

Leaders' Notes

The Ten Great Freedoms
Sermon #1

First Brethren Church of Sarasota, Florida
January 3, 2010

Dear Growth Group Leader:

Well, we are back at it again. Thank you for your willingness to continue on in your role as a leader, a pastor, of a growth group. Let me remind you to call me if you have any questions, problems, advice or just want to say hello.

Today's lesson is the introduction to a very big study. The next ten weeks will be about the ten commandments. We are presenting them as guidelines that help people who have been set free to live happier lives. What that means, practically, is that we are not under obligation to follow the law but we follow the law because we trust that God knows best. We believe in him and trust him so deeply that we go to great lengths to find his principles and follow them even though he has forgiven us and gives us grace.

In order to go through the ten commandments without getting into a non-Christian, legalistic attitude, I am introducing the subject with a sermon about the place of God's law in the Christian's life.

Don't forget to arrange for refreshments if your group has decided to have them. Your host can decide the best way to organize this.

Also, don't forget your report sheets. I assure you that I read every word.

I'm working hard to make these studies worthwhile. I'm praying about them and studying for them. I am collaborating with two other pastors. The only other thing I need is you: your feedback. Let me know what is working and what is not.

I'm posting the members of the groups on the web site, sarasotabrethren.com. Please look these over and if you can identify anyone in the church who doesn't have a group, try to encourage them to join yours.

I'm praying for another good quarter as we work together to build God's church.

Blessings,

Pastor David

The perfect law that gives freedom

James 1:22-25

What God's law does *not* do

The law cannot justify anyone.

Galatians 2:15-16; Romans 8:3, 4

Four purposes for God's law

The law makes us conscious of our sin.

Romans 3:20

The law shows we need a savior.

Galatians 3:23-25

The law gives us a pattern for a good life.

James 1:22-25

The law is a sign of our salvation.

1 John 5:1-5

What the law means for Christians

Jesus came to fulfill the law.

Matthew 5:17-20

"Fulfill" may mean to continue.

"Fulfill" may mean to complete.

"Fulfill" may mean to intensify.

The law should be written on our hearts.

Jeremiah 31:33

We should prefer the spirit to the letter.

2 Corinthians 3:6

Home Bible Study

The perfect law that gives freedom

Getting started

1. As a child, how did you feel about rules? Were you compliant and grateful for rules or did rules just make you want to rebel?

No right or wrong answer here. This is a getting-to-know-you question which will help get people talking. It might also explain some of the answers they give to some of the later questions.

2. Have you ever been frustrated by a rule or rules that seemed to be arbitrary and thus an unnecessary burden? What was the situation? How do experiences such as that influence your feelings toward rules?

It often seems that the more rules institutions make in order to be fair to everybody, the more unintended consequences crop up. Governments seem pretty good at making up these complicated and convoluted rules. Think of some examples yourself before you lead this study.

3. Does James 1:25 make sense to you when it teaches that the perfect law brings freedom? How do you think law, a command that prohibits or requires certain actions, can bring freedom?

If we didn't have rules for traffic, none of us would get anywhere safely or quickly. Even in Peru, there were unwritten traffic rules that everyone pretty much accepted even though the traffic signals and lane markers were routinely ignored. *Good* rules can mark out a safe zone, making it easier to be free.

Going deeper

4. Read Romans 6:11-14. What do you think it means when it says we are not under the law but under grace?

This is a very complicated question that can lead to a lot of discussion if your group is made up of deep thinkers. You may not have total agreement about what it means either. At the least it means that we are not required to follow the entire Old Testament law in the same way the Jewish people were. The early church faced a crisis when Paul started preaching to the Gentiles and they started accepting Jesus. The church decided that they did not have to follow the regulations of the Old Testament law. They did ask them to abstain from eating blood, strangled

animals (which were not bled properly), food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality. But that is a far cry from the Old Testament regulations. So, what does that say about the ten commandments and the rest of the Old Testament law? Are we free to do whatever we want? In a way, yes. Paul said all things were lawful for him but not all things were useful. The Old Testament law is still a great guide where we can find principles for a godly, blessed life. We can do anything we want if God has written his law on our hearts. If he has, then we want to do right. Whether it is the law or not.

5. Paul here teaches that since we are not under the law, we will be victorious in overcoming sin in our lives. How is grace better than the law in helping us to defeat our sin?

If we are truly saved and know that we were bought from slavery (to sin) by the blood of Jesus, then we will want to do right. That is a more powerful motivator than all the laws in the world. All the laws just make you want to avoid getting caught. Jesus' grace changes us on the inside.

6. Continue reading Romans 6:15-23. Should Christians follow the law? Why or why not?

The moral teachings of the law are for our good. Only a fool would insist on ignoring the law just because he could.

7. What are the crucial differences between a Christian's respect and obedience for God's law and a legalist's false religion? Or, to put it another way, how can I tell if I am living a life of grace or legalism?

A legalist is marked by the motives of his heart. Do I do what I do out of guilt, fear or a sense of duty or obligation? Do I serve God in order to feel that I am better than others? Those are the signs of a legalist. The more judgmental of others I am, the more I am thinking legalistically. On the other hand, if I delight in God's directions and serve God out of my trust for him and desire to bless him, then I am living in grace.