

What Do You Mean "FREE"?

An Old Hymn Expresses a Sentiment Embedded Deep in Christian Theology. Worshippers in the Modern Age Remain Blissfully Unaware that Their Denomination MAY Have Substituted a MisDefined Freedom that Could Have Lethal Consequences!

© Rich Traver, 81520-1411, 3-28-09 [13] www.goldensheaves.org

"Free from the Law, O happy condition, Jesus has bled and there is remission!" The words of this old Protestant hymn, written by Philip Bliss in 1873, generally sums-up where people stand or want to stand with respect to the Laws of God. They feel there is no further need for the Law, thus we're totally released from any further obligation to keep it. After all, didn't the Apostle Paul say that we are "not under the Law"? ¹ Doesn't that mean the law is no longer applicable when we come under grace?

We are a nation of laws. That's widely recognized. Despite that, the United States has been the very definition of 'freedom' in the modern world, and for that matter, in all of recorded history! It raises the question, what does the structure of law have to do with freedom?

In the same vein, the Word of God is well known for its inter-dependence upon "the Law" for its moral orientation. Under the Old Covenant, the law was an integral part of religious expression. Even the New Covenant, that relationship under which the Saints of God are provided access to redemption, is what implants a law-orientation into the minds of new believers. *"For finding fault with them, (the people) he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because **they continued not in my covenant**, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I*

*will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; **I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts:** ² and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:"* (Hebrews 8:8-10 repeating Jeremiah 31:31)

The question that should be apparent is, Does the common perception of what is meant by the term 'free' match the definition we find in scripture?

Man's Natural Enmity

There is a kind of thinking, natural to man, that opts for a **kind** of 'freedom', and that freedom sets aside any regard for the laws of God. Paul made pointed reference to that condition in Romans 8:7. *"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is **not subject to the law of God**, neither indeed can be."* Here enmity against God is defined as 'not subject to the laws of God'! Not only not subject to, but without capability of being subject! This in mind, should we consider more carefully those claims from the religious community that the Laws of God are completely abrogated and no longer applicable to the 'New Covenant Christian'? The majority seems to think that!

If 'the law being done away (abrogated) is the present situation, then why would people not being subject to that law be a matter worthy of concern?

Considering Sarah vs. Hagar

A place where Paul addressed this 'bondage versus free' issue is very revealing. In order to understand

¹ Another article, *"We Are Not "Under the Law"* addresses exactly what Paul meant when he used those words. What he actually said and what people today take his words to mean are distinctly different. Romans 3:19 illustrates that difference in rather clear terms!

² One technical exception some attempt to use is the reference to the houses of Israel and Judah, as though it means the Jews only! Would we say that being 'of a carnal mind' is strictly limited to Jewish peoples? If being subject to (under) the law is limited to Jews only, then why does Romans 3:9 draw-in all the world into guilty status?

‘free’ as Paul defined it, we should look into Galatians chapter 4 for an interesting observation. “Now I say, That **the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant**, though he be lord of all; 2: But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. 3: Even so we, when we were children, were **in bondage under the elements of the world**: 4: But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, 5: To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. 6: And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. 7: Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

There’s a basic point to note here. Paul addresses the matter of ones’ relationship to structured society by pointing out that the heir of lordship is just as obligated to obey as is the humble servant. However, our redemption, though to sonship in the Family of God, so long as we are children, we’re still regarded as ‘servants’. It is a matter of who we are servants to! This thought will prove important when we consider the Apostle Peter’s understanding of ‘the freewoman’s’ situation.

Peter offers more on this thought in his first Epistle: “Likewise, ye wives, **be in subjection to your own husbands**; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; 2: While they behold your chaste conversation (conduct) coupled with fear. ... let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. 5: For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being **in subjection unto their own husbands**: 6: Even as **Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord**: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.” What Peter points out is the importance of being ‘in subjection’, that condition we saw earlier that the natural man is incapable of being.

Sarah was in subjection to Abraham, obeying him and calling him lord! It wasn’t that he DEMANDED she be submissive, it was her choice to be! This is the essential distinction. **It isn’t that one had to obey and the other didn’t. Both women DID obey,**

only under different motivations! That’s what law-rejecting people regularly fail to notice.

