

# Galatians 5:13-15

- called to be free -

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## Introduction

- ❖ “Paul’s letter to the Galatians is one of the most significant books of the New Testament and of the whole Bible. Sometimes described as “the Magna Carta of Christian Liberty,” it discusses in clear, emotional, and intensely personal language the basic issue of how a man is put right with God. In Paul’s own words, the basic question is: “Does God give you the Spirit and work miracles among you because you do what the Law requires or because you hear the gospel and believe it?” (3:5). And the answer comes in similar language: “A person is put right with God only through faith in Jesus Christ, never by doing what the Law requires” (2:16, emphasis added).”<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Letter to the Galatians. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

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<sup>1</sup> Arichea, D. C., & Nida, E. A. (1976, p. viii).

## Context

❖ Overview of the contents of the letter:

<i>Gal 1:1-5</i>	Sender and Addressees, greetings
<b>Cause for writing this Letter</b>	
<i>Gal 1:6-10</i>	"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all" (Gal 1:6).
<b>The Gospel: justification by faith in Jesus Christ, and Paul</b>	
<i>Gal 1:11-2:21</i>	<p>"I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:11, 12).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Galatians 1:13-17. Paul and his conversion.</li><li>2. Galatians 1:18-24. After three years, Paul's first visit to Jerusalem.</li><li>3. Galatians 2:1-10. After fourteen years, Paul is acknowledged as the apostle to the Gentiles, Peter to the Jews.</li><li>4. Galatians 2:11-14. Conflict at Antioch between Peter and Paul.</li><li>5. Galatians 2:15-21. Paul's testimony. "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified" (Gal 2:15, 16).</li></ol>

## Slavery or Freedom

Gal 3:1-4:31

“You foolish Galatians!”

Paul refutes the Galatians by using arguments and rhetorical questions.

1. Galatians 3:1-5 (*the Spirit, faith, and the Law*):  
“Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?”
2. Galatians 3:6-14 (*Abraham, faith, justification, and the Law*):  
“Consider Abraham: ‘He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham” (Gal 3:6, 7).  
“Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous will live by faith’” (Gal 3:11; Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17).  
“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree’” (Gal 3:13).
3. Galatians 3:15-25 (*Abraham, Christ, and the Law*):  
“The Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law” (Gal 3:22-25).
4. Galatians 3:26-4:7 (*Christ, Abraham’s seed, sons of God*):  
“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26).
5. Galatians 4:8-20 (*Paul, the teachers, and the Galatians*):  
“Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!” (Gal 4:8-10).  
“Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them” (Gal 4:17).
6. Galatians 4:21-31 (*Hagar or Sarah, slavery or freedom*):  
“Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman” (Gal 4:31).

<b>Freedom!</b>	
<i>Gal 5:1-6:10</i>	<p>“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Gal 5:1).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Galatians 5:1-12: “Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1).</li> <li>2. Galatians 5:13-26: “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love” (Gal 5:13).</li> <li>3. Galatians 6:1-10: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Gal 6:10).</li> </ol>
<b>A final and emotional call</b>	
<i>Gal 6:11-18</i>	<p>“Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation” (Gal 5:15) Greetings.</p>

6. The Galatians had been confused by some people preaching a perverted Gospel. Because of what follows, the centrality of the problem seems to be the same question, that was discussed in Acts 15. Paul refers to the names of those who were present in Jerusalem at that time:
- Peter, James the LORD’s brother, John, and Barnabas (Acts 15:12-14).

## Form and structure

<i>Called to be free (verse 13)</i>	<sup>13</sup> You, my brothers, were called to be free.
<i>Address of the problem (A) (verse 13-15)</i>	But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. <sup>14</sup> The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” <sup>15</sup> If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.
<i>The conflict between the Spirit and the</i>	<sup>16</sup> So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. <sup>17</sup> For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with

<i>sinful nature (verse 16-18)</i>	each other, so that you do not do what you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.
<i>The acts of the sinful nature and the inheritance of the Kingdom (verse 19-21)</i>	<sup>19</sup> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.  I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.
<i>The fruit of the Spirit (verse 23, 24)</i>	<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control.  Against such things there is no law.
<i>The sinful nature has been crucified (verse 25, 26)</i>	<sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.
<i>Address of the problem (B) (verse 26)</i>	<sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

## Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

### The Letter to the Galatians

- ❖ The author is the apostle Paul.
- ❖ The location of the “churches in Galatia” cannot be established with certainty, it might be the southern or the northern part of central Turkey.
- ❖ The date of writing is only approximate: 53 C.E.
- ❖ There are strong connections with the Letter to the Romans.

