

LESSON NINE

FREEDOM IN CHRIST (Part 1)

INTRODUCTION

God gave the Israelites in the Old Testament hundreds of laws to obey. Those laws are usually divided into three general categories: (1) the civil laws, regarding the political, economic, and judicial activities of the people of Israel, (2) the ceremonial laws regarding worship, priests, sacrifices, offerings and related matters, and (3) the moral laws regarding personal behavior and relationships.

Most Christians teach that the civil laws were intended primarily or even exclusively for the Israelites and are not binding for us today. They do recognize, however, that there are certain underlying principles in these laws, such as honesty, integrity, justice, and special concern for the poor and needy, which can serve as positive guidelines for people everywhere.

The ceremonial laws are no longer binding because they were fulfilled through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Most of the moral laws, however, are considered to be still valid today because they are repeated in one form or another in the New Testament. And, in addition to the laws found in the Old Testament, there are many commands and teachings in the New Testament which serve as moral laws or guidelines for us today.

In this Lesson we will be looking only at the moral laws.

When Christians teach that believers are “free from the law,” they do not always mean the same thing. Some Christians believe that we are free from any obligation to obey the civil and ceremonial laws while we are still obligated to obey the moral laws—especially those in the New Testament. Some not only emphasize the importance of obeying the teachings and commands of the Bible but add a number of rules of their own which they believe all Christians should observe. Others teach that we are not free to do what we please but we do not have to be overly concerned about laws and commands if we truly love the Lord with our whole heart and if we love our neighbors as ourselves. And still others emphasize that we should focus on the leading of the Holy Spirit as we seek to know which laws are still valid for us and which are not.

In this Lesson and also in Lesson Ten we will study various teachings in the New Testament which can help us develop a Biblical understanding of what it means to be “free in Christ.”

SOME BIBLICAL TEACHINGS ABOUT OUR FREEDOM IN CHRIST

New Testament writers clearly emphasize that we can be saved only by grace and not by obeying laws—whether those be the laws of God or the laws of men. Because grace is a free gift of God and because Jesus perfectly fulfilled God's law in our behalf, we no longer live under the law but are free in Christ. Among the passages which teach these truths are the following.

“ . . . you are not under law, but under grace. . . .” Romans 6:14

“ . . . we have been released from the law, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” Romans 7:6

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1

“You, my brothers, were called to be free.” Galatians 5:13

“ . . . if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.” Galatians 5:18

While the writers of the New Testament emphasize our freedom in Christ, they also recognize how easy it is for some people to use their “freedom” to justify a way of life that does not please God or bless others.

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather serve one another in love.” Galatians 5:13

“Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.” 1 Peter 2:16

“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.” 1 Corinthians 9:19

SOME BIBLICAL TEACHINGS TO GUIDE US IN OUR LIFE OF FREEDOM

Sincere Christians will probably always differ somewhat on the best way for us to serve the Lord while living in freedom from the law and as we seek to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Bible does not give us specific directions on how to live in every situation which may arise in our lives, but it does give us some general guidelines to help us live humbly and joyfully and faithfully in our daily walk with God.

Among those guidelines are the following.

- (1) We should recognize that freedom from the law does not mean we are free to live as we please.

Neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament gives the believer the right to do “what seems right in his own eyes.” God has standards which He demands and expects us to obey. Our “freedom” in Christ does not give us the liberty to violate any of those commands or to ignore any of those guidelines. God expects us to learn what He has revealed to us and to live accordingly. Ignorance of what the Bible teaches is no excuse for failing to live as God wants us to live.

Some basic teachings on Christian living are found in Ephesians 4:17 through Ephesians 5:21, Colossians 3:1-17, 1 Peter 4:1-11, in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5-7, and in various other passages. Anyone who sincerely desires to live a life that is pleasing to the

Lord should become familiar with all of these passage--as well as others.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform

any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

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Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:1-2

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”
Ephesians 4:22-24

“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”
Ephesians 5:1-2

- (2) We should more emphasis on the positive things God wants us to do rather than focusing too much on things we should not do.

