: Enduring Principles from Paul's Instructions," *SBJT* 6:3 (Fall 2002): 67.

¹⁰⁵ Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide*, ed. 1st Augsburg books, 584.

for which a person thanks God is acceptable for human consumption.¹⁰⁶ In the passage, it is tempting to think that Paul would advocate exercising Christian liberty to eat the meat, but that was not the case.¹⁰⁷ He instead advocated abstaining for the sake of the heathen's moral consciousness. Paul's interaction with the church at Corinth undergirds the point that Christian freedom is not absolute. It must be qualified through the exclusion of any attitude or action that is not beneficial to the development of the individual (10:1–23) or not constructive to the growth of the community (8:1–13).¹⁰⁸

Andrew Knowles comments on Paul's explanation of the believer's freedom, "So Paul sets a limit to Christian freedom. Christian liberty is not permission to do whatever we like. Christian liberty is the freedom from the law in order to serve God and to put others' needs and feelings before our own. This is what Paul tries to do—and in so doing, he follows the way of Jesus."¹⁰⁹ The principle is that Christian liberty must be regulated by love for others.¹¹⁰ Christians should be willing to limit the exercise of their liberties because of the love for others, and Christian behavior must be for the glory of God. Every action must be construed as an opportunity to glorify God rather than a Christian expressing their freedom.¹¹¹ It is essential to balance liberty with responsibility.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Robert L. Plummer, "Eating Idol Meat in Corinth: Enduring Principles from Paul's Instructions," 67.

¹⁰⁷ W.W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* Vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books), 597.

¹⁰⁸ J.A. Davis, "1-2 Corinthians," in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 975.

¹⁰⁹ Knowles, *The Bible Guide*, 584.

¹¹⁰ D.K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J.F. Walvoord & R.B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 2:527.

¹¹¹ J.A. Davis, "1-2 Corinthians," in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, 975.

¹¹² Fee and Hubbard, eds., *The Eerdmans Companion*, 653.

Christ as Great Liberator

Another principle is that the purpose of Christian liberty is nullified every time the believer slips into a lifestyle of sin and compromise. Christian liberty outside the finished work of Christ is an illusion unsupported in scripture. The power of sin placed human beings in a state that made it impossible to live in righteousness outside of God's grace (Gal. 4:3-7). The result of the salvation Christ offers is to restore man to God by giving back the freedom to serve God without sin or any form of restraint (Gal. 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16). The pre-conversion experience of human beings paints a dark and gloomy picture of the bondage that traps people. MacArthur explains that every human being is under the dominion of darkness and the domain of sin until the moment of redemption. The unbeliever is wholly corrupted by the bondage of the fallen condition and utterly unable to free himself from it.¹¹³

Paul declares Christ as the great liberator who sets people free from bondage (Gal. 5:1). He cautions the Galatian church to safeguard the liberty enjoyed in Christ by making wise and discerning choices that undermine Christ's work. Paul appeals to the Christians in Galatia to stand firm in the freedom made available by Christ since they were in danger of becoming entangled in the Mosaic law. Loubser describes a believer as a person who acts wisely, not by living a morally right life according to the community's set rules, albeit Christian, but by living a crucified life originating from allegiance with Christ and his love.¹¹⁴ The Galatian church, which began by prioritizing its freedom in Christ, eventually slipped into bondage. It is against this backdrop that Paul teaches that their keeping of the law no longer defines God's people; rather,

¹¹³ MacArthur, *Slaves*, 121.

¹¹⁴ Loubser, "Life in the Spirit as Wise Remedy for Folly of the Flesh," 363.

their status before God depends exclusively on their faith in Christ (Gal 2:16, 20; 3:11–12, 23–25).¹¹⁵

The yoke of religion weighs heavy on the soul of the Christian. It makes unrealistic demands on believers and chains people into rules and regulations that have no bearing on their faith. David Wenham describes the shortcomings of the law as a failure to produce the right relationship with God and obedient ethical living.¹¹⁶ According to God's standard, the ability to live according to God is not the function of religious adherence to rules and regulations but a right relationship with God. The yoke of religion is burdensome, but Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden is light. The Christian who embraces the yoke of Christ receives the freedom to fulfill his will, but the religious legalist is bound by the yoke of bondage (Gal. 5:1).

The believer is no longer under the law but under grace (Romans 6:14). This does not indicate that Christians are now outlaws but that believers are no longer under the law's external influence to fulfill God's will because of the Holy Spirit's internal leading. The purpose of Christ's death was to set people free from slavery to sin (John 8:34-36). Therefore, it defeats the purpose of Christ's death when believers go back to religious legalism and become entangled in the maze of "dos" and "don'ts."¹¹⁷ Jesus is the key to freedom.¹¹⁸ Donald Bloesch describes Paul's disdain for legalism. Paul vehemently disagreed both with the misunderstandings in Judaism. He is against the erroneous notions in the Christian community in which salvation hinged on adherence to the dictates of the law.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ John D. Barry et al, *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹¹⁶ David Wenham, *Paul and Jesus: A True Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 56.

¹¹⁷ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* Vol. 1, 714.

¹¹⁸ John Stott, *Why I Am a Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 93.

¹¹⁹ Donald G. Bloesch, "The Reformers shed the Shackles of Legalism," *Christianity Today* Vol. 25 (October 1981), 18.

D.S. Dockery makes a brief remark on the dangers of legalism. He proposes that a misunderstanding of Christ's freedom creates the tendency toward self-indulgence, an act that can express itself in destructive words and actions towards other believers. Real spiritual freedom manifests itself in love both for God and for each other. Therefore, it is compulsory to be guided by the Holy Spirit in attitude, decisions, and actions. Failure to follow the Spirit's leading as a Christian results in the manifestation of a sinful lifestyle that is unworthy of the kingdom of God.¹²⁰ On the other hand, a Christian who yields to the Spirit's leading and is controlled by His dictates, expresses qualities that reflect supernatural godliness that transcends the law's requirements.¹²¹

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul cautions the believers, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"¹²² Some believe that since grace increases when sin thrives, the more believers' sin, the more grace they experience. An incorrect interpretation of the believer's freedom can affect how Christian liberty is understood.¹²³ The principle is that the abundance of God's grace is not designed to encourage sin, and freedom from the law does not equal license for lack of personal restraint (Rom. 6:1-2).¹²⁴

Every time a Christian reverts to sin or religious legalism, the freedom provided by Christ is undermined. It is prioritizing and preferring servitude to sin rather than slavery to Christ.

¹²⁰ Don Stewart, "What Are Some of the Effects of Sin on the Life of the Believer," *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed 11 August, 2020, https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_562.cfm.

¹²¹ D.S. Dockery, *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 710.

¹²² Romans 6:1-2

¹²³ J.A. Witmer, "Romans" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures Vol. 2* (eds. J.F. Walvoord & R.B. Zuck; Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 461.

¹²⁴ Fee & Hubbard, *The Eerdmans Companion*, 669.

Slavery to sin is the polar opposite of divine bondage.¹²⁵ Christians are always in danger of sinful bondage when obeying God's word, and the leading of the Holy Spirit is taken for granted. Christian liberty is only possible because of the salvific acts of Christ in redeeming humanity from the bondage of sin. Believers would always be conflicted between pursuing God's will and chasing their proclivities, but when in doubt, the decision to lovingly obey God's word must be preeminent.

Christian liberty entails that we transition from strict adherence to the Mosaic Law to obeying to following the Holy Spirit's leading. All that is required of Christians is obedience. There is a difference between obedience resulting from the fear of divine retribution or the attempt to seek righteousness and obedience birthed out of a loving relationship with God. The Christian places value on pleasing God above every other competing interest. Christians understand liberty affords believers to obey God without any impediments. In the truth of the scriptures, the believer finds his true liberty. Liberty is not defined as the ability to disobey God with impunity but to obey Him spontaneously without effective hindrance.¹²⁶

A person who gets saved and chooses to obey God's word can better live a life that pleases God. Disobedience was a primary manifestation of the sinful nature, and obedience is the primary manifestation of the believer's righteous nature. When Christians freely disobey God without any convictions, highlighting the inappropriateness of their actions, this raises question marks of the authenticity of the person's faith. Christian liberty makes it easy to serve God, a reality that is not possible for the unregenerate.

¹²⁵ Chris L. de Wet, *Preaching Bondage: John Chrysostom and the Discourse of Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 74.

¹²⁶ Tenney, *Galatians*, 18.

The New Testament commands believers to submit to Christ completely, not just as spiritual employees but as people who exclusively belong to Him (Gal. 2:20; James 4:7). People are not coerced to obey Christ without question and follow Him without complaint.¹²⁷ People who claim to belong to Christ but persist in patterns of disobedience betray the reality of their profession.¹²⁸ Therefore, Christian character and conduct are not determined and regulated by law but emanates when from faithfulness to Christ, which is the product of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the believer's obedience.¹²⁹

The contemporary church is focused on cultivating its spirituality and expanding its influence in society and social media. However, the church must note that obeying God's word results in Christians dying to their self-interests and living wholly for Christ and his kingdom.¹³⁰ Also, discipleship, like slavery, requires a life of total self-discipline, a humble disposition towards others, a wholehearted devotion to the Master alone. In the New Testament, *doulos* is a term that is used to designate a master's slave (one bound to him) and also a follower of Christ. The term describes a relationship of absolute dependence. The master and the servant stand on opposite sides—the former having a full claim, the latter having a full commitment. The servant can exercise no will or initiative on his or her own.¹³¹

Christ took upon himself the “form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). Believers have transitioned from being slaves to sin to become slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). Another common

¹²⁷ McArthur, *Slaves*, 14.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 47

¹²⁹ Loubser, “Life in the Spirit as Wise Remedy for Folly of the Flesh,” 354.

¹³⁰ Donald G. Bloesch, “The Reformers shed the Shackles of Legalism,” *Christianity Today* 25 (October 1981): 20.

¹³¹ Walter M. Dunnnett, “Servant, Service,” *In Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 725.

New Testament term, *diakonos*, derives from a verb meaning “to wait at table,” “to serve.” As the Son of man, Jesus “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45).¹³² Believers must embody both New Testament expressions in their relationship with the Lord. There must be a willingness to obey the commands of Christ in everything, an eagerness to serve Jesus even in His absence, and a motivation that comes from knowing that the believer’s Lord and Savior is well pleased.¹³³

The Call for Authentic Christianity

The blatant disregard for righteous living is a troubling trend that can destroy the church's image and influence. Richard Bauckman advises believers to act as truly free people amid compelling desires. Contemporary life addictions may be what can best give tangible substance to Christian faith and life in Western society today.¹³⁴ Paul, the Apostle, warns against the tendency to take Christ's freedom for granted in his letter to the church in Rome (Romans 6:16-18).

Paul helps the believer understand that God’s grace provides people with the ability to obey God rather than their inclinations. This ability was not available in their pre-conversion experience. This does not isolate the Christian from falling into sin but rather guarantees victory over sin if the person is willing to partner with the Holy Spirit by obeying his leadings. David Wenham includes the caveat that the Apostle Paul does not propose a spiritual utopia where all Christians will live perfectly. Paul addresses an ongoing conflict in the Christian between the old

¹³² Walter M. Dunnnett, “Servant, Service,” *In Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 726.

¹³³ McArthur, *Slaves*, 47.

¹³⁴ Richard Bauckman, *God and the Crisis of Freedom* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 2002), 17.

sinful life of the flesh and the new life of the Spirit. Paul further entreats the Galatian Christians to live out their crucifixion with Christ and their new life.¹³⁵

Christians should not succumb to sin since they are dead to it and no longer slaves (Romans 6:11). The death of Christ and faith in his finished works on the cross provides freedom from the bondage to sin and the law (Col. 1:11-14). Therefore, It is not God's plan for slaves of righteousness to become enslaved to sin!¹³⁶ Habitual sinning will manifest into a state of slavery to sin. It is not freedom for a Christian's passion is given sovereignty to subvert the Holy Spirit's leading. A Christian that is properly related to Christ lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of such a life is that it produces good works.¹³⁷ Obedience to the instruction of God's Word, coupled with the Holy Spirit's inner working, makes it possible to use the freedom in Christ as a vehicle to pleasing God. J. Paul Sampley describes obedience to God as a disposition that begins in the heart. The heart is where the Spirit of Christ resides. When Christians realize how fundamental the Holy Spirit is to the believer's faith and see how closely the Spirit is knitted to the human heart, believers recognize the importance of the heart in understanding and living the life of faith (Romans 10:9-10).¹³⁸

Throughout the scripture, Christians are admonished to pursue a righteous lifestyle and never take their freedom in Christ for granted. Without a heart that yields to God, Christian conduct will only be driven by religious rituals rather than a loving relationship. Jesus admonishes believers to take His yoke because His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

¹³⁵ David Wenham, *Paul and Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 58.

¹³⁶ J.A. Witmer, "Romans" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* Vol. 2 (eds. J.F. Walvoord & R.B. Zuck; Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 464.

¹³⁷ Howard F. Vos, *Galatians: A Call to Christian Liberty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 14.

¹³⁸ J. Paul Sampley, *Walking in Love* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 63.

Christian liberty ceases to be an excuse for a sinful lifestyle when Christians become responsible for the freedom that Christ makes available.

Several principles of Christian liberty have been developed in the theological foundation. These principles are anchored in the New Testament, particularly the Pauline interpretation of the believer's freedom, understanding the idea of religious legalism, and how Christians should use their freedom in Christ. A biblical case study that focused on the life of the Corinthian church was also examined. The ideas and concepts distilled from the case study were meant to support the research project's purpose: understanding the biblical concept of Christian liberty would help believers live a disciplined and responsible life.

Theoretical Foundations

Clergy and theologians have extensively discussed the concept of Christian liberty. The significance of understanding the biblical concepts of Christian liberty cannot be overemphasized. The post-modern world is in a crisis of freedom; people are confused about the meaning of freedom. Amid the confusion, theologians generally agree that Christ is the source of true freedom.¹³⁹

Other scholars such as Richard Baxter, F.F. Bruce, James Montgomery Boice also address Christian liberty from religious legalism.¹⁴⁰ Religious legalism emphasizes a relationship with God based on rules and regulations, as defined by a church or religious organization. The crux of Christian freedom is to unhinge the yoke of religion that measures righteousness based

¹³⁹ McArthur, *Slaves*, 142. For further reading on this see Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, cited in John MacArthur, *The Glory of Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996), 171; James Montgomery Boice, *Romans*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 2:690; F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 133.

¹⁴⁰ See Thomas R. Schreiner "Works of the Law' in Paul" *Novum Testamentum* 33, no. 3 (Jan. 1991): 217-244.

on obedience to rules and rituals rather than righteousness imputed by a relationship with Christ. Anyone who gets saved is automatically declared righteous not because of any effort; instead, it results from Christ indwelling the person and changing the person's nature from sinful to righteous. Some scholars espouse the idea that any limits placed on Christian freedom contravene the tenets of Christian liberty.¹⁴¹ The concept of legalism has been sharply contested by liberal and conservative theologians who have pitched their tents at both ends of the spectrum.

Christian liberty expresses the idea of shifting allegiance from sin as a master to Christ, who is the perfect Master (Rom. 6:20-22).¹⁴² "Time and time again throughout the pages of Scripture, believers are referred to as slaves of God and slaves of Christ (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). Whereas the outside world called them Christians, the earliest believers repeatedly referred to themselves in the New Testament as the Lord's slaves. For them, the two ideas are synonymous. To be a Christian was to be a slave of Christ."¹⁴³ Freedom in Christ is not freedom to sin but freedom from sin, freedom to live as God intends, in truth and holiness (cf. 1 Peter 1:16).¹⁴⁴

Several models exist that justify the research being conducted. Dr. Brent K. Haggerty, in his Doctor of Ministry project, *A Journey Away from Legalism*, presents an orientation on legalism as a problem in the ministry of Stonecrest Community Church. Dr. Haggerty's model examines the dangers of legalism and libertinism within a specific ministry context. In this model, Haggerty measured ninety-one respondents' attitudes, first to establish a baseline for his study. Then, eleven months later, he measured their movement in discipleship orientation

¹⁴¹ See Elise Daniel, *Called to Freedom: Why you can be Christian and Libertarian* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 20.

¹⁴² McArthur, 141.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

regarding legalism.¹⁴⁵ The author makes this noteworthy remark on the danger of legalism, “The Christ-follower fixated on legalistic orientation is constantly trying to merit Christ’s love and acceptance because the life orientation of the person has bought into a philosophy of works-oriented faith that meets the expectations of a person or group. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus is the demonstration of God’s love for humankind.”¹⁴⁶

Unlike Dr. Haggerty’s work, this researcher’s project is not a baseline study on legalism; only aspects of legalism related to Christian liberty are studied. The primary investigator studies concepts of Christian liberty that are not just limited to legalism but also deals with the dangers of libertinism. The Apostle Paul warns believers about the dangers of undermining their freedom by embracing religious legalism (Gal. 3:1); Christians are called not to blind observance of rules but abiding faith.¹⁴⁷ Haggerty notes that “Religion is humanity’s best effort to reach God. Christianity is God’s best effort to reach humanity.”¹⁴⁸ Unlike Dr. Haggerty, this researcher believes that the challenge of Christian liberty is broader than just the dangers of legalism. It is also important to address threats that libertinism possesses when Christian liberty is abused.

The instrument focused on measuring the participants’ predisposition to legalism but could not prove an actual movement towards an abiding faith. The working assumption that believers who transition from legalistic orientation will move towards abiding faith leaves much

¹⁴⁵ See Brent K. Haggerty, “A Journey Away from Legalism: Measuring Stonecrest Community Church’s Movement in Discipleship Orientation,” (DMin diss., Alliance Theological Seminary, 2017) <https://search.proquest.com/openview/485482b864b270ecd6b3691635a7306e/1.pdf?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.

¹⁴⁶ Brent K. Haggerty, “A Journey Away from Legalism: Measuring Stonecrest Community Church’s Movement in Discipleship Orientation,” 22.

¹⁴⁷ Albert Benjamin Simpson, *Wholly Sanctified: Living a Life Empowered by the Holy Spirit* (Camp Hill, Penn.: Christian Publications, 1991), 12.

¹⁴⁸ Haggerty, “A Journey Away from Legalism,” 29.

room for doubt and ambiguity.¹⁴⁹ However, the research underscores the point that freedom from social rules does not free the believer from God's commands.¹⁵⁰

Another theoretical model is the Christian discipline of responsibility model. This model underscores the value of living responsibly. Christians are called to live a life devoted to honoring God, and believers must rise to the occasion by coming examples of Christian conduct to each other and in their community (1 Cor. 10:31). This research differs from the primary investigator's study because of the sociological elements present in the research that Dr. Moriah attempts to incorporate into his theological construct. In his research project, Dr. Lionel Maurice Moriah, *Christian Discipline: Legalism or Covenant Responsibility*, surveyed several Atlantic Baptist Churches to affirm the relevance of discipline among believers. He argues that Christian discipline is a ministry of covenant responsibility. Hence, it is the church's responsibility to teach Christian discipline and enforce it by ensuring that believers uphold the standards in God's Word.