### The occasion of the Letter, a historical reconstruction

- ❖ “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:6, 7).

- The Galatians had turned their back on Paul. This was instigated by some people, who discredited Paul, probably by accusing him of lies. Because of this, Paul defends himself and he ascertains:
  - “I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie” (Gal 1:20).
  - He tells about his own conversion: “For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism” (Gal 1:13). This is important because Paul was well aware of the tenets of Judaism, especially the law and the circumcision.
  - Paul recounts all his meetings with apostles, whose names are not unfamiliar to the Galatians. He can write about Barnabas, Peter, James, the Lord’s brother, Titus, and John, without introducing them!
  - About Titus, he writes: “Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek” (Gal 2:3).
    - Paul continues: “This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you” (Gal 2:4-5). He contrasts the freedom we have in Christ with the slavery of the law.
- He concludes this part of the letter: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery”
- A thematic and historical reconstruction:

<b>Formerly:</b>	
<i>Gal 4:10</i>	“Formerly, when you did not know God, <b>you were slaves</b> to those who by nature are not gods.”
<b>Paul’s preaching:</b>	
<i>Gal 3:1</i>	“Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.”
<i>Gal 3:14</i>	“So that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”
<i>Gal 4:14</i>	“You welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself.”
<i>Gal 5:13</i>	“You, my brothers, were called to be free.”
<b>Quickly afterwards:</b>	
<i>Gal 1:6-7</i>	“I am astonished that <b>you are so quickly deserting</b> the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are

Gal 4:10 Gal 1:20	trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.” And: “You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!” <i>The relationship between Paul and the Galatians has been disturbed:</i> “I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.”
<b>Now, in this letter:</b>	
Gal 5:1	“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”
Gal 5:16	“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”
Gal 5:25	“let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

### Acts 15 and Galatians

- ❖ The major theme of this letter is summarized by Paul: “Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?” (Gal 3:2). Compare this with Acts 15:
  - “Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1).
  - “After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: ‘Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are’” (Acts 15:7-11).
- ❖ This matter hadn’t been settled once and for all. Paul needs to write about Peter:
  - “When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? “We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified” (Gal 2:14-16).

### The main problem: The Law, the sonship, and the inheritance

- ❖ The question needs to be asked how did the Galatians understand the “law”?

- Observing the Law:
 

“know that a man is not justified by **observing the law**, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by **observing the law**, because by **observing the law** no one will be justified”

    - Observing the law = “**ἐξ ἔργων νόμου**”: *deeds that the law commands you to do*<sup>2</sup> (Gal 3:2, 5, 10; compare Rom 3:20, 27) as understood by the Galatians and especially by “some people” who “are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:7). They stress the necessity of circumcision as a prerequisite for the inheritance promised by God: “for if the inheritance depends on the law” (Gal 3:18).
    - Paul: “Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law” (Gal 5:3). It is not possible to single out one aspect of the law, the circumcision, which must be kept, to gain salvation (through Christ).
  - Through the Law:
 

“I do not set aside the grace of God, **for if righteousness could be gained through the law**, Christ died for nothing!”

    - Through the law = “**διὰ νόμου**”. The law was understood by these teachers as the means “**διὰ**” to gain righteousness and the acceptance as sons by God.
- ❖ Over and against this, Paul teaches the Galatians the function of the law. His personal experience is important:
- “**For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God**” (Gal 2:19). This personal statement is more elaborated in Romans 7:7-25. In Romans 7:7, Paul refers to the tenth commandment, which confronted him with the power of sin. “Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet’” (Rom 7:7).
  - “What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come” (Gal 3:19).
  - “But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, **we were held prisoners by the law, locked up** until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith” (Gal 3:22-24).
- ❖ Positively Paul states:

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<sup>2</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 391).

