

Series: Legalism. License. Liberty!  
Message Title: **The Golden Rule of Faith**  
Date: Sunday, November 12, 2017  
Scripture: Galatians 5:1, 6, 13-15  
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Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

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## Introduction

Ever heard the term, *Golden Rule*? Do you know what it is?

Is it, "Do unto others before they do unto you."? No!

Is it, "Whoever has the gold, makes the rules."? No!

What is it and where is it found in Scripture?

"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12 ESV).

In this verse, Jesus summarized the Torah (Law and Prophets). Set the standard, show the courtesy, reflect the posture to others you would desire and want them to demonstrate to you. It is a law of reciprocity.

The *Golden Rule* has been said to be the maximum altruism in religion and culture. It is

positive, personal, practical and principled.

It is easy to live in a world of philosophy and theory (even theology), and yet, we forget the simple context of daily reality—what to do and how to live today.

In the final two chapters of Galatians, the Apostle Paul shifts from strong confrontation and tactical instruction to application of faith in life. We are set free, but why? For what?

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery... For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love... For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another” (Galatians 5:1, 6, 13-15 ESV).

Freedom!

We have a new life orientation (grace) and all the benefits that go with it. We are not bound by law or guilt.

This new relationship from slavery to sonship in Christ changes our life orientation from *us* (self) to *others*.



## **Freedom Does Not Mean Indulgence**

“opportunity for the flesh” (Galatians 5:13)

Opportunity = a place of opening, a jumping off place

“Our faith in Christ brings freedom, but not license.”

We are saved by grace alone through faith alone, but we are not spiritual libertines or libertarians. It is not cheap grace. It is grace that abounds toward something greater, higher, and purer—love for Christ and others!

Sadly, some have gone to seed on grace: “I can be saved and live any way I want because I am under grace.”

Paul addresses this in Galatians, and answers this sternly:

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:1-4 ESV).

“The spiritual weakness of today’s evangelical churches and their leaders ought to convince any honest believer that the most imminent threat to our gospel witness at the moment is hardly an unhealthy fixation with being correct. Indifference about personal holiness, apathy about sound, biblical doctrine, and an easy-going susceptibility to worldly values are far more pressing problems.” —John MacArthur

God’s grace is not cheap or sloppy; it is generous and leads to humility and surrender.

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20 ESV).

Therefore because of grace, you now have the capacity to do something that will matter—not to waste your life, but to invest your life for the glory of God.

You are free from sin and self! So much disturbance in life comes from self-focus and self-orientation. Isn't it the ultimate pathological disorder? Narcissism. Yet, it is fed and fueled daily in our world. It is among the most elementary principles of our world—life is all about you, what you think, how you feel, what you need, what you want, etc.

Technology only inflates this—your profile, your followers, your platform, etc. I'm not saying we are not important, but we are not *all* that is important. And the more we try to focus on us, the more consumed we are with self and it is destructiveness.

This is why Paul is distinguishing between freedom to sin and freedom to serve. Sin leads to brokenness and bondage—Satan and evil desires vs. freedom to live fully and freely for the glory of God.

Our call from the bondage of sin and self is a call to step back from personal indulgences in order to give attention to others.

This is a very important topic because in the Christian world, freedom becomes a tool of division regarding what we can and can't do. "If I am free, I can do what I want." But the truth is, we are not just free to do what we want, but what we ought.

Freedom is a journey from release toward responsibility.

While it is true we have been set free, this freedom doesn't allow us to trivialize and marginalize the needs of others or to do what I do without thought of others.

"As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while

the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand” (Romans 14:1-4 ESV).

This passage is a thorough discussion about how to consider and treat behaviors in our lives and the concerns of others—meat offered to idols. It is statement of need to guard against indulgence that brings injury to others.

What I eat and drink, where I go, what I say, laugh at, invest in, view—all of these can move me from freedom to indulgence.

Freedom is most threatened when those who are free fail to take responsibility to guard and govern the freedom they have been given (free society).

So to safeguard our lives, God gives us some permissible guidelines and protective devices

for freedom. (Illustration: plug covers, cabinet door locks). It is not that we are not free to have power to use potent products, but we never want to allow these to injure little ones. In Romans 14, we read about meat to idols, and in this context, we learn about some of God's protective guidelines (boundaries for us).

The journey to maturity:

### **I'm Free, But I'm Responsible For My Attitudes / Judgments**

"Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him" (Romans 14:3 ESV).

Don't police, criticize, or condemn others. Because of our freedom, let's not be "lawyers"! (Preferences) Choose your attitudes! We don't want to become Judaizers, bound in criticism and cynicism, but rather, let us be accepting of others as members together.



## **I'm Free, But I'm Responsible For My Conscience / Convictions**

We all know about the struggle of a guilty conscience—times when we think we could do more or live better. This is why Paul addresses “conscience” in Romans:

“One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind... The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Romans 14:5, 22-23 ESV).

When we are uneasy about a particular place or practice in our lives, we need to abstain. Conscience and conviction need to be united in us.