This researcher shares some similarities with Dr. Moriah's study in examining the importance of how Christians living should use their liberty responsibly. However, there is a sharp difference in the approach.¹⁵¹ A significant portion of his research focuses on the importance of Christian discipline in congregational life, but this is not why this researcher expressed interest in the thesis project. A portion of Dr. Moriah's work focuses on how Christian discipline can be revitalized or institutionalized as part of the believer's responsibility to each other; this aspect of his work caught the researcher's attention.¹⁵² Dr. Moriah notes that

¹⁴⁹ Haggerty, "A Journey Away from Legalism," 63.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 92.

¹⁵¹ See Lionel M. Moriah, "Christian Discipline: Legalism or Covenant Responsibility," (DMin diss., Acadia Divinity College, 1997) <https://scholar.acadiau.ca/islandora/object/theses:2929>.

¹⁵² Ibid., 19.

“Christian believers who experienced the new life are called together into a life of community... this new relationship in terms that symbolize both privilege and responsibility...”¹⁵³

The theological genius Walter Brueggemann agrees with Moriah and concludes that,

All of them [relational positions] a restless reception of newness about to be given and press toward a new world over which we do not preside, but in which we live at home, adopted, freed, open, vulnerable, obedient, at risk. A child is always vulnerable. A friend is always at risk. A servant is always called to accountability. The relation discerned through these metaphors permits, indeed, requires a sense of self which is either unrecognized or resisted in our culture.¹⁵⁴

In addition to advocating for a responsible way of living, Dr. Moriah views having a church covenant as one of the resources that have great potential to reorient believers. The church is seen as a community of faith and is accountable to each other. This level of accountability can act as a guard against abusing freedoms provided by Christ. Moriah proposes that when believers become aware that they are accountable both to the Lord and to each other, there is a sense of responsibility that dawns on the heart of Christians to use their freedom responsibly. Also commenting on the relationship between the church and Christian responsibility, Jarold Zeman attests,

A commitment of present and new members to specific minimal disciplines (responsibilities) of Christian life and service, both personal and congregational (responsible membership), is essential. Such a covenant should be formulated gradually and in group discussion and should reflect the specific needs and opportunities of a local church at a given time. An artificial imposition of a traditional "standard church covenant" upon an unprepared congregation would hardly lead to the practice of vital discipleship and discipline.¹⁵⁵

A unique theoretical model is a Christian freedom from the perspective of a Freedperson. A Freedperson is an enslaved person who has been freed from the conditions of slavery, usually

¹⁵³ Lionel M. Moriah, “Christian Discipline: Legalism or Covenant Responsibility,” 167.

¹⁵⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 164.

¹⁵⁵ Jarold Zeman, “Church Discipline,” *Syllabus on Believer’s Church* (1986): 18.

by legal means.¹⁵⁶ Dr. Robin G. Thompson, in his Ph.D. dissertation titled, *For Freedom Christ has Set Us Free: Christian Freedom from a Freedperson's Perspective* dedicates a portion of his work to exploring terms and ideas associated with freedom. His paper focuses on freedom as described in the lived experience of freedpersons with particular emphasis on the freedom Paul proclaimed in his letter to the Galatian churches.

The author defends the position that the freedom spoken of in Gal. 5:1 entails spiritual freedom and personal freedom as well. The freed person considered freedom as liberty from actual slavery, not just freedom from the tyranny of the law. He posits that, in his letter to the Galatian churches, Paul would be aware that different groups and statutes comprised the churches and would need to be knowledgeable of their views of freedom, whether to correct or affirm them.¹⁵⁷ How would a freedperson understand the proclamation of Gal. 5:1, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free.” Dr. Robinson argues that slaves in the Galatian churches are unlikely to consider Jesus’ rescue to be complete since it was real slavery rather than spiritual slavery. However, they are likely to experience some change in their relationships within the fellowship of the church.¹⁵⁸

This theory contrasts with previous theories because, in addition to spiritual freedom, it also advocates personal freedom, not a theme explored by other writers. Whereas Robinson explores the socio-political and linguistic implications of Paul’s letter to the Galatian churches, the primary investigator of this project departs from that perspective. This author focuses on the

¹⁵⁶ See Sinclair Bell and Teresa Ramsby, *Free at Last! The Impact of Freed Slaves on the Roman Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

¹⁵⁷ Robin Thompson, “For Freedom Christ Has Set Us Free: Christian Freedom from a Freedperson’s Perspective,” (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2019), 213, <https://search.proquest.com/openview/fdcaa93e0575468850b58b73a23abfc0/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.

¹⁵⁸ Thompson, “For Freedom Christ Has Set Us Free,” 216.

practical implications of the passage related to Christian liberty by examining how the book of Galatians points to freedom from keeping the Mosaic Law. The book examines Christian liberty from the perspective of a freed person. However, Dr. Robinson summarizes his ideas in a clear and scriptural way that has meaning for all Christians; he writes,

Surely the freedpersons, or slaves longing to be set free, were quite struck when they heard the reasons that Christ set them free. He did not set them free to benefit himself; in fact, he gave himself for them. He had no ulterior motives, no plan of exploitation.⁵³ He set them free because he loved them, and his love was free of the lust that permeated the relationships many freeborn persons had with slaves and even with some freedpersons. He set them free so that each one could become an adopted child of God's family. He set them free for the purpose of experiencing freedom. Every reason Christ set them free was to benefit them, not to benefit himself.¹⁵⁹

The kinds of literature and models reviewed explores several scholarly ideas on the concept of Christian liberty. Some of the writing thoroughly investigates Christian freedom from a purely biblical perspective; others examine a historical or philosophical perspective. Since the subject of Christian freedom is a broad one and requires a multi-faceted approach to addressing it, the various literature reviewed, like Moriah and Haggerty's research, explored several concepts and opinions. The different writers' methods and approaches leave no room for ambiguity or assumption in the reader's mind.

Whiles several pieces of literature and models address the topic of Christian liberty; there seems to be a long silence on how a Christians should live out their freedom in Christ. Christian liberty is a decision executed by faith in the promise that the Christian is free from the Mosaic Law. This provides a gap in the literature. The gap exists because most writers are fascinated by the seeming paradox of being free from the bondage that sin provides and yet being yoked to Christ's righteousness. For this research, the primary investigator will adopt the model that

¹⁵⁹ Thompson, "For Freedom Christ Has Set Us Free," 225.

underscores the value of Christians using their freedom in Christ responsibly. This model would be in the context of the biblical books.

In Acts 15, as the Gentiles' mission gains momentum, the early church struggled with accepting non-Jewish Christians into fellowship without circumcision. Circumcision was necessary to be saved in addition to faith. Circumcision was a practice of the Jewish people as established by Genesis 17:9-14, and the believing Pharisees in Acts 15:1 make the argument that a person only enters God's people by becoming part of Israel first.¹⁶⁰ Paul notes that circumcision was involved in adhering to the whole Old Testament law (Gal. 5:3); as such, "The method of justification ultimately determines the method of sanctification (cf. Col. 2:6)."¹⁶¹ Requiring Gentiles to obey the Mosaic law had two implications. First, the Jews would be testing God (Deut. 6:16) since keeping the Mosaic Law was necessary to be sanctified, and secondly, they would place an unbearable yoke on the disciples' neck. The Apostle Peter settles the argument by stating that both Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace rather than accepting the yoke of obedience to the law (Acts 15:10-11).¹⁶² The principle in this passage is that Christian liberty enables believers to obey Christ lovingly. Obedience does not become an obligation but a decision to choose Christ above personal desires. Elwell and Beitzel explain the purpose of the Jerusalem council,

The Jerusalem Council established Christianity as a religion which offers divine favor as a free gift to be received by faith; it rejected human effort as a means of or contributor to salvation. By implication, it also dissociated Christianity from any attempt to restrict it to a particular racial, national, cultural, or social group. The council affirmed Christians to be free from the obligation to earn salvation through ceremonies or law-keeping. At the same time, it recognized the practical necessity of responsible and appropriate conduct,

¹⁶⁰ S.D. Toussaint, "Acts" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* Vol. 2 (eds. J.F. Walvoord & R.B. Zuck; Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 393.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Conrad Gempf, "Acts" in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* 4th Ed., (eds. D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Motyer, & G.J. Wenham (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1089.

which takes into account the moral nature of God and the sensitivities and concerns of other Christians.¹⁶³

The conclusions reached at the Jerusalem conference of 49 A.D. are inspired by the Holy Spirit and must have influenced Paul's letter to the Galatian churches. This researcher believes that the Holy Spirit was aware of the Galatian Christians' temptations to revert to a lifestyle based on the Mosaic Law that Christ has delivered them from (Gal. 3:1), and Paul's letter mirrors the message of the Jerusalem Council. Also, Peter's argument in Acts 15:7, where he shares his experience about the Holy Spirit ministering to Gentiles who believed, sounds similar to what Paul wrote in his letters (Gal. 2:11-21).

The models examined in this thesis have some similarities with the researcher's work; however, all these models focus primarily on legalism without considering other dangers to Christian liberty, such as libertinism. Additionally, the solutions proffered by the models are not exhaustive enough to address the problem of Christian liberty since they are mostly theoretical rather than practical.

¹⁶³ Walter A. Elwell & B.J. Beitzel, "Jerusalem Council" in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* Vol. 2, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1138.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Christian Liberty

This chapter will describe the specific details concerning the implementation of this thesis project. The intervention would require that the researcher examine scholarly works on Christian liberty, interact with the academic writings, and provide a comprehensive theological reflection on the subject. The researcher would also look at the case study in Acts 15, particularly the Jerusalem council of 49 A.D. and Colossians 2:11-15. The Christian life is a walk of faith based on our position in Christ. These lessons would be outlined to present the position that freedom from Mosaic Law requirements is not a license for sinful behavior but a transition to a godly lifestyle within a biblical Christian framework. Although there are several writings on Christian liberty; Elise Daniels, Andrews Torrance, Kristin Largen, and Guy Loubser provide different perspectives on Christian freedom worth exploring. The methodology would include examining biblical and non-biblical views on Christian liberty and providing a constructive critique rooted in the scriptures. The first three writings reviewed are grounded in philosophical theology, and the researcher would respond from a biblical perspective.

The intervention aims to educate believers, particularly members of the International Central Gospel Church, on Christian liberty. For some, it might serve as a refresher course. However, for others, it would serve as an important educational process designed to ground their faith and provide a better understanding of their Christian experience. The lessons developed from the project would be incorporated into the discipleship program of ICGC and help address the dangers of legalism and libertinism.

This research is not plowing new ground with a new theory but expanding on the existing research by providing a different approach to understanding Christian liberty. This new approach

explores addressing the dangers of libertinism by drawing lessons from the Pauline perspective in the book of Galatians. Freedom in Christ is not just soteriological but also ethical. Describing Christian liberty as a guard against libertinism is one perspective that previous literature has not significantly explored. This is what the researcher hopes to explore in this project.

Perspectives on Christian Liberty

Clergy and theologians have extensively discussed the concept of Christian liberty. The initial idea that emanates when a person thinks of Christian liberty is the celebration of freedom from the law's demands made possible by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The advent of Jesus Christ made freedom a historical reality. Christ ushers in a new way of existence, known as the 'new creation', which came into being.¹⁶⁴ The unregenerate person can only find freedom from sin outside a relationship with Christ. The finished work of Christ becomes the fulcrum on which the concept of freedom revolves. The law, with all its best intentions, could not provide freedom, and its ethical demands were impossible to satisfy. Christ, through his selfless acts on the cross, fulfilled the requirements of the law and freed people from the need to meet those requirements (col. 2:11-14). The post-modern world is in a crisis of freedom and most theologians agree that Christ is the source of true freedom.¹⁶⁵

Andrew Torrance and the Kierkegaardian Concept of Christian Freedom

Andrew Torrance presents a Kierkegaardian account of the freedom to become a Christian. Soren Kierkegaard departs from a purely biblical perspective of Christian liberty and

¹⁶⁴ J.A. Loubser, "The Contrast Slavery/Freedom as Persuasive Device in Galatians" *Neotestamentica* 28, no. 1 (1994): 169.

¹⁶⁵ McArthur, *Slaves*, 142. For further reading on this see Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, cited in John MacArthur, *The Glory of Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996), 171; James Montgomery Boice, *Romans*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 2:690; F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 133.

presents an existential position based on a leap of faith. Kierkegaard explains the individual's dependence on God and believes that God gives people the freedom to make their individual choices. As powerful as human freedom is, a person can only come to know God and develop a meaningful fellowship with Him by God graciously encountering Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit's power.¹⁶⁶

Kierkegaard advances the position that remaining a Christian is contingent on being immersed within an established church's culture.¹⁶⁷ This is a false view of salvation that focuses on a works salvation perspective; this is corrected in In John 1:12-13.¹⁶⁸ Christian freedom arms the individual with the mindset that the Christian life is repulsive to the secular mindset. Christianity is not the comfortable life people expect of it. Becoming a Christian requires making the necessary sacrifices demanded by God and passionately committing to struggle to respond to God.¹⁶⁹

The Kierkegaardian ideas on Christian freedom is a fusion of the power of God's grace and the human will. This perspective contradicts Ephesians 2:1, which describes how God, through his sovereign act, rescued believers from a life of sin and bondage. Any attempt to complement or diminish God's power by placing it on the same level as human will contradicts the biblical position on Christian liberty. The Kierkegaardian idea does not factor the place of human action in pleasing God and considers it inadequate. Kierkegaard further argues that any human action independent of God's grace or seeks to circumvent God's grace cannot deliver a relationship with God. However, Kierkegaard's view sacrifices truth for philosophical theology.

¹⁶⁶ Andrew B. Torrance, *The Freedom to become a Christian: A Kierkegaardian Account of Human Transformation in Relationship with God* (Bedford Square, London: T & T Clark, 2018), 143.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

Kierkegaard also recognizes that God allows human autonomy to be decisive for becoming a Christian. Kierkegaard's ideas on human autonomy contravene the scriptural view of God's election (Rom. 8:29-33). The doctrine of election refers to "the idea that God chooses a people or individuals to belong to him in a unique way."¹⁷⁰ In the Old Testament, God, through his sovereign act, chose Israel to be His people (Acts 13:17). The nation of Israel became God's people, not because of their own choice, but because God took the initiative and chose them. God's choice was not based on any particular virtues that they exemplified but rather on his promise to their forefather Abraham (Deut. 7:7-8). The same thoughts are found in the New Testament, where God's people are described as his "elect" or "chosen ones" (1 Pet. 2:9).¹⁷¹

According to Kierkegaard, "The absolutely greatest thing that can be done for a being, greater than anything one could make it into, is to make it free. It is precisely here that omnipotence is required...For it is goodness to give away entirely, though in such a way that, by omnipotently retreating into oneself, one makes the recipient independent."¹⁷² In Kierkegaard's thoughts, God created free human beings over which he has authority. Conversely, God did not create human beings to be his subjects and to determine the paths they take. The researcher does not share this existential view about human autonomy but the scriptural view where Christian freedom is the product of Christ's work on the cross, freedom that liberates a person from the demands of the law as a means of salvation (Gal. 3:13; 4:4-5).

¹⁷⁰ D.N. Freedman (ed), "Election," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 434.

¹⁷¹ W.A. Elwell & B.J. Beitzel, "Elect, Election," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 682.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 170.

Elise Daniel and the Libertarian Notion of Christian Freedom

Elise Daniel challenges Christian liberty's stereotypical ideas by exploring the significant tensions between the Christian faith and the contemporary concepts of freedom. Any limitations or restrictions placed on Christian freedom contravenes the tenets of Christian liberty.¹⁷³ Elise Daniel describes freedom and human nature as creating perfect freedom that was corrupted when sin ruined the perfection of God's creation. It is the greatest tragedy humanity has endured, and it has scarred what it means to be human.¹⁷⁴

Elise Daniel equates being human to experiencing perfect freedom. The question that arises from such an analogy is what constitutes perfect freedom. Is it freedom from restraint? Are there limits to the freedom a Christian should experience? Jesus Christ, the image of true freedom, made a choice and voluntarily suffered beyond all imagining because Christ wanted every person to experience what it means to be free too.¹⁷⁵ For Elise, as much as Christians need to aim to live their lives in a manner that is aligned to the truth of the scriptures, freedom should be a voluntary response to God's grace without limits and restraints.

Kristen Largen and the Twenty-First Century Concept of Freedom

Kristen Largen, in her paper, *Freedom from and Freedom for: Luther's Concept of Freedom for the Twenty-First Century*, examines two of Martin Luther's fundamental claims around Christian freedom. Largen presents a philosophical theology on the concept of Christian liberty. She suggests that the characteristics of freedom, which are that it is relational, a gift, and contains an ethical imperative for one's neighbor. The freedom of Christ should not lead to living

¹⁷³ Elise Daniel, *Called to Freedom: Why you can be Christian and Libertarian* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 20.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 23

a lazy and wicked life but rather makes works and the law unprofitable that is unprofitable for righteousness and salvation.¹⁷⁶ Luther believes that Christian freedom does not include good works, a responsibility to the world, or a disregard for poverty and injustice, but rather the opposite.¹⁷⁷

Kristen Largen explains Christian liberty through the lenses of political theology. According to her, Luther understands Christian freedom as containing an ethical imperative. This imperative is not just spiritual in context but much more social and political.¹⁷⁸ Freedom is not just personal or private but should extend to everyone. Luther's formulation posits that the Christian is a servant to all. Once the Christian is free in Christ, it is incumbent that the believer advocates for others' freedom. The believers' freedom should lead to the freedom of their neighbors. Largen's thoughts are, however, steeped in liberation theology rather than biblical theology. This perspective of Christian freedom should also lead to social and political causes such as gun rights, soda bans.¹⁷⁹ This is a vision of Christian freedom inspired by God's kingdom, a life of freedom, and service to God and humanity.

Holmes and the Extremes of Legalism and Licentiousness

In *Balanced Preaching*, C. Raymond Holmes describes the problem faced by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church as licentiousness, not legalism. Holmes cautions the church against preaching that produces dead legalists (people who rest in their self-righteousness) and licentious church members (people who are spiritually illiterate and undisciplined in their

¹⁷⁶ Kristin Johnston Largen, "Freedom from and Freedom for: Luther's Concept of Freedom for the Twenty-first Century," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 52, no. 3 (2013): 235.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

lifestyle).¹⁸⁰ Holmes notes that the preaching of God's law in both conversion and sanctification.¹⁸¹ The law reveals the sins of humanity but provides no remedy. However, the preaching of the gospel can the condemned be freed from sin. The author notes that obedience to God's law is not the result of a sense of duty but the consequence of being indwelt by Christ and controlled by the Holy Spirit. Holmes notes that the law must be preached in a way that brings sinners to the conviction of their sin and repentance, and if the repentance is deep and sincere, the result will not be legalism.¹⁸²

However, the author is against preaching God's love to the unredeemed since it tends to distort the biblical message of salvation and produce a religious experience that is not in harmony with the scriptures.¹⁸³ It is at this point that the researcher disagrees with the thoughts espoused by Holmes. The love of God is the gospel of Christ, and it is inaccurate for the author to assume that when the unredeemed hear such a message, it will not produce any authentic religious experience. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), Jesus' encounter with the woman who had the alabaster box of oil (Matthew 26:6-13), his ministry to Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), and many others are scriptural proofs that the message of God's love is enough to convict sinners of their sin and bring them to the place of repentance. Christian liberty is about how Christ, through his selfless act on the cross, redeemed humanity from bondage to the law, and foundational to what Christ did is his love for sinful humanity. It would be unfounded to neglect preaching love to the unredeemed, especially if the reason is that it would produce an inauthentic religious experience.