We should definitely be aware of and stay away from things that dishonor or displease God. However, our Christian lives should not focus primarily on negatives. Some Christians are so involved in determining what we should not do that their Christian living becomes primarily a matter of “don'ts.” Those who observe these negative “rules” are then regarded as models of Christian living while those who do not observe them are often considered “weaker” Christians, poor examples, and ineffective witnesses. This tends to create a very negative view of the Christian faith and may give non-believers a totally wrong view of what it means to be saved by grace.

Among the many positive things we should emphasize in our lives of freedom are prayer, witnessing, helping the poor and others in need, demonstrating our love for God and neighbor in everything we do, faithfully doing our daily work, living with a thankful heart, and daily demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit. If we focus on these things, we will not only please God, but it will also be much easier for us to stay away from the things we should not do.

“And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

1 Thessalonians 5:14-18

“Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” Colossians 3:12-14

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through

him.”

Colossians 3:15-17

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(3) We should make sure that our **motives** are pleasing to the Lord.

Our motives for doing what we do are of fundamental importance in the sight of God. The two basic moral commandments in the Bible are that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and that we love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). Those commandments have never changed and they never will. No matter what we do, if our conduct does not reflect a love for God and a love for others, God will not be pleased with us. We may do kind things for someone in need and may even sacrifice our time or money or energy for a good cause, but if we are not motivated by love, all these things are of little worth in God's sight.

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-4

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments . . . are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” Romans 13:8-10

(4) We should be very careful about judging others whose standards may differ from our own.

We should be extremely careful not to judge others in regard to activities or practices which are not clearly commanded or forbidden by the Scriptures. People who deliberately lie, steal, cheat, commit adultery, murder, blaspheme God or do other things which are clearly forbidden should be warned and admonished. But even the warning and admonition should be motivated by love and given lovingly. The person being “judged” should easily be able to see and understand the motive of the person doing the judging.

When we focus too much on our own lists of “do's and don'ts” it is very easy to judge others who do not have the same lists that we do! We then begin to evaluate a person's spirituality (including our own) on the basis of obedience to certain man-made laws. By doing so, we begin to focus again on works rather than on grace! Therefore, the New Testament warns us about being too quick to judge others.

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. . . .Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” Matthew 7:1-3

“Who are you to judge someone else's servant? . . . why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. . . . So, then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.” Romans 14:4, 10, 12.

“There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you-- who are you to judge your neighbor?” James 4:12

(5) We should continually seek the leading of the Holy Spirit as our guide and source of strength.

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia, he warned them about their apparent attempt to make spiritual progress by relying on their own human efforts to obey the law. He asked,

“Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” Galatians 3:2-3

Trying to grow in Christ by observing laws and regulations is a real temptation for many believers. They begin well, trusting the mercy and grace of God for their salvation, but then turn to the law to help them grow in Christ instead of trusting in the indwelling power and work of the Holy Spirit. And that, Paul writes, does not work. The law can tell us what to do but by itself it does not give us the power to do it! Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.” Galatians 5:16-18

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. . . . Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” Galatians 5:22-25

“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.” Romans 8:5-6

(6) We should be very careful about requiring obedience to a list of rules or laws which are not clearly based on Biblical teachings.

There may be some situations where it is helpful to draw up a set of rules which Christians are asked to observe. One of the reasons for this is that many Christians, both older and younger, conform too readily to the standards of the world around them (See 1 John 2:15-16.) However, we should be careful not to bind the consciences of people who are “free in Christ” by requiring obedience to a list of rules and laws which are not directly based upon the teachings of the Bible. By creating a specific set of man-made rules which others are expected to obey, we may encourage them to focus on laws and rules rather than on the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Legalism is a very significant and ever-present danger for serious believers--particularly among those who have not learned to appreciate their freedom in Christ. Paul warned against this kind of legalism when he wrote his letter to the Colossians.

“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” Colossians

2:16-17

“Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!?' These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.” Colossians 2:20-23

Jesus was clearly opposed to a legalistic religion which focused on man-made rules and an outward obedience to the laws of God. He strongly opposed and frequently condemned the religious leaders of the Jews who focused on an external obedience to God's laws and made many new laws of their own.