To violate your conscience is to be a hypocrite. Peter in Galatians 2—hypocrisy.

“Peter, I smell ham on your breath. You forgot your Certs. There was a time when you wouldn’t eat ham as part of your hope of salvation. Then after you trusted Christ it didn’t matter if you ate ham. But now when the no-ham eaters have come from Jerusalem you’ve gone back to your kosher ways. But the smell of ham still lingers on your breath. You’re most inconsistent. Your compelling Gentile believers to observe Jewish law, which can never justify anyone.” —Ralph Keiper (paraphrase of Paul’s confrontation in Galatians)

## **I’m Free, But I’m Responsible For My Decisions / Actions**

“So then each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12 ESV).

I am not my own to do what I want as I want, but I am always under God’s authority and seek testimony that reflects His rule in me.

When I drive, I can literally go anywhere, but not at any speed, in any lane, without a seat belt and while texting.

Am I doing something clearly prohibited in the moral will of God? There is no freedom here. Morally, "If this were to be my last hour, would I so desire to meet the Lord?"

### **I'm Free, But I'm Responsible For My Influence / Example**

"Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother... It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble" (Romans 14:13, 21 ESV).

Alcohol is an entry and injury drug of hearts, homes and families. It causes accidents, infidelity, irresponsibility and neglect.

We are to be on our guard and help others grow in their faith. My focus must always be on what helps others on their way, not what holds them back. I cannot flaunt freedoms that hinder others.

### **I'm Free, But I'm Responsible For My Church / Community**

"As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions... For if

your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died... So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Romans 14:1, 15, 19 ESV).

Americans are all about autonomy and anonymity at church, but the truth is, if you are a believer, you are to be concerned about community! You are part of a body of believers held together by love for God and for each other. We never want to traffic in individual indulgence; we want to do all we can to create connectivity and accountability that reflects commitment to grow in maturity in Christ.

## **I'm Free, But I'm Responsible For My Role / Call for God's Kingdom**

"So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit... Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, 'The

reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me'" (Romans 14:16-17;15:2-3).

In all I do, I never want to forget I am bound by a call and a commission to share Christ with a lost world. I cannot dismiss God's agenda or God's call in the pursuit of my own freedoms in life.

You don't have to talk, live, dress and eat so that everyone says, "There's a Christian," but you do so in such a way that when one hears that you are, they are not surprised.

Yet, God's plan and purpose in all of this is not sensitivity training so that we are just nicer people, but more importantly, it is to engage our minds, hearts and energies to serve His glorious purpose in the world. We are freedom fighters sent in the world to bring release and hope to those bound in sin, under the law and headed toward judgment.

Question: If God has set you free, where are you going freely and fully to magnify and glorify God's saving grace in your life?

## **Freedom is Intended for Service**

“through love serve one another”  
(Galatians 5:13)

The Apostle Paul is concerned about much more than faith as a proposition. He is calling for the practice of faith.

...“faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6b ESV). Why?

“Love is the greatest proponent of care and the strongest prohibition against carelessness.”

We are to be moved by the liberty and love of Christ in us. The grace of God in us inspires zeal, not apathy!

### **Why is Serving so Important?**

(opposite of indulging)

- **Serving Helps Us Shed Our Pride**

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4 ESV).

- **Serving Allows Us to Grow**

Jesus sent His disciples out because they needed to know what they did not know! His role with them was not tutorial, but training and developing them.

- **Serving Connects Us With God's Power**

“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy” (Colossians 1:9-11 ESV).

The place you meet the power of God is where you need the power of God. We experience God where we obey God.

- **Serving Changes Lives Inside and Outside the Church**

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe

came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42-47 ESV).

According to an Eric Geiger article, the top three influencers on your child's spiritual health are (1) Bible reading, (2) prayer and (3) service in the church. Being committed to your church and serving in your church = greater impact in your child's life than the right school, right neighborhood, right friends, and so forth.

*Our Needs and Ministries.* Our church should have waiting lists for service, not gaps! We need to move up and move out together.

*Our Neighborhoods and the Nations.* This is not just an internal debate for the church.



The idea is that our service is to be directed to serve Christians and non-Christians alike. If you are struggling to apply “neighbor”, see Luke 10:25-37. The story of the Good Samaritan was Jesus’ answer to the qualifying question, “Who is my neighbor?”

What a contrast this call provides to the harsh and hateful speech that is rampant in our world today! Everyone has a polarizing position on everything—“I’m right. You’re wrong.”

God wants us to move toward those who not only disagree with us, but who may hate us to show them a faith working through love. As a parent, you are always warning your children and intervening for your children! We serve them in love.

Hospitality is a way to serve and show care for our neighbors. You have to love the fact that Jesus made much about getting near who the Jewish leaders saw as sinners in their communities.

In the end, grace (far from demanding less of us) demands more. We are called to live out

our faith in liberty and love—each increasing the demands on our lives, but releasing blessing in our lives and through our lives toward others.

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13 ESV).