¹⁸⁰ C. Raymond Holmes, "Balanced Preaching: Avoiding the Extremes of Legalism and Licentiousness," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 1(2) (1990): 71.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

However, Holmes notes that the law should not be preached in a way that misleads that unconverted people to think that they can be saved by keeping the law as a religious duty.¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, how can this be avoided if the message of God's love is not preached to them? How would the unredeemed understand the implications of Christ's death on the cross if it is not linked to his love for sinful humanity (Rom. 5:8)? Without a proper understanding of God's divine love, the unredeemed would be bound to the premonition that their salvation is based on their good works rather than on God's grace (Eph. 2:8). Anyone who takes the grace of God for granted can indeed slip into licentiousness (Rom. 6:1-2, 15; Gal. 2:17-21); however, this possibility should not prevent preachers from teaching the love of God. Holmes notes that balanced preaching of the law and grace will "produce born-again believers who have experienced their freedom in Christ and whose greatest joy is to be His disciples, living obediently in harmony with His will."¹⁸⁵

Preachers must explain the dangers of both legalism and licentiousness to their respective congregations and stir them towards Christian liberty principles. Freedom from the demands of the law should empower believers to live for Christ and serve him with all their heart (Gal. 5:1, 13). It is not a license to sin.

Loubser and the Ethical Implications of Freedom

In *The Ethic of the Free*, Guy Loubser presents the position that although the law plays no salvific role in the believer's life, it has ethical implications that must not be overlooked. The God-given freedom that the believer possesses should not be utilized out of fear by returning to the law. It should instead be celebrated by following the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Although

¹⁸⁴ Holmes, "Balanced Preaching," 76.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

Christian liberty is popularly known as a soteriological concept, Guy Loubser does not perceive any difference between soteriological and ethical freedom. Loubser believes that the ethics of freedom is not libertinism (abusing Christian freedom without recognizing any obligation to obey the law or restrain from sin¹⁸⁶), and believers should not substitute their God-given freedom for legalism.¹⁸⁷ Whereas some scholars regard the law's soteriological function to have been abolished, its ethical function is still relevant today¹⁸⁸. The condemnatory aspect of the law is what Christ dealt with on the cross, but the revelatory function of the law is restated in the grace commandments in the New Testament.

Guy Loubser explains that the restraints and limitations of the law have provided a creative ethic where believers can develop a scope and responsibility of the ethical way that is guided by love for each other, the leadings of the Holy Spirit, and assistance of the faith community.¹⁸⁹ This is, however, a digression from the concept of Christian liberty for the individual. Some critical observations made from Loubser's paper include, (1) freedom is a vocation,¹⁹⁰ (2) the Pauline perspective of Christian freedom in Gal. 5:13-6:10 is not a warning against licentiousness but an introduction to the Holy Spirit as the one who enables the believer to live freely,¹⁹¹ (3) the law possesses no soteriological and ethical value,¹⁹² (4) Christian liberty

¹⁸⁶ M.H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

¹⁸⁷ Guy Loubser, "The Ethic of the Free: A Walk according to the Spirit! A perspective from Galatians" *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 27 (2006): 614.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 615.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 617.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 618.

¹⁹¹ Loubser, "The Ethic of the Free," 618.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 619.

is a soteriological and ethical sum of God's intentions fulfilled in Christ,¹⁹³ (5) the flesh intends to frustrate the believer ethically.¹⁹⁴

Loubser concludes that the work of the Holy Spirit in producing Christian character in the believer "was equally as much a solution to man's ethical plight, as it was to his soteriological need for new life."¹⁹⁵ The author notes that in Gal. 5:16, believers are called to walk by the Spirit and not to gratify the flesh.¹⁹⁶ Exhibiting godly character is only possible under the guidance of the Spirit, and the orientation of the Christian should not be to the law but Christ and his cross. This orientation shapes the believer's lifestyle and practice to conform to the principles of Christian liberty. The law was unable to deal with the dictates of the flesh, but the Spirit makes the law defunct.¹⁹⁷ It is, therefore important that believers walk according to the Spirit since this is the only way to overcome the demands of the flesh (Gal. 5:16).

Three perspectives on Christian liberty have been examined, each with its merits and demerits. However, this researcher considers Guy Loubser's ideas on Christian freedom as reflective of this thesis's purpose. The researcher will now explore some New Testament case studies on Christian liberty.

Old Attitude and New Orientation: The Jerusalem Council

The story of the Jerusalem Council of 49 A.D. is a classic case study about the interplay between the indictment of the Mosaic Law and the practical applications of the freedom Christ purchased on the cross. The theological implications of the apostolic decree of the council have

¹⁹³ Loubser, "The Ethic of the Free," 619.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 622

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 629.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 622.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 626.

relevance for the ministry practice of the International Central Gospel Church. The decision of the Jerusalem Council removed circumcision and adherence to the law as requirements of fellowship (Acts 15:24). The council, however, recommended certain safeguards that would not be detrimental to their faith of the Gentiles and also made it easier to relate with their Jewish counterparts (Acts 15:28-29). This decision influenced Paul's writings in the book of Galatians since the requirements to be circumcised and obey the law as a means of salvation has been adequately addressed. These requirements have been removed because they served as a burden on the Gentiles and did not allow them to enjoy the freedom that Christ provides (Acts 15:28; Gal. 2:11-16).

It is, therefore perplexing to Paul that Galatians reverted to the law as a means of salvation when clearly Christ had saved them from their sin and not the law (Gal. 3:1-3). The Galatians were trapped in old attitudes rather than embracing a new orientation, that it is Christ who sets a person free and not the law. Any attempt to earn salvation by obeying the demands of the law defeats what Christ has accomplished on the cross for humanity (Gal. 3:13-14).

Nonetheless, the conclave held at Jerusalem discussed the best approach to integrating the Gentiles into the Christian fellowship with the Jews.¹⁹⁸ There were old attitudes that served as stumbling blocks for Gentile fellowship, but new perspectives reflected the departure from the Law's requirements. This researcher would explore both a regulatory framework and a revelatory framework on Christian liberty. Features of both frameworks are present in Acts 15 and other passages of the Bible. The regulatory framework describes how the law served as a temporary instructor intended to help people live right until Christ is revealed (Gal. 3:24). It, however,

¹⁹⁸ John B. Polhill, *Acts* vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 321.

revealed sin but could not help people walk in righteousness (Gal. 3:21). The law regulated the behaviors and conduct of people but could not impart in humanity the ability to live right.

The revelatory framework, however, exposes how Christ came to fulfill what the law could not do (Gal. 3:22). The law designed to be a schoolmaster added more burden on people, but Christ was manifested to unburden humanity from the yoke of the law. Christ fulfilled the law so that humanity would not have to meet its demands but rather embrace the freedom that he provides for all.

The Apostolic Decree: A Theological Agreement

The issue of the Jerusalem council is: Should the Gentiles become Jews in every respect as a requirement for salvation? For hundreds of years, Jews have been welcoming Gentiles into the faith, and the procedure was well structured. If any Gentile desires to come into the Jewish faith, that person must undergo circumcision and keep the Mosaic Law. The contention in Acts 15 is not about a post-conversion behavior but what constitutes true conversion in the first place. It involves both salvation and sanctification.¹⁹⁹ W.W. Wiersbe provides a catalog of ideas that the legalists were trying to propagate. Wiersbe explains how heavy the Jewish yoke was on the Gentile believers (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1) and how that demanded that they move back into what Christ has liberated them from (Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 10:1). The Jewish Christians demanded that “A Gentile must first become a Jew before he can become a Christian! It is not sufficient for them simply to trust Jesus Christ. They must also obey Moses!”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 421.

²⁰⁰ W.W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* Vol.1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books), 461.

Since Christianity is a branch of the Jewish faith, why should the rules change?²⁰¹ The Judaizers failed to recognize that God had changed the rules, and at that point in the church's history, some contention on the matter arose.²⁰² The legalists did not question the Gentile's conversion nor the propriety of recognizing them as believers, but contended that their right to the Abrahamic covenant and their standing in the church was incomplete without being circumcised.²⁰³ The controversy at Antioch correlates with the hubbub at the Jerusalem council of A.D. 49. Peter at the Jerusalem Council compared the Mosaic Law to a burdensome yoke (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1).

Christian liberty breaks down the ethnic/racial barriers to Christian fellowship. One of the critical points of contention in the Jerusalem Council revolved around how the Gentiles would be accepted into Christian fellowship. The conservative Jewish Christians advocated proselyte initiation, a process in which the Gentiles were accepted into the Jewish community.²⁰⁴ Polhill notes that the moral aspects of the law, such as the Ten Commandments were not the point of contention; however, the ritual provisions were in dispute.²⁰⁵

The provisions for food laws, ritual purity, circumcision, and their concepts were specific to the Jewish people. Moving along this trajectory of ensuring that Gentile Christians go through a Jewish proselyte procedure could isolate a significant group of believers. Every believer is accepted on an equal footing since God does not look at an external circumcision of the flesh but

²⁰¹ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary - Acts* Vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1988), 246-247.

²⁰² Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 421.

²⁰³ David Brown, A.R. Fausset, and Robert Jamieson (n.d.), *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Acts–Revelation* Vol. 1 (London; Glasgow: William Collins, Sons & Company Limited, 1984), 104.

²⁰⁴ John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary – Acts*, Vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 321.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 324.

an internal circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:29). Peter's invaluable experience in Acts 10 points to the truth that true purity does not come from an external mark (circumcision) but by faith in Christ. It is beyond comprehension that Paul had to remind Peter of this same truth a short time later in Antioch (Gal. 2:14-17).

Resolutions from the Jerusalem Debate

The resolution of the debate of the apostolic council eventually outlined some requirements for Gentile fellowship. These requirements were not intended to be discriminatory and burdensome but to ensure that the Jewish Christians could fellowship with their Gentile brethren without ritually defiling themselves. Gentiles were to directly abstain from four things: food offered to idols, sexual immorality, strangled animals, and blood (Acts 15:27-29). Three of the requirements foods offered to idols, strangled animals, and blood are generally described as Jewish obligations. The requirement to abstain from sexual immorality is less ritual and more moral.²⁰⁶ Although in the Old Testament, illicit sexual relationships are condemned; this requirement is broader than just the Old Testament edicts. Kenneth Gangel described the four requirements as more sociological than theological.²⁰⁷ According to Gangel, the apostolic decree requires that the Jewish Christians accept the Gentiles without any discussions about keeping the law. The Gentile believers must refrain from things that would seem odious to the Jews.

Are the non-Jewish Christians of today still required to abide by the apostolic decree of the Jerusalem council of A.D. 49? J.B. Pohill describes the four requirements as,

Often referred to as "the apostolic decrees," they belonged to a period in the life of the church when there was close contact between Jewish and Gentile Christians when table fellowship especially was common between them. In a later day, by the end of the first century, Jewish Christianity became isolated into small sects and separated from Gentile

²⁰⁶ Pohill, *Acts* Vol. 26, 331.

²⁰⁷ Gangel, *Acts* Vol. 5, 251.

Christianity. There no longer existed any real fellowship between them. The original function of the decrees no longer had any force, and they tended to be viewed in wholly moral terms.²⁰⁸

Unlike Gangel, this researcher is persuaded that these four requirements can be described in today's language as moral prohibitions: no idolatry, no sexual immorality, no murder (shedding blood), and no eating meat offered to idols. The apostolic decrees were partly ritual and partly moral as indicated by the command for no fornication. However, scholars like J.B. Polhill understand fellowship and not morality as the issue at the Jerusalem conference.²⁰⁹ The decrees were a minimum requirement placed on the Gentile Christians in deference to the scruples their Jewish brethren had to deal with.²¹⁰

These four requirements were already expected of resident aliens who lived with the Jews (Lev. 17:8-14; 18:6-23), so it is possible that the Gentiles were required to observe them out of respect for their fellow Jewish brethren, thus the requirements of no salvific value.²¹¹ Paul was undoubtedly opposed to unchastity (1 Cor. 6:9) and recommended that meat known to have been offered to idols in the presence of Jewish Christians should not be eaten (1 Cor. 10:25-28). Romans 14:13-21 probably deals with question of meat that contained blood which was unacceptable to Jewish Christians.²¹²

Peter's experience with Cornelius implied that God's actions had suspended God's command for foreigners to be circumcised and become members of the covenant community to

²⁰⁸ Gangel, *Acts* Vol. 5, 251.

²⁰⁹ Polhill, *Acts* Vol. 26, 332.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ For more scholarly ideas on the passage see, D.R. Schwartz, "The Futility of Preaching Moses (Acts 15, 21)," *Bib* 67 (1986): 276-81.

²¹² I.H. Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 260.

draw Gentiles into the faith through the gospel and give them the Holy Spirit.²¹³ However, because there were Jews everywhere with qualms in these matters (Acts 15:21), the Gentile believers had to use their freedom in Christ to love and serve their Jewish brothers by observing these few requirements.²¹⁴ James brings finality to the contention. The changes to the law that the apostle alludes to were by quoting Old Testament prophecies about the new covenant, “nothing less than what God had promised Abraham and David.”²¹⁵ While the Jerusalem council recognized that the Gentiles were not obligated to live under the yoke of the law, at the same time, it challenged them to exercise their liberty with restraint, wisdom, and love, recognizing the apprehensions of some Jewish Christians.²¹⁶

Paul defended the position that Christ has brought an end to the law, and as such, how was he going to reconcile that with any demands that infringed on the freedom of his converts? Were these demands not designed to appease the sensibilities of the Jewish Christians? It is important to note that although the law was not a means of salvation, Paul believed that “strong” Christians should be prepared to limit their freedom for the sake of their fellow believers. Paul also believed that his teachings established and upheld the law (Rom. 3:31).²¹⁷ The Mosaic law was designed to serve as a bilateral covenant for Israel alone to govern the nation in the promised land (Gen. 12), but due to its nature, the law could not be obeyed to the letter by anyone.

²¹³ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 212.

²¹⁴ Allison Trites, J. Williams and William J. Larkin, *Cornerstone Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Luke and Acts*, vol. 12 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2006), 523.

²¹⁵ Walter C Jr Kaiser, “Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of the Gentiles (Amos 9:9-15 and Acts 15:13-18): A Test Passage for Theological Systems,” *Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society* 20, no. 2 (June 1977): 111.

²¹⁶ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 440.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 261.

However, the spirit of the law set forth the moral principles which are applicable anywhere and anytime (Rom. 7:21, 23).

Once the Gentile converts were not required to be circumcised and to keep the whole law as a means of salvation (Acts 15:24-25), the other concerns could easily be accommodated. This principle remains basic for all time, and no racial, national, or social can ever be made conditions of salvation and membership of the church (Acts 15:11). Any doctrine or teaching that compromises the gospel message's simplicity will rob Christians of their assurance and leave them confused. In the end, the Jerusalem Council provided the needed theological equilibrium for Gentile-Jewish fellowship.

Regulatory Framework of the Law

This framework highlights the controlling nature of the Law and its advocacy of human effort as the means for salvation. Before the Christian faith came on the scene, people were held bound by the law until the divine revelation of the faith that was to come. However, people are still saved based on faith in Christ.²¹⁸ The Law exposed the bankruptcy of human effort in obeying God and makes God's grace the only hope of pleasing God.²¹⁹ All efforts to please God outside within the regulatory framework of the Law proved futile. Before Christ came, the Law served as a custodian. It was a pedagogue and guardian until the revelation of faith that was to

²¹⁸ R. Alan Cole, *Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 151-152. Richard Longenecker further notes that "In the religion of Israel as set out in the OT [...] relationship with God was based on God's love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness – not on any type of legalistic observance by people of a set of divine laws or instructions. Yet the OT prophets always insisted that the covenantal relationship established by God with His people was to be expressed by them in ways that were prescribed by the ordinances given by God to his servant Moses, that is, by a life governed by 'covenantal nomism' as expressed in the Mosaic law." Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 851.

²¹⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 180.

come.²²⁰ F.F. Bruce notes that “In the personal experience of believers it coincides with their abandonment of the attempt to establish a righteous standing of their own, based on legal works, and their acceptance of the righteousness which comes by faith in Christ (cf. Rom. 10:3f.; Phil. 3:9).”²²¹

In Galatians 3:23-26, Paul explains the purpose of the Law before the coming of Christ. The apostle employs the imagery of the *paidagōgos*, a slave charged with the rearing and discipline of children.²²² Several translations describe the *paidagōgos* as a disciplinarian, custodian, schoolmaster, tutor, teacher, and guide. Using the analogy of the personal slave-attendant who accompanied the freeborn wherever he went, Paul explains the role of the Law. During the minority years, the slave-attendant imposed restraints limiting the boy’s liberty until he had reached the age of maturity where he could be trusted to use his liberty responsibly.²²³ In the same regard, Christ’s appearance gave credence to the purpose of the law, where both Jews and Gentiles would be justified by faith in accordance with God’s promise to Abraham.²²⁴ On the one hand, the Law is holy, good, and righteous, but consequently, it also served as an instrument of condemnation, judgment, and death.²²⁵

Revelatory Framework of God’s Grace

The coming of Christ, which is also the coming of faith, no longer requires believers to remain under the control of the Law. Paul explains, “Before the coming of this faith, we were

²²⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 180.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

²²² Timothy George, *Galatians* Vol. 30 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 265.

²²³ Norman H. Young, “*Paidagōgos*: The Social Setting of a Pauline Metaphor,” *Novum Testamentum* 29, no. 2 (1987): 150, accessed September 13, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/156074>.

²²⁴ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Galatians*, 183.

²²⁵ See E.P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 68-69.

held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.”²²⁶ The law served its purpose of leading people to Christ, but once faith has come, believers are no longer under the authority of the law since Christians have become God’s children through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:25).²²⁷ The law had its place in history, but as R.A. Cole notes, “Once the faith-principle is operative, there is no room for the principle of law as a means of justification. The two cannot co-exist at the same time (as the Judaizers want) since the function of law is essentially preparatory.”²²⁸

The Jerusalem council of Acts 15 has often been linked to the story in Gal. 2. The issue of Gal. 2 ostensibly deals with the possibility of table-fellowship with uncircumcised Gentiles. Before the visit of members of the Jerusalem church, Peter’s fellowship with the Gentiles of the Antiochene church supported Paul’s advocacy for Christian freedom from the law (Acts 10; Gal. 2:11).²²⁹ Upon the arrival of these men from James, pivotal members of the early church, like Peter and Barnabas, still struggled with relating to the Gentile believers who did not practice Judaism (Gal. 2:11:13). Paul’s disagreement with Peter centered on the believer’s liberty in Christ. This struggle was evident when Paul had to rebuke Peter for his hypocrisy. After enjoying an unreserved time of fellowship with the Antiochene church members, Peter recanted his fellowship and returned to Jewish-style social separation.²³⁰ This defection was necessitated

²²⁶ Galatians 3:23-25.

²²⁷ Cole, *Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary* Vol. 9, 152.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

²²⁹ Gordon D. Fee & R.L. Hubbard Jr., *The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI, UK.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 668.

