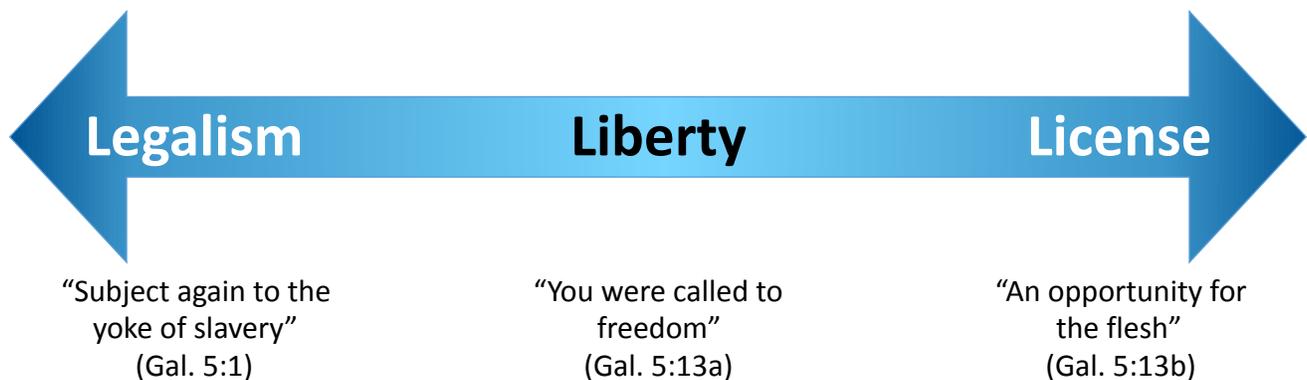


Legalism, Liberty, License

(Chuck Swindoll)

Though the Galatians had been “called to freedom” (5:13), it wasn't the kind of freedom of which the Judaizers accused Paul and his fellow preachers of grace. Like legalist today, the Judaizers feared that without the law as a rule of life, people would become lawless. Paul responds by reminding the Galatians that Christian freedom is not a license to indulge the selfish and sinful desires of the flesh. Commentator John Stott defines Paul's use of “flesh” well: “‘The flesh’ in the language of the apostle Paul is not what clothes are bony skeleton, but our fallen human nature, . . . which is twisted with self-centeredness and therefore prone to sin.” Paul warns his readers against giving our flesh—our natural tendency towards sin—an “opportunity” by abusing our freedom. The Greek word translated “opportunity” is *aphormē*, referring to a “pretext.” That is, God's grace should never be used as an excuse for sin. I'll repeat that statement so it will never be misunderstood: the grace of God should never be used as an excuse for succumbing to temptation and sin.

Because I believe in and preach grace and freedom, I've occasionally been accused of preaching lawlessness and license. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Paul says (and I wholeheartedly agree) that we have been freed from the power of sin. To return to the sinful lifestyle that God has forgiven would be to return to slavery. Instead, having been freed from the dark, shameful oppression of sin, we are to embrace our true calling to serve one another through love (5:13). Liberty should result in love, not legalism or license.



Serving others out of love frees us from our own self-centeredness. It humbles our pride. It has the power to transform us into the image of Jesus Christ. Loved brings us into the fullness of God's purpose for our lives. In fact, love itself transcends the dos and don'ts of Law, rendering them irrelevant. Love also limits our natural tendencies to sin, rendering them impotent. By living a life of service through love, we avoid legalism and license.