- “The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’” (Gal 5:15; Lev 19:18; Rom 13:8-10; Jas 2:8-11).
- ❖ And:
  - “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Gal 5:22–23).

#### Second problem: observing special days

- ❖ “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!” (Gal 4:8-10).
  - The Galatians returned to certain practices of their former life when they were enslaved to the gods.

#### Two problems, the same cause?

- ❖ Both problems, although seemingly different, have probably the same cause.  
 The Galatians were looking for the certainty of faith in observing the law and special days.

## Exposition

### Verse 13

- ❖ **“You, my brothers”**
  - **“You”** is emphatic. Paul is stressing the relationship we have as Christians, sons of God. He is calling them **“my brothers”**,
- ❖ **“were called to be free.”**
  - By God. This is a divine passive. The proclamation of the Gospel sets us free through faith in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. By his grace(!) (Gal 1:15).
    - It is God’s initiative to call and to set us free, not ours.
    - Most people are unaware of the fact that they are not free but enslaved.
    - “The point he now wished to bring out was that the call to freedom was a call not merely *from* the older enslavement, but also a call *to* a new responsibility. The freedom of God has both aspects, otherwise it is not

God's freedom. The liberty which does not ask, Liberty for what?, is a dangerous commodity."<sup>3</sup>

❖ **"Free."**

- This freedom is explained in the following verses:
  - **"Live by the Spirit"** (Gal 5:16). And: **"Led by the Spirit"** (Gal 5:18).
    - Compare: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17).
  - **"Not under the law"** (Gal 5:18).
    - Paul refers to the condemnation because of the trespasses of the law. Free from sin (Rom 6:18).
    - There is no tension between the law of God and the freedom (of the Gospel, as James wrote: "But the man who looks intently into **the perfect law that gives freedom**, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does."
  - **"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires"** (Gal 5:24).
- This freedom is not absolute freedom, but qualified by **"belong to Christ."** We are set free by him to live with him, to love God and to love our neighbour.
- Free from (spiritual) slavery:
  - **"So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir"** (Gal 4:7).
    - Compare Romans 8:1-17. "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26).
  - **"Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods"** (Gal 4:8).
  - **"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery"** (Gal 5:1).
    - Paul is referring to the burden of circumcision and related Old Testament prescriptions (Gal 2:4).
- Free from the curse of the law:

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<sup>3</sup> Dunn, J. D. G. (1993, p. 286, 287).

- “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit” (Gal 3:13, 14).
  - The fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22, 23) is the sign of spiritual freedom:
    - **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”**  
Paul is stressing this freedom brought about by the Spirit when he writes: **“Against such things there is no law.”**
    - The believer is not depended on circumstances, special occasions, happenings, personal emotions and feelings, but ultimately depended on the Spirit of Christ and of God, to enjoy love, joy and peace.
    - John Stott: “What sort of freedom is Christian freedom? Primarily, as we saw in the previous chapter, **it is a freedom of conscience**. According to the Christian gospel no man is truly free until Jesus Christ has rid him of the burden of his guilt. And Paul tells the Galatians that they had been ‘called’ to this freedom. It is equally true of us. Our Christian life began not with our decision to follow Christ but with God’s call to us to do so. He took the initiative in His grace while we were still in rebellion and sin. In that state we neither wanted to turn from sin to Christ, nor were we able to. But He came to us and called us to freedom.”<sup>4</sup>
- ❖ **“Serve one another in love.”**
  - The Christian is called to be free. This freedom enables the Christian to serve unconditionally.
    - “What we see here is that both the life and teaching of Christ is the ground of Paul’s teaching at this juncture. Christ fulfilled the Law, and made it possible for his followers to see the fulfilment of the Law and its requirements in their own lives simply by following his example of loving neighbour as self, simply by walking in the Spirit and following the example and teaching of Christ, the ‘Law of Christ’.”<sup>5</sup>
  - **“Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up”** (Rom 15:2).
    - “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Mt 7:12).

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<sup>4</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1986, p. 139).

<sup>5</sup> Witherington, B., III. (1998, p. 384).