²³⁰ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Galatians*, 133.

by the presence of “certain men who came from James,” this description is *hoi ek peritomēs*, often translated, as here, the circumcision party.²³¹

Peter’s defection from the table of fellowship communicated the message that unless the Gentile Christians conform to the Jewish way of life, he would have no fellowship with them. He was living as a Gentile. Such a policy exposed Peter’s hypocrisy since he Hellenized voluntarily until the messengers from James arrived (Gal. 2:12). Peter, by his action, was not just an attempt to honor the “weaker” Jewish Christians; it was also in effect imposing an alien theology of salvation that reintroduced the very bondage from which Christ died to make them free.²³² F.F. Bruce expounds on Peter’s motive,

If Gentile Christians were not fit company for Jewish Christians, it must be because their Christianity was defective: faith in Christ and baptism into his name were insufficient and must be supplemented by something else. And that ‘something else’ could only be a measure of conformity to Jewish law or custom: they must, in other words, ‘judaize’.²³³

The confrontation and conflict between both apostles ushered in the Pauline perspective on Christian liberty, anchored on the truth that: no individual is justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:10-14). The basis of one’s standing before God can no longer be measured by obedience to the law since the law is not the source of a person’s justification. Unlike the law, a relationship with Jesus Christ had a greater eternal significance since he was the only person who perfectly fulfilled it.²³⁴ Christ has opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles. Paul’s central thesis in his letter to the Galatians is that: God accepts a person, not because of their obedience to the law, but on a simple act of trust in Jesus Christ. This revelation

²³¹ Cole, *Galatians*, 117.

²³² Timothy George, *Galatians*, in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 30 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 180-181.

²³³ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Galatians*, 133.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

frees the believer from the tendency to interpret their righteousness as a product of their effort and helps them place their trust in the finished works of Christ.

There are no longer any soteriological privileges based on the law, the Old Testament Scriptures, or circumcision.²³⁵ Peter lived like a Gentile until the coming of Jews from James. Peter's posture in Antioch indicated that the Jewish Christians were not as good as the Gentile Christians; however, in Christ, these privileges have been dismantled, creating a level playing field for all who receive Christ into their hearts. The segregation proposed by the Judaizers was a dangerous precedent that could destroy the future of the church. The truth of the gospel is that Jews and Gentiles are equal and one in Christ.²³⁶

The fact that Jewish believers had faith in Christ with the view of being saved is a testament that the old system of Judaism was not enough (Heb. 8:13).²³⁷ If keeping the law was an effective way of winning God's acceptance, then the redemptive acts of Christ were in vain. Christian liberty, therefore, provides freedom from the law's demands, freedom made possible by the death of Christ. Therefore Christ makes no distinction because, for him, there is no distinction.

Jewish believers had all alike believed in Christ with a view to being saved. This is a confession that the old system of Judaism was not enough. Paul reveals that the insistence on keeping the law by the Judaizers is at variance with their own beliefs.²³⁸ It is illogical for Jews who rejected insisted that keeping the law was necessary for both salvation and sanctification but

²³⁵ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Galatians*, 189.

²³⁶ M. Anders, *Galatians-Colossians* Vol. 8 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 23.

²³⁷ Cole, *Galatians*, 121.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

were not saved by the same law to burden Gentile believers with keeping the same law. The justification by the law is inconsistent with the redemption by Christ.

Opponents of the grace message have argued that if people are not observing the law, then they will freely sin (Gal. 2:17). The posture of the opponents was an attempt to reestablishing the law. People who challenge this message reasoned that a person could believe in Christ and still live a sinful life, thus making Christ a promoter of sin. Paul responds to the accusation, explaining that Christian liberty leads to freedom from sin's slavery; it is not a license to disobey him.²³⁹ W.W. Wiersbe agrees, "Liberty does not mean license; rather, it means the freedom in Christ to enjoy Him and to become what He has determined for us to become (Eph. 2:10). It is not only "freedom to do" but also "freedom not to do." We are no longer in bondage to sin and the Law."²⁴⁰ The believer's obedience to God is based on love, not the law.

Paul's task was to reduce any kind of legalism to absurdity.²⁴¹ He refuses to give an iota of credence to the Judaizers but instead declared that since he has been crucified with Christ, Christ has now become the source of his existence (Gal. 2:20). Paul explains that faith in God helps to shift the believer's confidence from the flesh to Christ. It is a departure from boasting what a person has accomplished to confidence in what Christ accomplished on the cross. Jesus is the perfect law keeper, and so to put a person's relationship with God on a legalistic basis is to make that person a lawbreaker (Gal. 2:18).²⁴² A legalistic system has no power to make any meaningful transformation in the believer's life since real transformation emerges from having a

²³⁹ Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, 23.

²⁴⁰ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 696.

²⁴¹ R. Mohrland, and Gerald L. Borchert, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Romans and Galatians* Vol. 14 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 282.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

relationship with Christ (Gal. 2:19). Returning to the law as a requirement for salvation nullifies the sufficiency of Christ's atoning work on the cross (Gal. 2:21).

The Cross: Free from the Demands of the Law

Christian liberty is traced to the cross where Christ nailed the requirements of the law, removing its indictment and giving believers the freedom to worship God. Colossians 2:11-14 discusses what Christ accomplished in His death,

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ...having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

In the passage, Paul provides an alternative to the demand for circumcision; he explains that the believer is circumcised, not within the Jewish social milieu. Instead, it is a Christological and spiritual reality. It is an act done by God (Col. 2:11-12). The importance of what Christ accomplished on the cross and his resurrection occurs by a sequence of metaphors like circumcision, burial and resurrection, death, forgiveness, cancellation of legal bond, and public triumph.²⁴³

The first metaphor in the passage is circumcision: "you are also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands" (Col. 2:11). This clearly rules out literal circumcision. It denotes what human hands cannot make and rather involves an action through the agency of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 2:28-29). The death of Christ on the cross is a kind of circumcision that believers in which believers have been included.²⁴⁴ The idea that this metaphor applies only to

²⁴³ James D.G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 154.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

Gentile believers since the Jews are already circumcised is not determinative. Definitely, the Jewish believers also needed proper spiritual circumcision as well. It would have been contradictory for Paul to desire that Gentiles be free from physical circumcision and yet place spiritual value on Jewish circumcision.²⁴⁵ Circumcision without hands is, therefore, a spiritual act that God performs himself.

There should be no attempt to establish a parallel here with the Galatian church since it was unlikely that Paul was trying to compel the Gentiles to be like the Jews. In the Abrahamic covenant, circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with the Jews (Gen. 17:9-14), and although it was a physical act, it has spiritual implications. During this era, circumcision was regarded by both Jews and Gentiles as characteristically and distinctively Jewish. The Jewish people had always understood circumcision as a cultural and religious landmark that sets them apart as God's people (Gen. 17:9-14). It is against this backdrop that Paul classifies the Jews as 'circumcision' and the Gentiles as 'uncircumcision' (Rom. 2:25-27; 3:30; 4:9-12; Gal. 2:7-8).²⁴⁶

Physical circumcision only had value when the heart was involved, and the Old Testament alludes to a circumcision beyond the law (Deut. 30:6). Unlike the legalists, Paul presents the positional truths of Christianity; he understood the spiritual nature of circumcision because since it was a matter of the heart and not the body, it had to be spiritual (Rom. 2:28-29).²⁴⁷ Believers (Gentiles) no longer require physical circumcision to legitimize their identity as God's people. Warren Wiersbe describes the role of circumcision in the life of the believer, "It is not necessary for the believer to submit to circumcision, because he has already experienced a

²⁴⁵ Richard R. Melick Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* Vol. 32 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 257.

²⁴⁶ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 154.

²⁴⁷ Melick Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* Vol. 32, 257-258.

spiritual circumcision through his identification with Jesus Christ.”²⁴⁸ When a person gets saved, a spiritual circumcision takes place, the “foreskin” of the old nature is removed, and Christ imparts his Spirit (Rom. 2:28-29; Col. 2:11-12). This is referred to as the “circumcision of the heart,” it is a spiritual transformation that occurs by being united with Christ. The inward reality of faith is the true mark of a believer, not the outward mark of circumcision.

The second metaphor for what Christ accomplished on the cross is burial (Col. 2:12-13). Paul is talking about the believer’s union with Christ in his death. On the cross, the believer also died, was buried, and raised with Christ (Col. 3:1). The believer’s burial with Christ occurs at his spiritual baptism, and the believer’s resurrection depends on God’s power. On the other hand, the resurrection of Jesus is the basis for the believer’s faith (Rom. 6:5; 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:47-49; Phil. 3:10, 21). Sharing in Christ’s death is no exemption from the death of this mortal body but deliverance from any liability to receive the wages of sin.²⁴⁹

The third metaphor that describes the transition produced by the cross is death and new life: “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him” (Ephesians 2:1). The fourth metaphor is drawn from the legal world; it is the handwriting of requirements: “having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col. 2:14). The requirements of the law, as well-intentioned as they might have been, were impossible to fulfill. Every effort to adhere to the law’s requests was a frustrating experience that placed a burden on people. Jesus on the cross fulfilled the requirements of the law so that believers would not have to be saddled with those requirements.

²⁴⁸ Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* Vol. 2, 127.

²⁴⁹ R.C. Lucas, *Fullness & Freedom: The Message of Colossians & Philemon* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 103.

James Dunn describes “the indictment of the law” as the certificate of indebtedness or bond.²⁵⁰ The phrase “handwriting of requirements” is also described as “decrees or ordinances or regulations,” “binding statutes,” or “legal demands.” They “constituted the record of transgression as condemnatory.”²⁵¹ Paul draws out the significance of the fact that the recent believers have been united in baptism with the death and resurrection of Christ and so are welcomed into a family circle beyond the indictment of the law.²⁵²

The Indictment of the Law

Paul discusses the Christian’s relationship with the law; he understood the implication of such an enslaving and legalistic obligation. Richard Melick defines legalism as “any philosophy or movement that assumes God’s blessing comes from keeping the law, whether Jewish Law or human law. It assumes a contractual relationship whereby in one’s thoughts, God can be bought by human effort.”²⁵³ It is an ever-present danger that threatens the believer. The law was certainly against everyone because it was impossible to meet its holy demands. Anyone who attempted to fulfill all the requirements of the law always fell short of its demands.

The handwriting of requirements being removed and nailing the accusation to the cross are two images that express what Christ did for believers (Col. 2:14). In the ancient world, the Greek term *cheirographon*, “written code” (Col. 2:14), referred to a handwritten certificate of indebtedness and obligated the signer.²⁵⁴ It is a word that is drawn from the legal world and

²⁵⁰ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 164.

²⁵¹ Dunn, 165.

²⁵² N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 12 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 113-114.

²⁵³ Melick Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* Vol. 32, 257-258.

²⁵⁴ J. McRay, “Galatians,” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. J.F. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 3:1056.

written by the person responsible.²⁵⁵ It is a document of condemnation that provided a record of transgressions against an individual.²⁵⁶ N.T. Wright describes the term *cheirographon* as a bond that has been signed by everyone in their consciences, and although it might correspond to the truth about the universal consciousness of guilt, the word “still reads a great deal of extraneous material into an already crowded verse.”²⁵⁷ Nonetheless, in Col. 2:14, Paul should be referring to the Mosaic Law as a mere IOU note or a book that does nothing else but keep a tally of people’s sins (Rom. 4:15; 5:20).²⁵⁸

Several views attempt to explain the written code. Melick lists these views:

- First, the “written code” is viewed as a sacred book that contains God’s secrets or man’s misdeeds. This, however, seems unrelated to this context.
- Second, it is said to refer to a covenant between Adam and the devil. Some of the early Church Fathers took this position, but there is no hint of any such covenant, and the idea of regulations counters this.
- Third, it refers to the law of Moses. Against this view, however, is the fact that Paul never spoke against the law. The failure of persons is not in the law but in the weakness of the flesh (Rom 8:4).
- Fourth, it has been understood as a certificate of debt from humans to God—an I.O.U (that is, “I owe you”).²⁵⁹ The debtor personally signed to acknowledge the debt owed or the list of every person that is owed.

²⁵⁵ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 164.

²⁵⁶ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 165.

²⁵⁷ Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 117.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

The best approach is understanding the different aspects of the Mosaic law, as Paul addressed it in the New Testament.

The handwriting has also been described as a certificate of debt written in one's hand. The certificate stood between the debtor and the person he owed until the entire debt was paid. In Christ, the believer's debt to the law has been fully paid. Christ took away the debt on the cross, which implies that there is an announcement that the personal note which testifies against the believer is canceled.²⁶⁰ Köstenberger admits that Christ, through His atoning sacrifice, removes the sinner's indebtedness by nailing it to the cross.²⁶¹ The handwriting also refers to the indebtedness related to the law.

It is appropriate to suggest that the Mosaic law here consists of all decrees that regulate human conduct.²⁶² In this case, the law functioned as a record book for the sins of humanity. It bounded the Jews under sin and prevented the Gentiles from becoming part of God's people. Instead of the law becoming a guardian to bring the Jews to Christ (Gal. 3:24-25), it became a barrier to keep the Gentiles out. Paul in Rom. 1:32 sums up the indictment of human beings by saying that, "who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them."

The Apostle James explains indicates that to break one command is to destroy the entire law (James 2:10). James does not suggest that everyone can, in reality, fulfill the demands of the law, but that the law is an indivisible unity, as such to view it as a series of commandments would imply that "disobedience of a particular commandment incurred guilt for that

²⁶⁰ Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 263.

²⁶¹ Andreas J. Kostenberger, "Colossians," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, eds. E.A. Blum & T. Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1896.

²⁶² Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 210.

commandment only.”²⁶³ The individual commandments are part of one indivisible whole because they reflect the will of the lawgiver (James 2:11).²⁶⁴ Thus, to violate a commandment is to disobey God himself and to be found guilty before him.

Freedom through Christ

Christ, through his death on the cross, expunged the believer’s record of transgression (Col. 2:14), which the law used as an opportunity to keep them in bondage. The expunging of the record confirms that none of the transgressions is held against believers any longer. There is an erasure of the entire book of transgressions.²⁶⁵ The law and regulations no longer obligate since the work of Christ removed them. This by no means suggested that the law ceased to have force, but rather that the law is no longer God’s standard of judgment.²⁶⁶ The condemnatory aspect of the law was removed on the cross, but the revelation of God’s character that the law embodies is still profitable for the believer. Hence Christians can go free without any stain on our record; there is liberty from any interminable sentence years in which to pay.²⁶⁷

Paul’s kaleidoscope of metaphors explains the fundamental transformations in the life believers. Christ translates the believer from death to life, from slavery to freedom. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul explains that the power of the law has been abolished in the death of Christ. Another metaphor: “nailing to the cross,” is understood as the indictment hung for the

²⁶³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans, 2000), 114-115.

²⁶⁴ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 114-115.

²⁶⁵ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 166.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Lucas, *Fullness & Freedom: The Message of Colossians & Philemon*, 108.

prisoner's when he was crucified. By that action, the criminal's debt to society has been paid (Matt. 27:37; John 19:19).²⁶⁸

Jesus, through his death, took away the certificate of indebtedness. It is just as if he nailed it to the cross with him, showing that he paid the debt that was owed. The slate has been wiped clean, and the believer is no longer indebted to the law. Douglas Moo explains, "It is by "nailing it to the cross" that the IOU has been decisively removed from having any power over us. The imagery probably has nothing to do with any ancient means of canceling debts but arises from the actual nature of Christ's crucifixion. Believers are no longer indebted to law and to live according to its demands. Christ paid the debt so that Christians can walk in freedom."²⁶⁹ In causing Christ to be nailed, by his obedience Christ has provided for the full cancellation of the debt of obedience humanity had incurred. Christ took upon himself the penalty that disobedience brought to humanity, and in his death, satisfied God's demand for the appropriate punishment of that disobedience.

Before their conversion, the Colossians, like all believers, were under the curse and condemnation of a broken law, but in Christ, this has been set aside (not overlooked or ignored) since in Christ, the demands of the law have been exhausted (Gal. 3:13). Therefore, Christians are no longer subject to any form of legalisms, and legalism has no spiritual benefit for them. Jesus is sufficient alone to fulfill the spiritual needs of believers.²⁷⁰

These metaphors help the believer understand that God has canceled the law's condemnatory aspects and paid the price in full. The crucifixion of Christ destroyed the indictment of the law; hence, believers cannot be judged based on obedience to the law since its

²⁶⁸ Melick Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* Vol. 32, 264.

²⁶⁹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 211.

²⁷⁰ David S. Dockery, *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 727.

relevance has been nullified. Whereas circumcision produced the legal system, salvation produced a relationship of freedom by faith.²⁷¹ Paul affirms that the believer no longer has a relationship with the law because of Christ's work (Rom. 7:1-6). The death of Christ rendered the effectiveness of the law obsolete, thus bringing deliverance from a system that aroused the passions of the flesh. It is at the cross that the believer was translated from the oldness of the law to the newness of the Spirit (Rom. 6:6). The result is freedom for the believer.

Some positional truths about Christian freedom include the following:

- Legalism is wrong because believers are dead to the law in Christ. Through his death and life, Christ fulfills the demands of the law. Charles C. Ryrie defines legalism as “a fleshy attitude which conforms to a code for the purpose of exalting self.”²⁷²
- Christ is the source of freedom. Freedom from sin and bondage is impossible without Christ since it cannot be attained by willpower.
- Believers are no longer slaves to the requirements of the law.
- The rightful demands of the law place the sinner in sin and bondage.
- Christ irrevocably sets aside the demands of the law. When Christ was nailed to the cross, believers went with him to his tomb to be buried there forever in their sins, but when Christ rose from the dead, he fulfilled all the divine demands.
- Faith in Christ sets a person free from the requirements of the law.

²⁷¹ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 262.

²⁷² Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1994), 168.

From Slavery to Sonship

Paul continues his thesis on Christian liberty by comparing the law to a prison warden and a pedagogue (Gal. 4:1-2). He describes man's condition under the law, where the law served as a guardian that ordered him about, directed, and disciplined him (Gal. 4:3).²⁷³ People were under restraint and had no liberty. Although he is an heir, he is no better than a slave. The heir is expected to remain in that state until the date set by the father (Gal. 4:2). The bondage the heir is under is bondage to the law, since the law served as a custodian (Gal. 3:24), and humanity needed to be redeemed (Gal. 4:5).

John Stott comments about the purpose of the law, "God meant the law as an interim step to man's Justification; Satan uses it as the final step to his condemnation. God meant the law to be a stepping-stone to liberty..."²⁷⁴ Man's bondage under the law continued until the fulness of time when Christ would be manifested (Gal. 4:4-5). Christ was born under the law, but he succeeded where others before and after him had failed. He perfectly fulfilled the righteousness of the law. The humanity and divinity of Christ qualified him as humanity's redeemer.²⁷⁵

When a person gets saved, the spirit of God indwells that person and changes their status from slaves to sons (Gal. 4:6-7). No other qualification is needed; there are no laws to follow to become a son of God. Paul, therefore, appeals to the Galatians not to revert to external formalism (Gal. 4:8-11) and its dreaded routine of rules and regulations. Paul desired that the Galatians would become like him in the faith, be delivered from the evil influence of false teachers, and share in his conviction that Christ has set them free (Gal. 4:12-20).