Jesus said: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. . . . on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.” Matthew 23:25-27

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. . . . You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.” Matthew 23:23-24. (See also the rest of Matthew 23:1-26).

(7) We should seek to serve the needs of others, be examples to them, and build them up in their Christian faith rather than seeking to please ourselves.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus Who . . . made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant . . .” Philippians 2:3-7

“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”
Hebrews 10:24

“. . . set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity.”
1 Timothy 4:12.

“Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” Colossians 3:12-14

In Lesson 10 we will consider some additional guidelines for those who seek to live out their freedom in Christ in a way that pleases God and blesses others.

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Old Testament contains hundreds of laws which God gave to His people. Jesus Christ has perfectly fulfilled the law in our behalf, so those who have committed their lives to Jesus now live in freedom from the law. Instead of following a “written code of laws,” Christians are led by the Holy Spirit as they live their daily lives to the glory of God.

However, even though believers are no longer living “under the law,” they are not free to do as they please. Rather, they have the freedom of living for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit so that they increasingly do what pleases Him!

In order to help us live God-pleasing lives, God has given us many specific guidelines and teachings in the New Testament. It is our obligation, as well as our privilege, to study these guidelines so that we may live each day in a way that honors our Lord. Observing these guidelines is not a way to gain salvation but rather a way to show our gratitude to the Lord for the salvation He has already given us by His grace. It is also a way for us to be an encouragement to other believers and a blessing to those who do not yet know the Lord.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON NINE

1. List and brief describe the three main categories of laws which God gave to the Israelites.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.

2. Why are the ceremonial laws no longer valid for today?

3. Indicate three different answers which have been given to the question: “Since we are “free from the law, which commands in the Bible do we have to obey?”
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.

4. Write out two New Testament passages which teach that Christians are “free from the law.”
 - A.

 - B.

5. Write out two New Testament passages which teach that we should not misuse this “freedom.”
 - A.

 - B.

6. Evaluate the following statement: “The New Testament is very clear on how we should live, so Christians today fully agree with one another on what we should do in every situation.”

7. Evaluate this sentence. “Since we are saved by grace and not by our works or obedience, sincere Christians may do whatever they think is best and right.”

8. Complete these sentences from Romans 12:1-2: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's _____, to offer your bodies as _____, holy and pleasing to God. . . . Do not conform any longer to the pattern of _____, but be transformed by the _____ of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is— his _____, _____, and _____ will.”

9. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? “People who don't know what the Bible teaches have a reasonable excuse for not doing what God wants them to do.”
Please give the reason(s) for your answer.

10. The Bible teaches many things which we should not do. It also teaches us many things we should do. List, with Scripture references, five specific things the Bible teaches us we should do.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.

- D.
- E.

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11. Write out Colossians 3:17.
12. God not only sees what we do but He also knows why we do it.
 - A. Why are our motives important in God's sight?
 - B. List (but do not write out) one passage in the New Testament which emphasizes the importance of our motives.
13. According to Romans 13:8-10, what is the “debt” we owe one another?
14. A. What does Jesus teach about judging one another in Matthew 7:3-5?
 - B. Does this mean we should never warn or admonish someone who is clearly violating God's standards? Please explain your answer.
15. Summarize briefly what Paul teaches in Galatians 3:2-4.
16. What nine things are included in the “fruit of the Spirit” referred to in Galatians 5:22-23?
17. What does John teach in 1 John 2:15-16?
18. Why did Jesus condemn the Pharisees and teachers of the law so severely?
19. List two reasons why we should be very careful about requiring obedience to a list of man-made rules or laws.
 - A.
 - B.
20. Write out Colossians 3:12-14.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. If two sincere Christians can not agree on what they believe God wants them to do, what should they do?
2. In Philippians 2:3 Paul teaches: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.” What do you think it means to consider “others better than ourselves”?
3. In general, do you think it is easier to do what we should do or to stay away from things we should not do? Please explain your answer.