Bondage versus Freedom

Continuing in Galatians 4: 21: “Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? 22: For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a **bondmaid**, the other by a **freewoman**. 23: But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. 24: Which things are an allegory: for these are **the two covenants**; the one from the mount Sinai, which genders to bondage, which is Agar. 25: For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. 26: But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” What Paul is telling us here is that there are two approaches to ‘servanthood’. One keeps the law by coercion, the other by choice. The son who obeys only because of his **obligation** isn’t the legitimate heir of the promises. It is the son who obeys by **choice** who is the heir of the New Covenant, having the law implanted in his heart and mind. Keeping it is an expression of his heart’s desire! It achieves the righteousness which is by faith, where reluctant compliance does not.

This is the key distinction between the Old Covenant relationship and the New. Those who advocate not keeping the law, the terms on which both Covenants are based, are misleading their followers toward a disastrous conclusion. It’s one thing to be naturally **incapable** of being subject to the laws of God and quite another to deliberately choose to disregard them. This is the orientation of much of the Protestant world. They’ve taken man’s natural orientation **against** ‘the law’ and solidified that state of mind through their theological justification.

28: “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. 29: But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. 30: Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the **bondwoman** and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the **freewoman**. 31: So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”

When words like ‘free’ are used, there are different ways to understand what is meant. We’ve already considered that the term ‘free’ as Paul spoke of it in

Galatians 4 doesn't necessarily mean what the unconverted 'natural man' would want it to mean.

Free From What?

When we consider the meaning of the word, we should ask ourselves, Free from what? From any obligation to keep the law, or free from the penalty of having broken it? Do we become free **to** sin or free **from** sin? No one is or can be free from sin on his own as all have sinned (which John defines as having broken the law).³ In that **all have sinned**, we have proof that the law is applicable to all who have ever lived. It isn't possible to incur guilt of having broken a law that isn't applicable to you! (Romans 5:13) This is well worth pondering! It establishes that we are not 'free' **to** sin either.

When we are removed from being 'under' the law, which Romans 3:19 defines as a 'guilty' condition, by Christ's blood sacrifice, and come 'under' grace, we become **freed of the penalty** of our sins. But being under that condition, we are forbidden to continue breaking the law. *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? **God forbid**. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. **Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body**, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? **God forbid**."* (Romans 6:1-4, 12, 14-15.)

When we come under grace, we are released from the penalty of our sin, but we're never free of the obligation to discontinue sinning. In fact, being under grace, we take on an obligation more substantial in our lives than ever before. We must not let sin reign in the conduct of our daily lives!

Not Justified BY the Law


A common response to the suggestion that we should keep God's Laws are those many scriptures where Paul seems to be negative toward the idea of

anyone keeping the Law. Places such as Romans 3:20, the verse following the one that defines the term 'under the law' as applying to all and is a term meaning **guilty**, says, *"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."* In this statement, Paul makes clear his point that law keeping will not bring us to a state of 'justification'!

Paul's negative statements regarding the law all bear the common denominator: That it isn't possible to generate remission of sins by even perfect law-keeping. There is nothing in the law that will roll away past guilt. It takes a perfect blood sacrifice to do that. *"And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."* (Hebrews 9:20) What the law does for the performer is define sin so that we can chart a more sinless life course! We're to avoid the condition of sin (from which we're forbidden) when we come under grace! (See Romans 6: in the left column.)

When reading those verses by Paul which seem to be negative toward the idea of keeping the law, please notice, they are always tied into the word or the idea of '**justification**': that process of becoming absolved of ones' guilty past. But as a new way of life, we find Paul's regard for the law to be overwhelmingly positive! "Free from the law" people typically fail to make that important observation.

Paul ultimately concludes, *"Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good... Therefore we conclude that a man is **justified** by faith without the deeds of the law. Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? **God forbid**: yea, we establish the law."* (Romans 3:12 & 7:28, 30-31)

No-one is free from the law in the sense of being free to disobey it. What we become free of is the death obligation imposed by our incurred guilt. 

Additional related topics available:

"We Are NOT Under the Law"
"Growing in Grace"
"What Must I DO?"
"Oh For the Love of God"
"The Faulty Logic of Antinomianism"

³ 1st John 3:4 *"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."*