

Paul and Freedom from the Law (13th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Galatians 5:1, 13-18—Freedom in Christ

¹ For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery...¹³ For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another.

¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. ¹⁶ But I say, *walk by the Spirit*, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For *the desires of the flesh* are against the Spirit, and *the desires of the Spirit* are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would.

¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit *you are not under the law*. (Galatians 5:1, 13-18)

1. Freedom: for “freedom” (Greek *eleutheria*) Christ has set us free (5:1)

2. The Law: the “yoke” of “the law” (5:1, 18)

Rabbi Simlai when preaching said: *Six hundred and thirteen precepts were communicated to Moses*, three hundred and sixty-five negative precepts... and two hundred and forty-eight positive precepts...¹

R. Joshua b. Karha said: “Why does the section, ‘Hear, O Israel’ precede ‘And it shall come to pass if you shall hearken?’—so that a man may first take upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven and afterward take upon himself *the yoke of the commandments*.”²

3. Love of Neighbor: as a summary of “the whole law” (5:14)

It happened that a certain heathen came before [Rabbi] Shammai and said to him, “Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me *the whole Torah* while I stand on one foot’. Thereupon he repulsed him with the builder’s cubit which was in his hand. When he went before [Rabbi] Hillel, he said to him, “*What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah*, while the rest is commentary thereof; go and learn it.”³

Living Tradition

Thomas Aquinas: [C]harity must be maintained, *because the whole law is fulfilled in one*

¹ Babylonian Talmud, *Makkoth* 23b (tran. Isidore Epstein).

² Mishnah, *Berakoth* 2:2 (trans. H. Danby).

³ Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbath* 31a (trans. Isidore Epstein).

word, namely, in the one precept of charity: “he that loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law” (Rom 13:8) and love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:10)... [For] in the love of God is included love of neighbor... Conversely, we love our neighbor for the love of God. Consequently, the whole law is fulfilled in the one precept of charity. (Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on Galatians, no. 304)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (13th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

What is the “freedom” that Paul is speaking of in Galatians? Does “Freedom” from the law mean the freedom to sin? If not, what does it mean?

For Further Reading

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*. Translated by F. R. Larcher, O.P. and M. L. Lamb. Lander, Wyoming: Aquinas Institute, 2012.
2. Brant Pitre, Michael P. Barber, and John Kincaid. *Paul, a New Covenant Jew: Rethinking Pauline Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2019.