

The Law of Liberty

But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does. . . . So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty (James 1:25, 2:12 emphasis mine).

Webster states that law “implies imposition by a sovereign authority and the obligation of obedience on the part of all subject to that authority.” On the other hand, liberty is seen as “the quality or state of being free:

- The power to do as one pleases
- Freedom from physical restraint
- Freedom from arbitrary or despotic control
- The positive enjoyment of various social, political or economic rights and privileges
- The power of choice”

Although law and liberty appear to be contradictory terms, the Bible refers to “the law of liberty,” a reality that is possible because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Observe a young child of two or three. Some of the first words that many children learn are “mine” or “no.” Children test their boundaries, wishing to be free from restraint. However, if they are taught by godly parents, they eventually learn that freedom is actually the ability to make right choices in life.

Using freedom to chose to act in selfish ways does not result in a happy life. There are adults who can testify that because there were no restrictions or guidelines given to them by their parents, they chose a life of crime. Other adults credit their godly upbringing with their success in society. The law of liberty referred to in Scripture leads a person to choose to act in love, just as Jesus did.

Freedom is certainly a topic of cultures and nations. America is known as a “free nation.” Nations with dictators are known for oppressive rule, where people are not allowed choices or have very limited choices as to lifestyle, education, employment, religion, etc. Presented with the ability to choose freedom or dictatorship, most people would choose freedom. Even in countries where the political climate is burdensome and unjust, Christians understand the “law of liberty.” They choose to follow God through extremely difficult circumstances. Although oppressed, they know they have freedom in Christ.

Many believers, such as Corrie ten Boom (*The Hiding Place*) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*The Cost of Discipleship*), have given testimony to their joy and freedom in Christ while undergoing horrendous trial. In his poem *The Friend* from *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

When the spirit touches mans heart and brow with thoughts that are lofty, bold,
serene, so that with clear eyes he will face the world as a free man may. . . . then

would that man, lonely and actively working, know of the spirit that grasps and befriends him, like waters clear and refreshing where the spirit is cleansed from the dust and cooled from the heat that oppressed him, steeling himself in the hour of fatigue - like a fortress to which, from confusion and danger, the spirit returns, wherein he finds refuge and comfort and strengthening, is a friend to a friend.

God tells us that choice is ours. When you choose Christ, you choose freedom. *It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery* (Galatians 5:1). “A yoke of slavery” implies bondage, and an “obligation to keep the whole Law” (Galatians 5:3). The law of liberty involves choice: the power to choose to be in submission to Christ, His teachings and His example. He left the freedom of Heaven voluntarily for our sakes. Along with the apostle Paul, we can choose to follow His ways:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly (Galatians 2:20-21).

For further study and reflection, examine the following passages. You will need to do background study in order to answer the questions.

John 8:32

- Who spoke these words?
- What was the context – the background of this passage?
- How does one “know the truth?”
- How does knowing the truth set you free?

Romans 8:2

- Who wrote these words?
- What was his background?
- What group of people was he addressing?
- Describe the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” and “the law of sin and of death.”
- What is the difference between the two?

Galatians 2:4-10

- What role did misunderstanding and jealousy play in the attack described in verse 4?
- How did the apostle respond to the “false brethren” described in verse 4?

Galatians 6:2

- How does this verse relate to the “law of liberty?”

2 Corinthians 3:17

- Read this entire chapter. How does verse 17 describe the “new covenant?”

Biblical references are from the New American Standard Bible.

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