4. Evaluate the following statement: “It would be much easier to live by strict laws which cover every situation than to follow the guidance of the Spirit, because then we would know for sure that we are doing exactly what God wants us to do.”

5. Would you agree or disagree with the person who made the following statement? “When I read what God requires us of in the New Testament (for example, the Sermon on the Mount, Ephesians 4-6, Colossians 3, and other passages), I know in my heart that I can never live the way God wants me to live. Sometimes I just feel like giving up. ”

Please give the reason(s) for your answer.

GRACE COURSE ANSWERS

LESSON NINE

1. A. Civil laws
B. Ceremonial laws
C. Moral laws
2. Because Christ fulfilled these laws through his life, death and resurrection.
3. A. Believers are free from an obligation to obey the civil and ceremonial laws, but they should still obey all the moral laws.

B. Believers should obey all the moral laws in the Bible and should also obey other man-made laws and rules to deal with situations not explicitly covered in the Bible.

C. Believers may not live “as they please,” but they don't have to be overly concerned about laws and rules if they truly seek to love and serve the Lord with all their heart and love their neighbors as themselves.

D. Believers should focus on the leading of the Holy Spirit as they seek to know which laws are still valid and which are not.
4. Students may choose such passages as Romans 6:14, Romans 7:6, Galatians 5:1, or Galatians 5:18.
5. Students may choose such passages as 1 Corinthians 9:19, Galatians 5:13, 1 Peter 2:16.
6. This statement is not true. The New Testament does not address every possible moral situation which may arise, so Christians often differ on what they should do in certain situations.
7. This statement is not true. The New Testament re-affirms many of the moral laws of the Old Testament and also gives us many specific teachings on how we should live in a way that pleases God. If we ignore those teachings, our lives will not please God.
8. mercy living sacrifices this world renewing good, pleasing and perfect
9. No. Believers should make a definite effort to learn what the Bible teaches. However, if they are not able to learn what the Bible teaches because they cannot read or because there is no Bible in their language or because there is no one to teach them, the Lord will not hold them fully responsible for breaking laws which they do not know. But even if they do not have access to Biblical teaching, the Holy Spirit will increasingly impress on their consciences the things which the Lord wants them to know so that they will be kept free from living in a way that displeases Him.

10. Students may choose a great variety of things here. It would be interesting to compare the answers of a number of students to see whether there are certain things which are included on most lists.
11. Colossians 3:17: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”
12. A. God wants us to love and serve and obey Him from the heart. He is not pleased when we simply “go through the motions” of external obedience in order to try to gain some benefit for ourselves or to escape punishment for failing to do what He commands. God's primary commands are that we love Him above all with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and that we love our neighbor as ourselves. If we do not truly love God and our neighbor, we are not truly obeying God, no matter how carefully we observe the letter of the law.

B. Most students will probably select 1 Corinthians 13 here, though some might also choose other relevant passages.
13. The one debt we have is to LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELVES.
14. A. Jesus taught that we should not judge others without first “judging” ourselves. If we don't do that, we easily become hypocritical, doing ourselves what we condemn in others. Or, at the least, we emphasize the sins of others while ignoring our own.

B. No. IF we truly love others, we will lovingly admonish them and seek to correct them when they are clearly doing what God condemns or when they are failing to do what He commands.
15. The Galatians did not receive the Holy Spirit by observing the law so they should not be so foolish as to think they will be able to grow in Christ by observing the law. They began their spiritual journey by faith (believing what they heard about the Lord) and they will continue to make progress in that journey by faith and not by works.
16. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.
17. Christians should not love the world or anything in the world. Those who do love the world show that the love of the Father is not in them. Everything in the “world” such as sinful cravings, the lust of the eyes, and sinful boasting comes from the “world” and not from the Father.
18. The Pharisees not only deceived themselves by boasting that they were “righteous” by obeying the letter of the law, they also led others astray by their teachings and actions. Instead of focusing on God's grace and forgiveness and on thankful and loving obedience to Him, they foolishly focused on human works and efforts.

19. Various answers can be given here, since the notes list several reasons why we should be careful to require such obedience.
20. “Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” Colossians 3:12-14