²⁷³ Stott, *The Message of the Galatians*, 104.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 106

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

The Call to Christian Liberty

The Galatians are advised to “stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage... For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:1, 13). Paul commanded the Galatians to stand fast in their liberty in order not to be hoodwinked into submitting to legal bondage. The believer’s responsibility is to stand firm and fall back into the law and sin.²⁷⁶ This section is generally agreed to be the summarized statement, although other scholars view it as Paul’s concluding thoughts to the previous section.²⁷⁷ The departure from Christ to legalism is fundamentally a return to slavery, which is the opposite of freedom. Any return to circumcision would signal the acceptance of the entire law and separation from Jesus Christ (Gal. 5:4). Douglas Moo rightly notes that “Obligation to do the whole law brings a person into the sphere of a works-oriented approach to justification that in itself is fruitless and in turn fundamentally denies the meaning of grace. It, therefore, separates a person from Christ, who benefits people only by means of grace.”²⁷⁸

Paul’s admonition of the Galatians: “to stand fast in the liberty” (Gal. 5:1) is an admonition that is still relevant to today’s Christians. Paul addresses the law’s demand for total commitment (Gal. 5:2-6); he issues a stern warning to troublemakers (Gal. 5:7-12), examines the way of love and how that relates to Christian liberty (Gal. 5:13-15), addresses the need to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-18), the danger of living by the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21), and then addresses the need for Spirit-led character (Gal. 5:22-26).

²⁷⁶ Loubser, “The Ethic of the Free,” 621.

²⁷⁷ Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 433; Richard B. Hays, “The Letter to the Galatians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 11, ed. L.E. Keck et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 306.

²⁷⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians* BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 325.

Christian liberty is the freedom enjoyed by the children of the freewoman, who are the heirs of the promise to Abraham (Gal. 4:30-31). Paul, therefore, admonishes the Galatians to stand fast in their freedom as a means of safeguarding them against submission to legal bondage.²⁷⁹ If the Galatians submit to the legal bondage, they will end up enslaving themselves all over again (Gal. 4:9). Some churches make it a requirement for their congregation to fulfill religious obligations like almsgiving, praying several times during the day. The demands for female parishioners to cover their hair in the church as a sign of modesty and many other acts, as noble as these gestures might look outwardly, do not reflect the state of a person's heart. Therefore, it would be naïve for any person to think that the demands of the law require occasional compliance; the law's demands can only be satisfied by total performance.²⁸⁰ Believers do not win acceptance with God based on their own obedience.

When a strong emphasis is placed on these religious responsibilities without a corresponding emphasis on a Christian's relationship with Christ, these believers could eventually revert to legalism without being aware of it. It is, therefore, important that Christians determine to remain firm in their freedom in Christ. There must be a resolution not to be enslaved in any legalistic system designed to undermine what Christ has accomplished on the cross. Paul's idea of freedom in Gal. 5:1 is not necessarily freedom from sin but the law. It is freedom from the struggle to keep the law; it is setting the conscience free from the guilt of sin. Christ fulfilled the demands of the law and unburdened believers from its fearful condemnation.

Paul continues his argument about Christian liberty and downplays the importance of circumcision for Gentile believers. If the Galatians make circumcision a requirement for their

²⁷⁹ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 226.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.

salvation, then what Christ accomplished on the cross will not benefit them (Gal. 5:2). Paul spells out the consequences of taking this fatal step towards bondage: “Christ will profit you nothing.” Paul’s contention is not with circumcision perse, but rather what it represented.²⁸¹ It is hopeless to rely on keeping the law and consequently experience the blessed life of the Spirit. Submission to circumcision as a legal obligation would imply that keeping the law was necessary for achieving a righteous status in God’s sight. Such an acknowledgment will nullify the grace of God.²⁸²

In Gal. 5:3, Paul amplifies his earlier warning concerning the consequences of accepting circumcision. The Galatians would not only lose Christ and his benefits but would consequently become indebted to the law. This means that they would be required to adhere to every demand of the law, an intolerable burden that would be impossible to bear. It is important for the Galatians to understand the implication of their decision because accepting the Jewish ritual of circumcision carried with it an obligation: “the necessity of accepting the law in its every precept.”²⁸³ F.F. Bruce notes that circumcision as a minor surgical operation does not imply much, but circumcision that is willingly undertaken as a legal obligation carries demands nothing less than the duty to keep the entire law.²⁸⁴

If the Galatians accept circumcision, then they forfeit the precious gift of freedom and step back into the endless routine of self-justification.²⁸⁵ It is impossible to receive Christ, which is an acknowledgment that you cannot save yourself, and then receive circumcision, thereby

²⁸¹ George, *Galatians*, 357.

²⁸² Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 229.

²⁸³ George, *Galatians*, 358.

²⁸⁴ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 230.

²⁸⁵ George, *Galatians*, 358.

claiming that you can save yourself. Christ is sufficient for salvation and adding anything to Christ as a basis for salvation will imply losing Christ.

Justification comes by faith, not the law, and any person seeking justification from the law becomes alienated from Christ (Gal. 5:4). The alienation is the result of choosing the law as one's means of justification rather than Christ. Paul warns the Galatians about the danger of embracing the principle of winning God's approval by following the law. To be justified by the law is to be right with God by obeying the law (Gal. 2:16; 3:11). People who put their trust in the law as a means of winning God's approval have separated themselves off from Christ. This means that these individuals are no longer in fellowship and union with Christ.²⁸⁶ Speaking about justification, F.F. Bruce makes this noteworthy remark, "To seek it through faith in Christ was to seek it on the ground of God's grace; to seek it through legal works was to seek it on the ground of their own merit."²⁸⁷

Righteousness by legal works is a vain hope, and only those who believe in Christ are given the enablement by the Holy Spirit, through faith, to confidently wait for the hope of righteousness (Gal. 5:5). The 'hope of righteousness' is the hope of a favorable verdict in the last judgment (Rom. 2:5-16).²⁸⁸ The law does not provide any such hope. Believers in Christ are assured in advance of such a verdict due to their present experience of justification by faith (Rom. 5:1). The believer's hope and the present experience of justification provide no room for circumcision or a lack of it (Gal. 5:6). When a person is in Christ, nothing else matters; rather,

²⁸⁶ Daniel C. Arichea & Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), 122.

²⁸⁷ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 231.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 231-232.

faith made effective by God's love is what matters. Acceptance by God occurs when a person is in Christ, and faith in Christ makes that possible.

The Danger of False Teaching

The Galatian Christians had earlier believed the truth that Christ had set them free; they obeyed that truth and enjoyed the liberty that Christ had given them. The moment they started listening to false teachers who contradicted the truth they had believed, it became an obstacle and deviated them from the path they had earlier followed. (Gal. 5:7).²⁸⁹ The progress made by the Galatians had been truncated by the error of false teachers. The false teachers had persuaded the Galatians to forsake the gospel's truth, and this persuasion was not endorsed by God (Gal. 5:8). The false teachers propagated a doctrine based on merit rather than on God's grace, and this doctrine is inconsistent with the message of the gospel.

The message of false teachers, if not stopped, can contaminate an entire Christian community (Gal. 5:9). That is the danger the Galatian church faced from the error of the false teachers spreading in the community and the church. Just like a little yeast can affect an entire lump of dough, the pervasive influence of false teachers can cause great harm.²⁹⁰ The doctrinal deviation from truth to bondage propagated by the false teachers should be resisted and never allowed to thrive in the Church and Christian community. Paul's letter to the Galatians provided a counter-response to the false teachers, and rather than wage an anti-circumcision campaign, Paul focused on the benefits of Christian liberty and its implications (Gal. 5:11).

²⁸⁹ John Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 135.

²⁹⁰ Daniel C. Arichea & Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, 126.

A Defense against Libertinism

The Galatian church faced another equally dangerous challenge—libertinism (Gal. 5:13). It is the idea that freedom from the law is a release from all moral restraints. In Gal. 5:1, the freedom in Christ was under threat with the temptation to relapse to legalism; however, in Gal. 5:13, there is the danger of undermining Christian freedom by disregarding the grace of God through licentious living. Paul rejected this extreme form of antinomian teaching in Rom. 6:1-2. This kind of perverted theology is not scriptural because it distorts the message of salvation and encourages believers to indulge in their natural appetites to allow God the opportunity to display his grace. Christian liberty is rather the unrestricted access to God as his children without fear of condemnation.

Christian liberty reflects the following: first, a new way of thinking and living reflects the freedom in Christ. Legalism required that a person conducts themselves based on strict obedience to the law. A person's conduct would have to be regulated by total compliance. While freedom from the law liberates Christians from religious rules and regulations, it by no means exonerates anyone from the obligations of moral conduct; on the contrary, it is a necessary part of it. In Gal. 5:13,²⁹¹ Bruce makes an important distinction, "Christian freedom is the bulwark against legal bondage, here it is the bulwark against libertinism."²⁹² In Christ, believers are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:27). Christ must be glorified both in their thoughts and actions. There is an indissoluble connection between the freedom Christ provides and the command to utilize that freedom responsibly (1 Peter 2:16). Any attempt to downplay that connection has the danger of

²⁹¹ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 239.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 240.

causing the believer to lapse into legalism or libertinism, which are both dangerous to Christian freedom.

Secondly, the gift of freedom comes with the burden of responsibility. Freedom in Christ equates to freedom to live righteously, and it is crucial to guard against the misuse of that freedom. Christians are constantly faced with the temptation to misuse their freedom as an occasion to fulfill the desires of the flesh (flesh refers to the selfish element of human nature which, if unchecked, would produce the works of the flesh listed in Gal. 5:19-21). However, Paul warns that the call to liberty is not an opportunity for the flesh but an opportunity to serve each other in love.

Paul's colleagues could have guaranteed him that the only way to curtail the temptation of abusing their freedom in Christ as an excuse for an enthusiastic license was strict adherence to the law.²⁹³ Nonetheless, legal bondage is not the antidote to libertinism. The law opposed spiritual freedom, so it could defend that freedom. The freedom in Christ is the antidote to both legal bondage and unrestrained license and encourage a loving fellowship of the people of Christ. It is to this end that Paul explains the role of the Spirit in the life of the believer (Gal. 5:18, 22-25). Fulfilling the ethical demands of the law cannot be done by submitting to the law (Gal. 5:18), but rather by walking in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, and living in the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that produces in believers the character to live in ways that do not honor the demands of the law (Gal. 5:22-24).

Thirdly the call to freedom is an appeal for believers to serve each other in love. Instead of using liberty for selfish purposes, the actual objective should be love and service. The liberty of the gospel is exercised within the believing community to enhance the welfare of each other.

²⁹³ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 240.

John Stott describes freedom as a noteworthy paradox, where this liberty is a form of slavery, but not slavery to the flesh but our neighbor.²⁹⁴ True freedom is found in faith but translated into love and service to others. It is true servitude where a person does not focus on their perks or privileges but are willing to go beyond themselves and become a blessing to others.²⁹⁵

According to Timothy George, Christian liberty finds its truest expression, not in theological privatism (“I am free to believe anything I choose”) or spiritual narcissism (“I am free to be myself no matter what”) but rather the freedom to love and serve one another in the context of the body of Christ.²⁹⁶ Christian liberty is the freedom to love and serve. This freedom is not about independence but interdependence.²⁹⁷ Luther’s famous maxim expresses the paradox of Christian liberty, “A Christian is free and independent in every respect, a bondservant to none. A Christian is a dutiful servant in every respect, owning a duty to everyone.”²⁹⁸

The Danger of Unrestrained License

Paul briefly addressed this danger in Gal. 5:13, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” The freedom of the Spirit could easily be misconstrued as an unrestricted license, opening the door for sinful behaviors, thus promoting a perverted understanding of the gospel. As a result of this tendency, Paul provides an ethical admonition to the Galatians. Paul’s understanding is that the law thrives in the flesh and encourages the very sin it forbids. The idea that Christian liberty provides the opportunity to revert to the law and sin is itself unscriptural.

²⁹⁴ Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, 142.

²⁹⁵ Largen, “Freedom from and Freedom for,” 236.

²⁹⁶ George, *Galatian*, 354.

²⁹⁷ Largen, “Freedom from and Freedom for,” 239.

²⁹⁸ Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 212.

This understanding of liberty is rather a more terrible form of bondage. John Brown has used an analogy that has sometimes been described as extreme, “The madman who has mistaken his tattered garments for the flowing robes of majesty, and his manacles for golden bracelets studded with jewels, has not erred so widely as the man who has mistaken carnal license for Christian liberty.”²⁹⁹

Conclusions Regarding Christian Liberty

This chapter examined how the early church addressed the problem of Christian liberty in Acts 15 and the resolutions that emerged out of the Jerusalem Council of 49 A.D. Paul’s thesis on Christian liberty, in his letter to the Galatians, was also examined as well as his letter to the church on Colossae. It is the Pauline thesis on the subject that a clear biblical definition of Christian emerges. The merits and demerits of the biblical and non-biblical views on Christian liberty were also examined in this chapter.

The orientation of the believer must be centered on a clear biblical understanding of Christian liberty. Paul presents positional truth that relates to Christian liberty. Paul describes the believer’s moral laxity as a pre-conversion behavior (Titus 3:3), and the believer should not indulge in such a lifestyle. In contrast to libertinism, Christian freedom is not the liberty to indulge in the flesh but living the crucified life where the lusts and passions of this world have been conquered (Gal. 5:24). True freedom is anchored in Christ, and this spiritual reality should be protected from abuse and used to serve the community of believers. Christian freedom should not be used as a springboard for the flesh, and the moral standards of the law cannot be discarded just because Christians are free from the law.

²⁹⁹ John Brown, *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians* (New York: Carter and Brothers, 1853), 286.

The conduct of believers should be Spirit-controlled since the flesh is against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. Believers are now able to manifest the fruit of the spirit, walk in love, and honor God in all they do. Freedom with responsibility is the prescription for a healthy Christian experience, and ultimately the believer is responsible for using their freedom conscientiously.

Effects of Christian Liberty

Christian liberty is the freedom from the law and its demands effected by the death of Christ on the cross. This freedom serves a purpose in the life of believers, and in Gal. 5, Paul explains the implications of Christian freedom, which are as follows:

- Believers have been freed from the negative effects of the law (Gal. 5:1-12). Legalism demands that the entire law be kept perfectly, but this aspiration is impossible. In Christ this expectation has been satisfied (Col. 1:11-14), and faith in his finished works gives believers access to freedom from the negative consequences of the law.
- Christ died to set people free from slavery to the law. The believer's responsibility is to remain firm and not revert to the law (Gal. 5:1).
- The Christian is no longer under the external control of the law, but the internal control of the Spirit (Gal. 5:18).

Therefore, a person who submits to the law would face several negative consequences, some of which are:

- The law invalidates the work of Christ on the cross. A return to circumcision and other requirements of the law demonstrates a lack of faith in what Christ accomplished on the cross (Gal. 5:2). This nullifies the sufficiency of Christ for salvation.³⁰⁰
- A person under the law is required to adhere to all its demands (Gal. 5:3).
- Returning to the law removes a person from the sphere of grace. Unlike the legalist who is insecure about whether what has been done can merit salvation, believers are confident not in their effort but in their faith in Christ (Gal. 5:4-6).
- The law hinders spiritual growth and maturity. In Galatians 5:7-10, Paul explains how the legalists had hindered the Galatians from obeying the truth. Using the metaphor of yeast, Paul illustrates how a bit of legalism can contaminate a believer, an entire Christian community, and the church.³⁰¹
- Reverting to legalism is an offense to the cross (Gal. 5:11). Before his conversion, Paul preached circumcision, and in his post-conversion life, Paul omits circumcision, and provoked the legalists to attack him.³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Max Anders, *Galatians-Colossians* Vol. 8 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 62.

³⁰¹ Anders, *Galatians-Colossians* Vol. 8, 63.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

Chapter Four - Called to Freedom

There is an expectation that some members of ICGC have developed an interest in the subject of Christian freedom. There might not be much biblical and theological interaction amongst Charismatic Christians in Accra, particularly members of ICGC, and this intervention should mark the beginning of a broader conversation on the subject. The lessons developed would help members of ICGC understand biblical Christian liberty concepts by demonstrating Christian freedom within a disciplined biblical Christian framework.

Lesson 1 - The Dangers of Legalism (Gal. 2:11-16)

The focus of this lesson is to address the ever-present dangers of legalism by looking at the Paul's confrontation with Peter and certain Judaizers. Before the coming of Christ, people were expected to live by the Mosaic law. Christ, having fulfilled the law's requirements, frees believers from any obligation to the demands of the law (Romans 8:3-4). There is, however, the temptation for some Christians or churches to legislate the behavior of other believers. This tendency to legislate behaviors can sometimes be covert; for instance, a friend shared an experience where a colleague pastor advised him not to watch movies on Sundays because it is the Sabbath and should be kept holy. Instances like this and many more are driven by a legalistic orientation that has no basis in the New Testament. This does not discount the fact that there are biblical instructions that serve as rules of conduct for believers; it is no violation of grace.³⁰³ Nonetheless, believers and churches must tread cautiously in how these biblical imperatives are communicated.

³⁰³ Charles Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1969), 158.

Defining legalism

Legalism is a term that is often talked about than defined. Legalism does not just indicate the presence of laws. If this were the case, God would be accused of being legalistic since he has provided humanity with innumerable laws throughout human history. For the purpose of this thesis, legalism is defined as “The belief that salvation demands or depends upon total obedience to the letter of the law.”³⁰⁴ The letter of the law refers to obeying every instruction in the law. Legalism makes an unrealistic demand on people without giving them the ability to fulfill its demands. This includes the preoccupation with human legal traditions as the basis for salvation.

The anecdote in Galatians 2:18-24 spells out a clear case of how dangerous legalism can be and its implication on Christian fellowship. Peter had played a crucial role in facilitating the propagation of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15).³⁰⁵ However, the full implication of the spiritual symbiosis of Jewish and Gentile Christianity was not yet achieved; and the incident at Antioch is a painful reality about the development of a mature New Testament ecclesiology.³⁰⁶ A matured New Testament church is intentional about inclusivity rather than branding itself as an exclusive club of a select few.

The church must become the assemblage of all, irrespective of background, economic status, ethnicity, race, or tribe, and under no circumstance must discrimination be tolerated. Before the arrival of the Judaists, Peter had an excellent working relationship with the Antiochene church. However, this table-fellowship was quickly interrupted because of the

³⁰⁴ Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

³⁰⁵ George, *Galatians*, 171.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

presence of an external authority. Paul confronts Peter about the inconsistency in his attitude. Peter's actions spell out the ugly effects of legalism, which are:

Hypocrisy (verses 11-12)

It is incredible how Peter suddenly altered his relationship with the Antiochene Gentiles when the men from James arrived. The frosty relationship between the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians was gradually easing, especially with Peter's encounter with Cornelius and his household. (Acts 10:24-48) In that encounter, Peter had learned that the gospel of Christ could not be hindered by racial and ethnic barriers (Acts 10:9-16). He, however, quickly forgot that encounter, and out of fear forsook his relationship with the Gentiles. It is no surprise that several Jews were also led astray by the actions of Peter.

After observing Peter's hypocrisy, Paul was incensed and confronted Peter about his pretense. Such a stereotypical behavior is still prevalent in many churches where people relate with others only if they fit their criteria of what a Christian should look like. There are Christians who do not easily relate to those who could be considered "less spiritual." Because of their Christian maturity level or lifestyle, only to abandon these people when our fellowship is questioned by religious zealots who only relate to people they consider "spiritually mature." Such a posture tends to drive away people from the church and Christian fellowship because they feel unworthy of our company. In Matthew 23:27-28, Jesus warned the Pharisees about this behavior, and the contemporary church must also heed this warning.

Lack of love for people (Luke 6:32-36).

Legalism tends to make Christians insensitive to others. People end up choosing particular people whom they will fellowship with and shun all others. Such an attitude makes a person discriminate against others based on cultural, ethnic, or racial considerations. This

tendency to treat people unequally that the Jerusalem decree attempts to resolve by facilitating social fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.³⁰⁷ Jesus issues a warning to his disciples not to love only those who love them back but also to show love to humanity (Luke 6:32-36).

Spiritual pride (Lk. 18:11-12; Matt. 6:1-2, 5; Rom. 10:3)

Their sense of perfection often blinds legalists that they begin to feel superior to others who are not like them. Peter, Barnabas, and some of the Jewish brethren were caught in this trap when Peter dissociated himself from the Gentile Christians (Gal. 2:13-14). For the strict Jewish Christians, the Gentile Christian males were only worth their fellowship if they were circumcised, and this attitude revealed the prideful behavior of the Jewish Christians.³⁰⁸ Spiritual pride is an attitude that is still prevalent in the contemporary church.

There are Christians who feel that because they always pray and fast, they think they are better than other Christians who are not at “their level of spirituality.” As such, choose not to associate with believers considered “less spiritual.” Dr. Charles Ryrie defines legalism as “a fleshy attitude which conforms to a code for the purpose of exalting self.”³⁰⁹ Such a posture creates division in the church and disturbs the fellowship that is characteristic of the church.

Strict allegiance to human-made rules (Mk. 7:7-8)

It is important to note that the presence or absence of rules does not create righteousness.³¹⁰ Due to their religious orientation, Peter, Barnabas, and the other Jewish

³⁰⁷ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 129.

³⁰⁸ George, *Galatians* Vol. 30, 173.

³⁰⁹ Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life*, 159.

³¹⁰ Gangel, *Acts* Vol. 5, 251.

Christians forsook Christian fellowship with their Gentile brethren to comply with human-made rules that had no bearing on their faith. Jesus celebrated the eschatological meal with tax collectors and sinners, a scandalous act that drew sharp criticism from the Pharisees: “This Man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). Irrespective of the critical response from the Pharisees, Jesus continued fellowshiping with sinners. Unfortunately, Peter and the Jewish Christians at Antioch could not replicate that example. Human-made rules do not reflect the nature of God and cannot produce the righteousness of God.

It Suffocates freedom (Gal. 2:14)

In his confrontation with Peter, Paul poses a question to him: “If you, being a Jew, living in the manner of Gentiles, and not of the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews” (Gal. 2:14). If keeping the Law was an effective way to win God’s acceptance, then there would have been no need for Christ to come.³¹¹ The flawed understanding of legalists is that they perceive themselves as better or more qualified for salvation than other believers. In Christ, both Jews and Gentiles are made equal (Gal. 3:28), and any kind of distinction aimed at discriminating against one group or other is not reflective of the freedom that Christ purchased on the cross. Peter’s action attempted to place a yoke of a burden on a people that Christ had declared free.

Legalism contradicts what Christ accomplished on the cross (Gal. 2:16)

The danger of legalism is it contradicts the message of the cross. One of the purposes of Christ’s death on the cross was to redeem humanity from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13), and any attempt to reinstate what Christ has discarded defeats the purpose of his death. The freedom

³¹¹ Gangel, *Acts* Vol. 5, 121.

that Christ purchased for all cannot be conditioned on the works of the Law but the grace of God. Life under the Law and life under grace are mutually exclusive lifestyles, and any attempt to mix it is a recipe for disaster.³¹² Legalism distorts the gospel not by keeping people from being saved but by keeping them from growing in their faith. It hinders both justification and sanctification.³¹³ Paul makes it clear in Romans 3:20-24 that by the works of the Law, no person can be justified in the sight of God. It is, therefore, futile to demand that believers live up to the demands of the Law. Charles Swindoll describes why Christ is of no benefit when a person leans towards legalism, “By accepting the idea of righteousness by works, we reject the savior. Consequently, His death is of no benefit to us.”³¹⁴

Concluding Thoughts

The church must recognize that legalism is a present danger to its congregants. Continued attachment to the Law is not just fruitless but dangerous since it demands total obedience, of which none is capable (Gal. 3:10-12).³¹⁵ Once a person subscribes to just one small part of the Law, that individual is required to observe the whole law (James 2:10-11) could eventually lead to the person rejecting Christ in an attempt to earn salvation through the Law. Christ is the source of our salvation, and any teaching that elevates the idea of righteousness by works above the finished work of Christ must be rejected. It is to this end that the Apostle Paul issues a warning against legalism (Gal. 4:10-11).

³¹² Charles R. Swindoll, *Galatians: Letter of Liberation* (Fullerton, CA: Insight for Living, 1987), 47.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 49.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

³¹⁵ Walter A. Elwell, “Legalism” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 478, Logos bible Software.

Lesson 2 - Victory over Legalism (Acts 15:1-21)

Introduction

The purpose of this lesson outline is to teach on how Christ has rendered the demands of the law obsolete. The story of the Jerusalem Council of 49 A.D. teaches some useful lessons that are applicable in a contemporary context. The concept of freedom from the law is emphasized throughout the book of Galatians. The Apostle Paul argues that no one is justified by the works of the law but through faith, since the work of the law does not produce justification (Gal. 2:16). Christians have not been called to obey rules and regulations to be saved; instead, they have been given victory through the finished work of Christ over any temptation to revert to legalism. The believer is no longer under the Law but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

Background

The story in Acts 15:1-21 explains the believer's victory over the requirements of the Law. The fragmented relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians had reached a crescendo, and there was a need to provide a clear scriptural solution to this looming problem. To this end, the Jerusalem Council of A.D. 49 was convened to design an appropriate response to the challenge of Christian liberty. The background to the story in Acts 15 is that a sect of believing Pharisees insisted that Gentile Christians be circumcised and adhere to the Law of Moses as a means of salvation. The situation became contentious and needed to be addressed by the leaders of the early church.

In his sermon, Matt wood describes legalism as “when we add some other qualification to salvation outside of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”³¹⁶ The Judaizers requested that the believing

³¹⁶ Matt Wood, “Victory over Legalism,” Faithlife Sermons, accessed October 26, 2020, <https://sermons.faithlife.com/sermons/538289-victory-over-legalism>.

Gentiles be saddled with Jewish requirements that do not correlate with their faith. This situation quickly became a contentious matter, which ended up before the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:2-5). There are several lessons from James' response to the plea of the believing Pharisees:

Legalism must be rejected

Legalism must be rejected regardless of the demands made since there is only one way of salvation, which is faith in Christ Jesus. A Gentile proselyte who became a Jew experienced a change in their religious conviction and their lifestyle.³¹⁷ The demand for a legalistic and ritualistic lifestyle was satisfied on the cross when Christ satisfied all the requirements of the law, nailed to the cross so that believers would not have to meet those demands any longer (Col. 2:13-14). Therefore, it is puzzling that the believing Pharisees would make such a demand on the Gentiles, thereby nullifying what Christ accomplished on the cross. The requirement for salvation is not meant to be burdensome or tedious since all that is required is faith in Jesus and what He accomplished on the cross (Rom. 10:9).

Living as Redeemed People

God's goal for the believer's freedom is to live as the redeemed people that they are. Redeemed people are no longer subject to rituals and regulations that frustrate their relationship with God but experience the freedom to serve God (Rom. 2:25-29). Believers are no longer constrained to the demands of the law. As such, obedience to the Law is no basis of God's acceptance for believers since such an expectation would have been impossible to fulfill (Isaiah 64:6).

³¹⁷ J.B. Polhill, Acts Vol. 26, 321.

God is no respecter of Persons

Peter's encounter with Cornelius, which he shares at the Jerusalem Council of 49 A.D., teaches that God's relationship with humanity is not based on any social or racial consideration (Acts 15:7-9).³¹⁸ God looks at the heart and not on external matters like circumcision or adherence to the Law. God does not look at the external circumcision of the flesh but is interested in the internal circumcision of the heart (Jer. 4:4; 9:26; Rom 2:29).³¹⁹ Peter's vision in Acts 10 broke the mental stereotype and opened the door of the gospel to the Gentiles. The sign of God's acceptance of Cornelius and other Gentiles is the gift of his Spirit.

God only gives his Spirit to those he has accepted (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). J.B Polhill notes, "The fact that they had received the Spirit just as Peter and the Jewish Christians had was proof that God had accepted Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles on an equal footing."³²⁰ The Jews regarded circumcision as a mark of sanctity and purity, a sense of belonging as God's people, and acceptance by God. Peter's experience with Cornelius revealed otherwise. It showed that true purity comes not from an external mark but faith.³²¹ Faith in God gives believers access to his grace, not works (Eph. 2:9).

The Answer to Legalism: Knowing the Gospel

What is the appropriate response to legalism? Peter provides the answer in Acts 15:11, where he stresses the truth: the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is what saves a person is not strict obedience to the Law. Legalism is not the answer to salvation. The answer to legalism is the

³¹⁸ Timothy Wiarda, "The Jerusalem Council and the Theological Task," *JETS* 46, no. 2 (June 2003): 235. Retrieved from https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/46/46-2/46-2-pp233-248_JETS.pdf

³¹⁹ Polhill, *Acts* Vol. 26, 326.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 326.

³²¹ Polhill, 327.

grace of God (Gal. 2:12). Although the Law is burdensome, it cannot save anyone, hence as far as salvation is concerned, it is irrelevant.³²² If only the Judaizers understood that God makes no distinction between the Jews and Gentiles but saves both by grace through faith, the Judaizers would not make any distinction either. John Stott notes that “Grace and faith level us; they make fraternal fellowship possible.”³²³

Conclusion

The sacrifice of Christ on the cross redeems humanity from the curse of the Law, thus allowing Gentiles to receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:13). In Eph. 2:8-9, Paul excludes any possibility of obtaining salvation by any self-effort. Salvation by faith through grace is not by merit; it is a gift of God. This passage is a good reminder that irrespective of a person’s race, gender, or tribe, our good works are not enough for God, and everyone is admitted on the grounds of grace.

Lesson 3 - Walking in Freedom (Romans 6:16-18)

Introduction

On the 6th of March 1957, just at the stroke of midnight when we entered the 6th of March, the first Prime Minister of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, made the Declaration of Independence and in his speech made this celebratory remark to a jubilant crowd: “At long last, the battle has ended! And thus, Ghana, your beloved country, is free, forever!”³²⁴ Freedom is a powerful word. It is a word that inspires hope and courage. It inspires hope in those who seek it.

³²² Gangel, Acts Vol. 5, 249.

³²³ John Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 246.

³²⁴ Franck Kuwonu, “Africa’s Freedom Struggles and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” *Africa Renewal* (December 2018 – March 2019), <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2018-march-2019/africa's-freedom-struggles-and-declaration-human-rights.com>

It inspires fear in those who want to keep it from people. For the sake of freedom, children rebel against their parents, subordinates against their superiors, citizens rise in mutiny against presidents, nations go to war against each other, and in the last few years, there is a clear manifestation of the power of freedom working in North Africa. Such a forceful demonstration from people against regimes that everybody thought was impregnable.³²⁵ However, this lesson plan is not about political freedom but freedom in Christ.

The Greek word *eleutheria* refers to “liberty” or “freedom.” Jesus brought freedom to humanity (Luke 4:18), but what kind of liberty? The Jews in Jesus’ day thought of this liberty in terms of freedom from foreign domination. Jesus was not concerned about political freedom but is concerned with setting people’s spirits free.³²⁶ The important kind of freedom is the one that Christ gives (John 8:36). What does freedom mean to Christians? What are Christians free to become? What are Christians free to do? This aspect of the paper will examine the subject of Christian liberty related to the believer’s walk with God. Romans 6:16-18 reads,

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

It is a very interesting passage of scripture discussing two opposite concepts.

³²⁵ For an academic insight about the Arab springs in North Africa see George Joffe, “The Arab Spring in North America,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 19:4 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2011.630881>.

³²⁶ E.E. Carpenter and P.W. Comfort, in *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew words Defined and Explained* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 323.

The Free

Freedom is an important concept, one that Paul uses more than any other New Testament writer.³²⁷ The Greek language describes “free” as not being under the control or the power of another or not to be under bondage to another person.³²⁸ The post-conversion experience of the believer can be characterized as a life strangled in sin and bondage. Rom. 6:16-18 explains the basic assumption that all are slaves before they become believers in Christ; they are not free to do as they please since they are subject to the bondage of sin.³²⁹

If a person is under the influence of the law, that individual cannot claim to be under grace. The law was given not as a means of deliverance but to ensure that people are held accountable to God (Rom. 3:19) and know about sin (Rom. 3:20). Since no one will be justified by the law (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:11), and those under the law require redemption, Christ came under the law in order to redeem those under the law (Gal. 4:5).³³⁰ If Christians remained “under the law,” their inability to keep the law would have made them still subject to sin. It would have been pointless to tell a person struggling under the domination of sin that this person is free. But Christians are not bound to sin, and as such, don’t depend on their ability to keep the law. Christians are free from the tyranny of the law and sin.³³¹

³²⁷ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; InterVarsity Press, 1988), 263. According to Morris, Paul uses the verb ἐλευθερώω 5 times out of 7 in the New Testament, the noun ἐλευθερία 7 times out of eleven, and the adjective ἐλεύθερος 16 times out of 23. Each of the words have been used more than all New Testament writers put together.

³²⁸ S.J. Grenz and J.T. Smith, in *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 44.

³²⁹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter Varsity Press, 1988), 261.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 259.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

The Slave

In Greek, the word slave means “to bring under bondage.” In the days of Jesus, a slave did not have citizenship rights, and although the slave lived in a country, he was not considered a part of the country.³³² He had no rights of his own and could not claim any rights. A slave belonged only to one person and cannot serve two masters (Matt. 6:24).³³³ The Metaphor ‘slave’ is used by Paul both negatively and positively. Negatively, it refers to man’s bondage to the evil age and the flesh, to the extent that man could only be freed by divine intervention. Positively, the terms indicate the relationship between man and God (Gal. 1:10).³³⁴ Paul speaks of people offering themselves as slaves (Rom. 6:16), a situation which was not strange in the ancient world, where people voluntarily became slaves in order to secure a livelihood.³³⁵ Paul’s assumption is that all slaves before they became free in Christ were not free, since they were in bondage to sin.³³⁶

The Apostle Paul talks about free people who are not under bondage and talks about slaves (Rom. 6:18). The death of Christ frees believers from the bondage of sin. Sin is no longer the master of believers (Rom. 6:9). Believers can become slaves of righteousness precisely because sin has no lordship over them, and they are no longer under the stranglehold of the law but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

³³² H.A. Andrews, *Free in Christ: The Message of Galatians* (Webster, New York: Evangelical Press, 1996), 20.

³³³ Morris, *The Epistles to the Romans*, 261.

³³⁴ Gysbert M.H. Loubser, *Paul Cries Freedom in Galatia: On Ethics in the New Creation* (Zweigniederlassung, Zurich: LIT VERLAG GmbH & Co. KG Wien, 2017), 201.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

Slaves of Sin and Righteousness

Paul talks about two kinds of slaves: Slaves of sin and slaves of righteousness. Slaves of sin: these are people who yield their thoughts, words, and action to Satan. They have obeyed the impulses of Satan and did it either passively or actively. The slave to sin is bound to act sinfully. The second category is the slave of righteousness. These are not sinners; they are the redeemed. These are believers who submit their thoughts, words, and actions to God. They consciously seek to please God. According to this passage, Christians are slaves, although they have been set free by Christ (Rom. 6:18).

A person is either a slave of sin or a slave of righteousness (Rom. 6:16). What kind of slave will one choose to become? Because there is nothing like absolute freedom. J. Denney writes, “There is no absolute independence for man, our nature requires us to serve some master.”³³⁷ Unbelievers would think that accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and personal Savior is tantamount to relinquishing their freedom, but such is not the case.³³⁸ Heathens are servants of sin and the law, and when they come into Christ, there is an exchange of from one master to another, from sin and the law to righteousness (Rom. 7:5-6).

When a person is freed from sin and bondage, that individual becomes a slave. Like most young people in Ghana who reside with their parents, they crave independence from their parents and want to enjoy their own freedom at a certain point in their lives. The young person leaves the house, rents an apartment, and becomes a slave to the landlord. This person was free from one thing but enslaved to another.

³³⁷ J. Denney, “St. Paul’s Epistles to the Romans,” *EGT 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 636.

³³⁸ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans* vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers) 156.

A similar illustration is a single person that longs for the joys and satisfaction of marriage and declares, “the day I marry, freedom!!!” Nonetheless, most married people understand that there is no freedom in marriage. Married couples do not live independently of each other, but rather, in marriage, two individuals become one (Gen. 2:24). Both couples’ vision, assignment, goal, and purpose merge and become the driving force of that relationship. A person can come out of one situation but will be bound to another. The question is, what kind of bondage does a person prefer? What kind of slave does a Christian want to be? A slave of sin or a slave of righteousness?

The Apostle Paul in Galatians 4:21-31 makes a comparison between the free and the slave. The Galatian believers are children of the line of promise. They are free, and circumcision profits nothing.³³⁹ The purpose of the believer’s freedom in Christ is not for personal gratification or some self-centered pursuit (Gal. 5:13). Freedom is used to serve God. God sets Christians free from sin and the law in order that they might serve him. God’s freedom always has service related to it. Freedom from sin and the law must be used to serve God. There are four kinds of things God has freed believers from and four kinds of things He has made believers a slave to. A saved person experiences a change in lordship, location, laws, and life.

A Change of Lordship

God told Moses to inform Pharaoh: “Let my people go, that they may serve Me.” The children of Israel were under slavery in Egypt, Pharaoh was their lord, but Jehovah served a notice that he will become their Lord. The scripture in Exodus 8:1 does not refer to political

³³⁹ Swindoll, *Galatians: Letter of Liberation*, 95.

freedom; rather, it a dramatic change of masters.³⁴⁰ It is a change of lordship from one who is an oppressor to another who is a liberator. Romans 10:8-9 reads, “But what does it say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” When a person gets saved by confessing that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:9), there is a shift of lordship. That individual is freed from Satan’s rule but submitted to the Lordship of Christ. However, this is not just freedom from Satan’s rule alone but surrender to the Lordship of Christ.

In Christ, there is a change of masters. John Stott describes Christian conversion as “an act of self-surrender; self-surrender leads inevitably to slavery; and slavery demands a total, radical, exclusive obedience. For no-one can be the slave of two masters, as Jesus said (Matt. 6:24).”³⁴¹ Since the believer has shifted lordship, that person is no longer under Satan’s rule. In the days of Jesus, a Lord did not require the permission of a slave to act.³⁴² The slaves and their children were properties of the slave owner. If a man marries a woman and he is a slave, his wife is also owned by the master. For the unbeliever, Satan enters into their lives without permission; he held people in sin and darkness (Col. 1:4). Without their permission, Satan enters into their life and ransacks everything they have. However, believers have been rescued from the kingdom of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of the son of his love (Col. 1:13).

³⁴⁰ Allen P. Ross, John N. Oswalt, and Philip W. Comfort, *Cornerstone Bible Commentary: Genesis and Exodus* Vol. 1 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 341-342.

³⁴¹ John Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 183.

³⁴² Walter A. Elwell and B.J. Beitzel, “Slave, Slavery,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 1988), 1971.

When a person is under Satan's authority, that individual has no right. He can enter into the heathen's life at any time and do whatever he wants to do. When that same person by faith gets saved, a new Lord shows up (Col. 1:13). How did Christ become our Lord? He went to the marketplace where slaves were traded, and he paid a higher price so that he could buy sinful humanity from the slave market so that they can be his property (Gal. 3:13-15; 1 Peter 1:18-19). After Christ, through His sacrifice, redeemed humanity, He became the new owner. He is the Lord, but He is not like the previous lord.

What is the difference between slavery to Satan and slavery to God? One of the main differences between the new Lord and the old lord is that the old lord enters by force to take from those under him, but our new Lord never enters by force. Jesus proclaims, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). The other difference is that when Christ, the new Lord of the believer, comes, slaves are elevated into lords. Jesus takes the slaves (believers), and He makes them kings. Christ becomes the Lord of lords, not the Lord of slaves (Rev. 19:16). Which people become the other lords? The people Christ redeemed as slaves are also elevated to the position of lords.

A Change of Location

The believer is not just under a new Lord but has also changed location. Colossians 1:13-14 reads, "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." Christians are freed from the attractions of this world and brought under God's dominion. It is one thing changing lords and another thing changing locations. Not only does a Christian have a new Lord, but that person must also change location. Colossians says that Christ transported the

believer from the power of darkness. In other words, the moment a person gets saved, Jesus took that person from sin into righteousness.³⁴³

A significant transformation takes place at the moment of salvation, and the saved person is no longer bound by sin but freed to serve God in righteousness. Satan loses his lordship over the Christian's life and cannot locate that person again in his kingdom. The Christian is transferred from Satan's kingdom into the kingdom of God. The believer's spiritual residency has changed, and when that happens, that person has a new Lord who is Jesus Christ.

A Change of Laws

Freedom from Mosaic Law's demands does not translate into living life lawlessly (Romans 6:1-2). Unlike legalism, the believer is no longer saddled with hundreds of impossible laws to obey to the letter. There are Christians who contrast the law and grace by concluding that there are no specific laws under today's grace standards. According to them, introducing any new laws is a form of legalism.³⁴⁴ Such doctrinal error becomes the basis for a loose kind, which is "justified in the name of practicing Christian liberty."³⁴⁵ The New Testament talks about "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25), "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2), and the "law of the Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2). Living under these laws is not burdensome and does not determine the outcome of a person's salvation.

³⁴³ James Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 77.

³⁴⁴ Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life*, 152.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

A Changed Life

Freedom in Christ is a change of life (2 Corinthians 5:16-17). Believers are freed from the old life, but we are conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10). There is freedom from the pre-conversion life, and there is conformity to Christ. It is not freedom to live as a person pleases but the freedom to become like Christ. In Christ, people are no longer practitioners of sin but lovers of righteousness. Old things are passed away, the old life is gone, and the new life has come. The moment Jesus comes into a person's life, the old nature leaves. The believer becomes a new creation in Christ Jesus. Put on the mind of Christ. There is a changed life. The sinful lifestyle no longer brings pleasure because Christ changes a person's appetite and focus. Believers can now live a holy life, withstand temptation, honor God, develop self-control, and their salvation is not subject to a strict adherence to the Law.

If Christ is in a person's heart, that individual must be conformed to his image. There must be a change in lifestyle (John 14:15). R.H. Mounce makes this noteworthy remark, "The freedom brought by grace does not provide *carte blanche* to continue in sin. On the contrary, grace places the believer under obligation to holiness and growth in righteousness."³⁴⁶

Concluding Thoughts

God has provided the strength and power to walk in freedom. It is not enough for believers to know that they have been set free from the power of sin and the Law; rather, Christians must walk in the freedom that Christ has provided. This freedom reveals a change in lordship, location, laws, and life. The Apostle Peter describes how Christians should use their

³⁴⁶ Mounce, *Romans* vol. 27, 157.

liberty, “as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Peter 2:16-17).

Lesson 4 - Our Victory in Christ (Col. 2:11-15)

John 1:16-17 speaks to Jesus Christ and his ministry to believers: “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” There are two important thoughts concerning the difference between the Law and grace:

Under the Law, a person obeys God’s rules in order to receive his favor. The Law demanded strict adherence to rules and regulations as a qualification for God’s favor. Under grace, a person receives God’s grace in order to obey his rules. In the New Testament, the individual is not required to obey the Law as a means of accessing his grace; rather, God’s grace enables a person to obey God’s rules.³⁴⁷

In both cases, God’s rules must be followed. God is the originator of both the Law and grace. The laws, rules, and expectations of God are all the same. Jesus came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). In Colossians 2:13-14, Paul explains what Jesus did with the Law. There are three things that Jesus did with the Law:

Jesus wiped out the debt to the Law.

The Law had become a debt certificate. Humanity owed the Law, and anytime a person approached God, there was a handwriting reminding that individual of their debt. The picture in this verse is that of a person who owes money, and his debt is written on a slate. In some Ghanaian communities, there are shops where people borrow groceries, and the shop attendant

³⁴⁷ Steven J. Cole, “How Grace Works (Titus 2:11-14),” accessed October 24, 2020, <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-8-how-grace-works-titus-211-14>.

would have a slate and write the name of the debtor on the slate and the amount owed.³⁴⁸ Every customer who visits the store would identify the names of debtors written on the slate. A customer with an accumulated debt finds it difficult to shop at that particular store because of their debt. This illustration is similar to Paul's expression "the handwriting of ordinance," and every time a person approaches God's presence, the sins of that person are written, thus inspiring no confidence in approaching God. Christ's finished work on the cross wiped out the handwriting of the ordinance that was against people.

Jesus took the Law out of the way.

The law makes demands and condemns when those demands are not fulfilled, but it cannot overcome sin. This inability of the law necessitated the personal action of Jesus Christ. The Law and the debt owed due to sin are no longer a factor that stands between God and the believer. The slate was removed from the way, and the believer can approach God without being reminded of sin. The Law is no longer a hindrance between the believer and God.

Jesus nailed the Law on the cross.

Jesus took the slate that has been wiped and nailed it on the cross. This is a public statement that every person who has faith in Christ can experience freedom from sin, debt to the Law, and condemnation. There is, therefore, no condemnation for all who are in Christ who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1). A person who gets saved no longer experiences condemnation provided that the individual does not submit to the desires of the flesh but the dictates of the Spirit.

³⁴⁸ This scenario is prevalent in the rural parts of Ghana. Due to the communal nature of the Ghanaian society, people could borrow groceries and other items without immediately paying for it since the owner of the store could easily identify the address and family of the customer.

Lesson 5 - The Power to Live Right (Gal. 5:16-25)

Christian liberty is freedom from the law and its demands made possible by the death of Christ on the cross. The relevance of salvation through the law became an obsolete concept after Christ satisfied its demands on the cross (Col. 1:11-14). It is important to note that freedom from the law is not an endorsement of a licentious way of living.³⁴⁹ The ethical emphasis of the law cannot be adequately satisfied through submission to the law but through a conscious decision to please God coupled with the agency of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16).³⁵⁰ The law is not sufficient to deal with the problem of sin since it stimulates the very sin that it forbids (Gal. 3:19).

The Apostle defended the importance of Christian liberty, particularly against the doctrines of false teachers and Judaizers who sought to lure the Galatians back to legalism (Gal. 3:1-4). Paul's declaration of freedom in Gal. 5, states a thesis developed against legalism (Gal. 5:2-12) and libertinism (Gal. 2:13-15). Paul's diagnosis of the believer's conflict is the command: "Walk in the Spirit," and the promise, "you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).³⁵¹ If believers are no longer required to submit to the demands of the law and consequently shun libertinism, how should they conduct themselves? Is it possible to live right outside of the law? Where does the believer get the resources to avoid being subverted by legalism or libertinism? While modern religious pedagogy offers various answers, only the spirit of God who liberated believers from the power of sin and produced a new life in

³⁴⁹ G.F. Wessels, "The Call to Responsible Freedom in Paul's Persuasive Strategy. Galatians 5:13-6:10," *Neotestamentica* 26, no. 2 (1992): 465.

³⁵⁰ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 240.

³⁵¹ George, *Galatians*, 285.

regeneration can keep believers truly free and experience as they continue to walk in him the power of sanctification.³⁵²

Walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16)

The inner working of the Holy Spirit in the life that has been emancipated from legalism is crucial to permanently deal with the problem of legalism.³⁵³ In Gal. 5:16, Paul admonishes the Galatians to: “walk in the spirit...” this is the only remedy against fulfilling the flesh's desires. Paul denies that the law was the most effective prophylactic against gratifying the flesh.³⁵⁴ Timothy provides a working definition of the phrase ‘walk in the spirit,’ which means “to go where the Spirit is going, to listen to his voice, to discern his will, to follow his guidance.”³⁵⁵

There are several reasons why it is important to walk in the Spirit:

- The limitation of the law has given way to the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:3). Walking in the Spirit provides victory over the fleshy appeals of the Judaizers and their libertine predispositions.³⁵⁶
- The indwelling power of sin prevents the person existing under the law from fulfilling its ethical demands (Rom. 7:7-25; Gal. 5:17).
- The person who yields to the flesh is enslaved by it.

³⁵² George, *Galatians*, 286.

³⁵³ Tenney, *Galatians*, 34.

³⁵⁴ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 243.

³⁵⁵ George, *Galatians*, 286.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

- The person who yields to the promptings of the Spirit is liberated by it. It makes it possible to obey the moral imperatives of the scriptures (Eph. 6:6), and to exemplify godly Christian character.³⁵⁷

The decision to allow oneself to be influenced by the Holy Spirit is one of the important steps to living right before God. Paul continues stressing the importance of living under the leading of the Holy Spirit as the cure to escaping the tendency of living under the law (Gal. 5:18).

Led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:18)

Gal. 5:18 reads, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” There is no reason why those who have been set free from the law should needlessly place themselves under the law. The intention of the Galatians to retreat from grace to the law would imply that they were willing to exchange their freedom for spiritual bondage. F.F. Bruce describes the phrase ‘led by the spirit’ as “to have the power to rebut the desire of the flesh, to be increasingly conformed to the likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18), to cease to be under the law.” To live under the law is of no benefit to the believer since it offers no protection against the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:18). However, the person who chooses to submit to the leading of the Spirit is delivered from the desires of the flesh, the bondage of the law, and the power of sin (Rom. 6:14).³⁵⁸

Living under the Spirit’s dictates stands in irreconcilable conflict with living under the law. It does not suggest that the Ten commandments are antiquated; rather, believers are empowered to fulfill the true intention of the law since they have been set free from the law by

³⁵⁷ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 245.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.³⁵⁹ Paul expressed similar sentiments in Romans 8:3-4, “ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

Live by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25)

Paul moves on to list the differences and ethical qualities produced in human life by the presence of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21) and the presence of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-24). Paul advances his argument by providing a contrast between the natural life and spiritual life. Living by the Spirit means dedicating one's life to pleasing the Holy Spirit, and it should not be a pretext for libertinism nor reverting to legalism (Gal. 5:25).³⁶⁰ If the Spirit is the believer's life source, then their conduct should be governed by the Spirit.

Concluding Thoughts

The power to live right is only possible through the help of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, living under the law is not the appropriate solution to overcoming the desires of the flesh. Believers must endeavor to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), be led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:18), and live by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). In a versified sermon on “The Believer's Principles concerning the Law and the Gospel,” the Scottish preacher Ralph Erskine declared both the evangelical freedom from the law and the Christian obedience to it.

The law's a tutor much in vogue,
To gospel-grace a pedagogue;
The Gospel to the law no less

³⁵⁹ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 245.

³⁶⁰ George, *Galatians* 286.

Than its full end for righteousness.

When once the fiery law of God
Has chas'd me to the gospel-road;
Then back unto the holy law
Most kindly gospel-grace will draw.

The law most perfect still remains,
And ev'ry duty full contains:
The Gospel its perfection speaks,
And therefore give whate'er it seeks.

A rigid master was the law,
Demanding brick, denying straw;
But when with gospel-tongue it sings,
It bids me fly, and gives me wings.³⁶¹

³⁶¹ George, *Galatians*, 384.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

A proper understanding of Christian liberty gives the believer freedom from the demands of the law. In this thesis, Christian liberty is described as freedom from the law, made possible through the death of Christ on the cross. This thesis sets out to provide a theological analysis on the subject with particular reference to the Pauline reflection on Christian liberty as documented in his letter to the Galatians. Christian liberty has been examined from a philosophical and political dimension, but that is not the purpose of this thesis.³⁶² The researcher's observation, particularly with the church in Ghana, West Africa, is that the thoughts and ideas emanating from some churches regarding Christian liberty can be theologically damaging and negatively impact the understanding of believers with regards to the subject. The result is that some churches would indirectly advocate either legalism or libertinism, ideas that misrepresent Christian liberty. However, it is essential to point out that this paper is soteriology, not political theology.

The results of this project are broadly consistent with the published work analyzed in the literature review. Valued insights are developed about the intervention's potential impact and how churches can implement the intervention plan. The experience developed at ICGC is not universalized. However, the framework formulated from the project has broad applications in local ministry settings. Previous scholarly works focus on two primary strands of Christian liberty: religious legalism and freedom from sin, but this intervention does not rely heavily on either strand. Instead, it crystallizes the ideas from both strands and advances a position that responds to the doctrinal excesses that leak from the proponents of both concepts.

³⁶² For ideas on political ideas on Christian liberty, see Ryan Juskus, "The Peril and Promise of Christian Liberty: Richard Hooker, the Puritans, and Protestant Political Theology by Bradford Littlejohn (review)," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 39, (2019): 413-415.

Christian liberty is not the freedom to disregard the law (Gal. 5:14) but freedom from the demands of the law.³⁶³ The freedom that Christ offers removes the yoke of the law. It provides believers with the liberty to serve God. Righteousness by the law was an impossible goal since the law placed people in bondage, and a person needs to please God solely on their effort rather than relying on God's grace. It was important that Christ fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law so that believers would not be saddled with its yoke of bondage.

Christian liberty is also freedom from the tyranny of the law and the awful struggle with the law, with the hope of winning God's favor. It is the freedom that gives a person acceptance before God and access to God through Christ (Gal. 1:3). This project provides insights into how a flawed understanding of the believer's freedom can turn out into a yoke of bondage that binds people to sin. The research project results advocate the call to discipline, submission, and obedience to God's word and the dictates of the Holy Spirit as a proper interpretation of the concept of Christian freedom.

The Ghanaian church hemorrhages from the doctrinal damages that ill-informed "preachers" have meted out on the charismatic church. This project sets the theological record straight by building the idea of Christian liberty on the foundation of the scriptures rather than on personal reflections without a basis in scripture. This project explains the concept of Christian liberty from the context of the Jerusalem Council of 49 A.D. and the lessons gleaned from it. The Jerusalem Council had to address the problem of the Jewish-Gentile relationship in the church. After much deliberation, the council developed some regulations that the Gentile believer would adhere to, not as a means of salvation or bring them back into bondage, but rather as

³⁶³ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 344.

requirements that would foster a proper relationship with their Jewish brethren (Acts 15:22-29). The Pauline understanding of the subject, particularly his epistle to the Christians in Galatia, provides a useful theological reflection that prevents the tendency to lean towards legalism.

The dangers of legalism must never be underestimated; clergy and laity alike have struggled with this canker and its debilitating effect on the church and Christian fellowship. The challenges that the Jerusalem Council of 49 A.D. sought to address are still prevalent in the contemporary church. These difficulties tend to disrupt Christian fellowship, place an unnecessary burden on believers, and frustrate the freedom that Christ has provided on the cross. It is against this backdrop that the contemporary church must teach Christian liberty concepts and its implications on the Christian experience.

What does Christian liberty entail? Does the believer's freedom in Christ exonerate Christians from any responsibility to live a consistently righteous life? How should believers dispense this freedom? The scriptures clearly teach that the freedom in Christ must not be abused but used responsibly (Gal. 5:1).

The Function of the Law

In this thesis, the researcher argues that the law possesses both a revelatory and a regulatory function. The regulatory function describes the tyranny of the law and whether it is sufficient in leading people to salvation. The limitation of the law is that it exposes sin but provides no solution to overcoming sin.³⁶⁴ The law describes what sin is but cannot provide the power to overcome its bondage. It reveals the inadequacies in the human effort to obtain

³⁶⁴ Craig S. Keener, "Galatians," in *New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 152.

salvation but provides no remedy to overcome it (Rom. 6:23). However, what the law demands differs completely from what Christ demands (Gal. 3:24).

The law is not just regulatory but also revelatory. It served as a guide for a while until Christ was unveiled to humanity (Gal. 3:24-26). The law was a pedagogue teaching that people needed to be justified by faith. It showed that man was a sinner. Once Christ died on the cross, the principle of the law as a means of justification ceased, as such the advocacy to return to the law by the agitators is irrelevant.³⁶⁵ Both the law and faith cannot coexist since the law is primarily preparatory.³⁶⁶ Therefore, a believer who reverts to legalism nullifies what Christ has accomplished on the cross. That person is, in essence, declaring the law as a more efficient means of salvation than the finished works of Christ on the cross. Critics of Christian liberty have misconstrued it as an excuse to live licentiously (Gal. 2:17). These critics sought to reestablish the law in believers' lives and saddled them with yokes that keep them burdened and in bondage for all times.

Legalism is wrong. It makes the law rather than faith in Christ as the basis of justification.³⁶⁷ Paul speaks positively of the law (Rom. 7:7, 12, 14); he notes that it would be impossible to know sin without the law. The law revealed sin, but it was powerless to deliver people from sin (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 3:21b–22). A continuous attachment to the law is both unproductive and dangerous since it requires complete obedience, of which none is capable (Gal. 3:10-12). Justification is only possible through faith in the crucified Christ (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 2:16;

³⁶⁵ Douglas J. Moo, Galatians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 71.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 154.

3:13–14).³⁶⁸ The law as a means of salvation is an antithesis to God’s saving grace, and faith in Christ alone who fulfilled the law is the only means of deliverance from its demands.

Christ has set us Free

The thesis also explores Christian liberty beginning with the importance of the believer’s freedom in Christ. This freedom underscores the importance of not living by the Mosaic law standards as a means of salvation. A person who gets saved no longer remains under the law, including inconsequential rituals of circumcision, food, and keeping the sabbath (1 Cor. 9:20). What makes this freedom possible? The finished work of Christ is the sole reason why people are no longer under the tyranny of the law (Col. 2:11-14). However, for a person to partake in the freedom Christ provides, that individual must have faith in what Christ has accomplished on the cross (Gal. 3:23-29).

A positional truth of Christianity is that on the cross, Christ satisfied the requirements of the law once and for all, in order that all who get saved would no longer be required to fulfill the demands of the law (Col. 2:14). Before salvation, a person would be indebted to the law but could not fulfill their legal obligation. Christ, through His death, satisfied the legal obligations and removed such obligations out of the way in order that believers would no longer be required to meet those obligations.

Paul also emphasized that the Colossians have already been circumcised and need not undergo the operation again in a physical sense, as would be required by Judaism (Col. 2:11-12).³⁶⁹ Spiritual circumcision is the entry point into the Christian community, just as physical

³⁶⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 155.

³⁶⁹ G.K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2019), 200.

circumcision is the entry point into Judaism. The external rites of the law, of which circumcision is an integral aspect is no longer required, because of their redemptive-historical purpose to function as a shadow of things to come (Col. 2:17).³⁷⁰ Also, Paul sees the power of the law as abolished in Christ's death (Col. 2:13-14). Thus, a new believer shifts allegiance from sin and the law to Christ.

How did the cross address the problem of sin? Paul notes that one barrier stood between human beings and God, and that barrier was the written code and all its regulations (Col. 2:14). This antagonism could only be removed when God cancels the debt that was against humanity. Christ took out the written code and nailed it to the cross. The law was not a help, but a hindrance and God took away its accusing demands and removed them from the scene. The law can no longer keep Jews under its curse and prevent Gentiles from fellowshiping with God.

To this end, Paul warns the Colossians against the deceitful philosophy of false teachers to return them to the traditions of men rather than keeping their faith in Christ (Col. 2:8). Christ, through His death, abolished legalism (Col. 2:11), and faith in him grants people the access to partake in the freedom that Christ provides (Col. 2:12).³⁷¹ Even the legal requirements that were against believers was paid for by Christ and publicly displaced so that no one can accuse any believer based on the law (Col. 2:14)

The freedom that matters is the freedom that Christ brings (Rom. 8:2). It is the sum of the entire soteriology. It is the essence of being a Christian and the fundamental basis for all

³⁷⁰ G.K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 200.

³⁷¹ Paul Foster, *Colossians*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 270.

Christian living.³⁷² People experience true freedom when Christ sets them free (John 8:32).³⁷³ However, this freedom is not a philosophical concept but a spiritual reality that affects the believer's relationship with the law. For Paul, freedom in Christ does not automatically manifest itself in the lives of believers. They are still capable of yielding to sin and letting it dominate their lives (Rom. 6:12–13, 16; 8:12–13; Gal. 5:13), but they are also alive to God, and sin can no longer hold them down; nothing can hold Christians captive any longer (Rom. 6:11). Freedom could also be lost or surrendered when believers are not vigilant or willing to defend their freedom from those who desire to enslave them again (Gal. 2:4; 5:1-2). Paul encourages his readers to live out a righteous life and the freedom from sin that Christ has made possible.

Galatians: The Magna Charta of Christian Liberty

Some Judaizing groups persuaded the Gentile Christians of Galatia to adopt circumcision and other distinctive Jewish ceremonies. Since circumcision was a sign of the covenant between Abraham and God (Gen. 17:9-18), anyone who was not circumcised would be alien to the covenant and have no right to claim its blessings.³⁷⁴ The Judaizers argued that conversion to Judaism was a necessary criterion to participate in the blessings of Abraham. If the Galatians wanted to be spiritually free, they must become descendants of Abraham by submitting to the Mosaic law.

Paul refuted such a perspective and declared that those who propagated that message were perverting the true gospel (Gal. 1:6-9). The gospel was perverted since it advocated a return

³⁷² Loubser, *Paul Cries Freedom in Galatia*, (Zweigniederlassung, Zurich: LIT VERLAG GmbH & Co. KG Wien, 2017), 206.

³⁷³ Edward W. Klink, *John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publication, 2016), 39.

³⁷⁴ See John D. Meade, "Circumcision of the Heart in Leviticus and Deuteronomy: Divine Means for Resolving Curse and Bringing Blessing," *SBJT* 18, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 59-85.

to the legal bondage which Christ has freed believers from, and there was no longer a need to adhere to the demands of the law. In his argument against the Judaizers, Paul explained the purpose of the Mosaic law as a temporary guardian (Gal. 3:22-23). Thomas Schreiner agrees with this position and argues that when Peter withdrew from the Gentiles in Gal. 2, that withdrawal was not occasioned by a change in his theology but was spurred on by fear of the Judaizers.³⁷⁵

Christ came on earth to liberate those who were under the law from its curse (Gal. 3:13–14; 4:4–5), and through faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, believers are free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). Believers are no longer slaves or merely the children of Abraham (Gal. 3:29) but the children of God (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 3:26; 4:6–7). This freedom leads to a moral transformation. Paradoxical, the life that emanates from the Spirit produces in the believer the very conduct that the law expects (Gal. 5:22-23).

Christian liberty is, however, eschatological since the final liberation is yet to come. Furthermore, Paul understood the freedom of believers not as an endorsement of sin; rather, they are freed from bondage in order to serve God (Rom. 6:22), righteousness (Rom. 8:18), and others. Paul affirms his freedom (1 Cor. 9:1) and his willingness to be a slave (1 Cor. 9:19). Believers have a paradoxical status, on the one hand, they are freed by Christ, yet they are expected to be slaves of Christ. As believers are guided and led by the scriptures and the Spirit, their freedom should not be abused through sinful or destructive behavior, but rather to serve God in righteousness as they await his Second Coming.

³⁷⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 121, accessed on February 18, 2021 <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5397771>.

The Place of Christian Responsibility

Freedom must be performed as a gift and a responsibility.³⁷⁶ The blatant disregard for the grace commandments should not be understood as a characteristic of Christian liberty and the freedom from the law should not be misconstrued as freedom from moral obligations.³⁷⁷ Although the departure from a legalistic orientation and lifestyle is a noble pursuit, this should not breed the idea that Christians are liberated to pursue their self-centered desires. The contemporary church has been plagued with this warped understanding, which hinders the effective discipleship of its congregations. If the church will loosen the clutches of legalism, it must hold tight to the true gospel. The church must know the gospel, believe the gospel, and teach the gospel, and the gospel is that Christ came to die for the sins of humanity in order that they will not remain in bondage but live in freedom.³⁷⁸ Discarding legalism does not mean that the law should be disregarded. The law has a good purpose: to serve as tutor, revealing sin and driving believers towards the grace found in Christ Jesus.³⁷⁹

Some evangelical churches advocate against legalism. Their message has been misconstrued as an endorsement of licentiousness; this is not the case. Swinging from one extreme to the other is no solution to this budding problem. Anyone who talks about grace but lives legalistically or licentiously hinders the message of the gospel. The gospel centers on the finished work of Christ and “the law’s function cannot go beyond that of containing transgressions. God’s gift of life is what was promised, and it is available through faith in Jesus

³⁷⁶ Loubser, *Paul Cries Freedom in Galatia*, 206.

³⁷⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians*, 423.

³⁷⁸ L. Ann Jervis, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 84.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

Christ...”³⁸⁰ As the church departs from both legalism and licentiousness, what should be its focus? How should the church help its congregation understand the concept of Christian liberty?

The church must develop a biblical worldview that discards both legalism and licentiousness. Instead, it should focus on sermons that emphasize the importance of obedience, walking in the fruit of the Spirit, living responsibly. The law has a place in the believer’s life; for example, reading the grace Commandments should stir the desire to live according to God’s standards not because it justifies the believer but because Christians are already justified.³⁸¹ Christians should desire to live a righteous life that reflects God’s goodness and grace and pursue God’s will of gratitude. The desire to live a life that pleases God is out of gratitude for all that Christ fulfilled on the cross, not because Christians are trying to earn salvation. The law still reveals where believers fall short of God’s will, but there is the assurance that Christians can run towards God’s grace when they sin, knowing that God accepts believers based on Christ’s perfect obedience to the law.

The Return to External Codes

In Gal. 5:13-6:10, Paul denounces the soteriological implications of the law but retains its ethical function as a way to avoid over-stressing from the law.³⁸² The way freedom is explained in Galatians; a person can deduce that although it has been obtained in Christ, one must not practice for fear of succumbing to the flesh.³⁸³ This tends to cause Christians to revert to external moral codes that replace the Mosaic law but has their list of dos and don’ts. The researcher observed this phenomenon in certain churches where several rules and regulations are a

³⁸⁰ L. Ann Jervis, *Galatians*, 80.

³⁸¹ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, 155.

³⁸² Loubser, *Paul Cries Freedom in Galatia*, 203.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

prerequisite for church membership. The laid down rules and regulations end up becoming a burden on congregants, and believers end up saddled with burdens that undermine their freedom in Christ.

Paul shared a similar concern about the Galatians failing to understand the profundity of the radical change that occurs when a person by faith receives Christ (Gal. 3:1-3). Paul wanted the Galatians to understand that justification only comes by faith (Gal. 2:19-20). Paul's critics are likely to provide a rebuttal: "If the law has been abolished, how are people to be guided morally in this new dispensation?" Paul acknowledges that although in Christ the flesh has been crucified, its effects have not yet been displaced (Gal. 5:19-21). However, in Christ, the works of flesh could now be withstood, and living according to the dictates of the Spirit can be chosen (Gal. 5:22-24).³⁸⁴ The believer's moral life is no longer measured by the law but by remaining in Christ, walking in the Spirit, and bearing the fruit of the Spirit. Gysbert Loubser notes that "The restraints and limitations of the law make way for a creative ethic of the Spirit, assisted by the community of faith..."³⁸⁵

A Guard Against Libertinism

The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in guarding believers against libertinism and legalism. In Galatians 5:13-6:10, Paul lays down the groundwork for the believer's life.³⁸⁶ The Apostle warns his readers against libertinism so that their liberty in Christ will not become an excuse for licentiousness (Gal. 5:13-15).³⁸⁷ If the life of Christians is ruled by the Spirit, then they are not

³⁸⁴ Loubser, *Paul Cries Freedom in Galatia*, 204.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians*, 340.

³⁸⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 423.

subject to the condemnatory aspect of the law and need not fear it.³⁸⁸ Consequently the true life in the Spirit does not lead to libertinism since human beings are truly free when they are no longer under the dominion of their natural desires. This freedom is only realized when a person gets saved and desires to do the will of God.

The Holy Spirit can produce the fruit, but it would not automatically translate into Christ-like behavior unless Christians strive to the best of their ability for them in faithful obedience. The fruit of the Spirit in the believer's life does not imply passivity; believers must cooperate with Holy Spirit.³⁸⁹ Walking by the Spirit is partnering with the Holy Spirit so that his influence in a person's life is welcomed rather than resisted (Gal. 5:16). It is only such a partnership that would make believers produce godly character. The fruit of the Spirit is in harmony with and not opposed to the law. However, the law does not produce the fruit of the Spirit, but they are produced by the Spirit working the believer's faith.³⁹⁰ In Galatians, Paul concerns himself with the fruit of Spirit shown in Christ-like character. In practice, this connotes ethical conduct, as detailed in Gal. 5:22-24.³⁹¹ The freedom from the law should reflect behaviors that reflect that which the Bible teaches. Any doctrine that teaches believers that freedom from the law equals a life without restraints has earned from the biblical imperative (Gal. 5:1, 16-25).

In Gal. 5:13-24, Paul does not describe an ethical battle within the believer, but rather the believer's responsibility not to adhere to the dictates of the flesh. A person who is willing to obey God can fulfil that desires since they are no longer under the dictates of the flesh.³⁹² The believer

³⁸⁸ Carson et al, *Galatians*, in *New Bible Commentary*, 1219.

³⁸⁹ Craig S. Keener, "Galatians," in *New Cambridge Bible Commentary*, 216.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁹¹ L. Ann Jervis, *Galatians*, 113.

³⁹² Douglas J. Moo, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians*, 355.

is not a helpless victim caught in the war of the flesh and Spirit, and Gal. 5:17 does not describe the believer as a pawn in the hands of two opposing and imposing entities.³⁹³ It instead stresses the believer's responsibility to partner with the Spirit freely, and not be ruled by the flesh.

Thomas Schreiner sums it up succinctly, "life under the law actually leads to the reign of sin, for the law does not restrain sin but increases it. Therefore, the solution to moral disorder is not the law but the Spirit. Faith is never a cipher that sits idle, but it invariably produces a life pleasing to God."

³⁹³ Loubser, *Paul Cries Freedom in Galatia*, 209.

The Future of Christian Liberty

Christian liberty is a precious gift resulting from God's redemptive activity in Christ and this gift must be guarded.³⁹⁴ Future research on Christian liberty will provide a broader understanding of the subject and help believers understand the practical implications of freedom in their daily lives. A significant area of contention has been the difference between legalism and legislation. Should Christian behavior be legislated? Legislation in this chapter refers to laws considered collectively. There are grey areas where the lines between freedom and legalism are not demarcated. The complexities of modern life can make it difficult for believers to distinguish between what is off-limits for Christians and what is permissible.

However, these complexities are resolved when a person decides not to be conformed to the dictates and demands of this world and chooses to be transformed by renewing their mind (Rom. 12:2). Any demand that violates the instruction of the scripture should not be adhered to or condoned. The Bible sets the standard for Christian living.

The Place of Legislation

The Bible commands children to obey their parents in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1); however, certain specific instructions are not mentioned in the Bible but are binding and legitimate on children. Instances such as curfew hours for teenagers are not clearly described in the Bible. The decree of the Jerusalem Council of A.D. 49 (Acts 15:22-29) was a suitable solution designed to neutralize the prevailing conflict that threatened the fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ Robert K. Rapa, "Galatians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans-Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 675.

³⁹⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 90.

The letter written in the name of the Jerusalem leaders had decided not to burden the Gentiles with participating in circumcision and the law but rather provide some regulations that would enhance their relationship with the Jewish Christians. Still, it, however, recommended some necessary things. Craig Keener believes that the four proscribed areas of apostolic decree “minimal expectation for table fellowship to maintain unity with the Jewish believers (Acts 15:20).”³⁹⁶ This researcher thinks that the proscribed areas in Acts 15:27-29 could also be a way of restricting the liberty of the Gentiles as a means of facilitating fellowship. Was the apostolic decree a means of legislating the behavior of the Gentiles? Craig Keener proposes that these rules at the least allowed the Gentiles to be seen as God-fearers and not idolaters.”³⁹⁷ There is a lot of truth to Keener’s perspective provided it was not a basis for their salvific status.

The regulations in Acts 15:29, which stated that Gentiles should abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality, should be considered an expression of Christian liberty, not another form of legalism. Biblical regulation for the sake of honoring God and others should not be confused with legalism. However, there is a need for further study on this subject, especially how it should be applied within the contemporary context.

The Pressing Danger of Libertinism

The contemporary church has invested a considerable amount of time and pulpit ministry to explain the importance and implications of freedom from the law. As noble an exercise as this is, it is important to ensure that the congregation is aware of the dangers of libertinism. There would be temptations to abuse God’s grace and indulge in all manner of sinful behaviors, but it is

³⁹⁶ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 3, 107.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

crucial to understand freedom from sin is not freedom to sin (Gal. 5:13). The Apostle Paul has faced several criticisms on his teaching about freedom from the law. Critics labeled him as a proponent of libertinism (Rom. 3:8; 6:1, 15; 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23).³⁹⁸

However, Paul warns in Gal. 5:13 that freedom should not be used as an opportunity for self-indulgence. In the book of Romans, Paul's condemnation of libertinism is put in a cosmic context where he describes how the powers of sin and death hijacked the God-given purpose law to serve their purpose (Rom. 7:7-25; 8:2).³⁹⁹ The church must preach and disciple its congregants on the dangers of both legalism and libertinism.

Theological Tensions

The theological tensions within the early church still exists in the contemporary church. Just like Paul, today's believer must guard the message of the gospel and prevent its abuse by false teachers who through a faulty interpretation yoke Christians back into legalism or advocate the removal of moral restraints that helps them honor God. It is important that obedience to the law is not reestablished as the standard for right conduct, conversely, disobedience to God's commands should not be established as a feature of Christian liberty.⁴⁰⁰ These theological tensions would be properly addressed when justification and transformation are understood as inseparable features of the believer's union in Christ (Gal. 2:16-21).

New Trends and Practices

How should contemporary Christians understand the concept of Christian liberty? What are the consequences of a skewed perspective on Christian liberty? Today's church has been

³⁹⁸ Robert B. Kruschwitz, "Paul's Assessment of Christian Freedom," *The Centre for Christian Ethics* 2011, 4, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/140018.pdf>

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Martinus C. De Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2011), 271.

criticized for being judgmental, particularly believers who do not fit their church's cultural framework. There has always been a doctrinal tension between traditional (orthodox) churches and seeker-friendly churches concerning the limits of Christians liberty. The apostolic decree of the Jerusalem Council of A.D. 49 does not address the tensions of the modern-day church, and its proposals might have a minimal impact today. There is the need to develop lessons out of the resolution designed by the Jerusalem Council of A.D. 49 that are applicable in the lives of the contemporary Christian. The future of this thesis would have to recognize the contemporary implications of Christian liberty.

This thesis has sought to provide a working definition of Christian liberty, provide a New Testament study of Christian liberty, address the challenges of legalism and libertinism, examine case studies on the subject and discuss future research on Christian liberty. This thesis provides useful information for believers seeking to understand what Christian liberty is all about. The project concludes with a noteworthy remark from Nijay K. Gupta, "By making an appeal to the power of the cross, then, Paul is underscoring the solution not to the legal or forensic problem of transgression but also to the moral problem of how the will and the human outlook have been damaged and corrupted by sin and are in need of a reconfiguration in view of the cross."⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰¹ Nijay K. Gupta, *Colossians*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Mason, GA: Smyths & Helwys, 2013), 96.

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Appendix A: Adult Bible Class Program

NEW BEGINNERS MODULE	MEMBERSHIP MODULE	MATURITY MODULE	MINISTRY MODULE
The creation Story	Member of God's Family	Bible Study I	Understanding Christian Ministry I
The Fall of Man	History of ICGC	Bible Study II	Understanding Christian Ministry II
God's Plan of Salvation	Corporate Vision I	Quiet Time	S.H.A.P.E of Ministry
Assurance of Salvation	Corporate Vision II	Prayer	Spiritual Gifts I
Baptism of the Holy Spirit	ICGC Mission and Structure	Fasting	Spiritual Gifts II
	Ministry Portfolios	Authority of the Believer	Discovering my Spiritual Gifts
	The Church's commitment to Members	Fruit of the Spirit I	The Heart of Ministry
	The Members' commitment to the church	Fruit of the Spirit II	Natural Abilities for Ministry Talents
	Ordinance I (Water Baptism)	Giving	Personality of Ministry - Uniqueness
	Church Ordinance II (The Lord's Supper)	Specific Acts of Giving	Personal Experience & Ministry
		The Fellowship of Believers	Ministry of the Church
		Evangelism	Team Ministry
			Excellence in Ministry
			Getting Started

Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Approval

June 8, 2020

Harry Allotey
Norman Mathers

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY19-20-415 Christian Liberty

Dear Harry Allotey, Norman Mathers:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study does not classify as human subjects research because it is not considered generalizable.

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office