- Serve = “**δουλεύω**”: 2. **to act or conduct oneself as one in total service to another, perform the duties of a slave, serve, obey.**<sup>6</sup>
  - John Stott wrote these thought-provoking words:  
“Christian liberty is service not selfishness.  
It is a remarkable paradox. **For from one point of view Christian freedom is a form of slavery,—not slavery to our flesh, but to our neighbour. We are free in relation to God, but slaves in relation to each other. This is the meaning of love.**”<sup>7</sup> The same paradox is found in 1 Corinthians 7:22: “For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ’s slave.” See also Romans 6:15-23: “But now that **you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God,** the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life” (Rom 6:22).

❖ **“The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”**

- “The quotation is from Leviticus 19:18, and once more it is taken from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). In its Old Testament setting, it is simply a command for Israelites to love their fellow Israelites; here, it is understood as a command for Christians to love one another, regardless of their race or nationality.”<sup>8</sup> See also Galatians 6:10.
- The Galatians thought of the circumcision as (part of) the fulfilment of the law (Gal 5:3). Paul writes: “The entire law is summed up in a single command.” See also Romans 13:9.
- The entire law, not some parts! This is also a hermeneutical guideline, reading and applying the law.
  - James Dunn: “**Paul calls here for a lifestyle** which could best be summed up in love of neighbour.”<sup>9</sup>
  - John Stott: “We must notice carefully what the apostle writes. He does not say, as some of the ‘new moralists’ are saying, that if we love one another we can safely *break* the law in the interests of love, but that if we love one

<sup>6</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 259).

<sup>7</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1986, p 142).

<sup>8</sup> Arichea, D. C., & Nida, E. A. (1976, p. 132).

<sup>9</sup> Dunn, J. D. G. (1993, p. 290).

another we shall *fulfil* the law, because the whole law is summed up in this one command, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'<sup>10</sup>

- Again: "Our Christian freedom from the law which he emphasizes concerns our relationship to God. It means that our acceptance depends not on our obedience to the law's demands, but on faith in Jesus Christ who bore the curse of the law when He died. It certainly does not mean that we are free to disregard or disobey the law."<sup>11</sup>

❖ **"But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature;"**

- To indulge = "ἀφορμή": "a base or circumstance from which other action becomes possible, such as the starting-point or base of operations for an expedition, a set of convenient circumstances for carrying out some purpose occasion, opportunity for something."<sup>12</sup>
- Because of the contrast with the preceding words, this is a severe warning.
  - " seems that Paul pauses abruptly and adds a warning against the abuse of freedom in order to avoid any misunderstanding on the part of his readers: *Do not let this freedom become an excuse for letting your physical desires control you.*"<sup>13</sup>
- "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" (Gal 5:24).
- Compare 1 Peter 2:16: "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God." And 1 Corinthians 8:9: "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak."
- To indulge = "ἀφορμή": a base or circumstance from which other action becomes possible, such as the starting-point or base of operations for an expedition; *to give the flesh an opportunity* (to become active).<sup>14</sup>

❖ **"sinful nature"** is the fallen nature.

- **"They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."**
  - Compare Romans 7:14-25.

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<sup>10</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1986, p. 142).

<sup>11</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1986, p. 142, 143).

<sup>12</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 158).

<sup>13</sup> Arichea, D. C., & Nida, E. A. (1976, p. 130).

<sup>14</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 158).

- **“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious”**
  - Paul lists several acts. This list is not exhaustive. A comparable list is found in Romans 1:18-31: “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.”
- ❖ **“If you keep on biting and devouring each other”**
  - “The warning in this verse indicates that Paul pictures the Galatians as furiously fighting each other. The verb translated *hurting* is literally ‘to bite’ and refers primarily to beasts (a dog, a gnat; LSJ). The verb translated *harming* is literally ‘devour’ or ‘gulp down,’ again used of wild beasts (animals of prey; LSJ).”<sup>15</sup>

## Application

### Called to be free

- ❖ Praise God, because by his grace he called us to be free.
- ❖ Praise Christ, because with our sinful desires have been crucified.
- ❖ Praise the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us (Jn 14.16, 17), who sets us free!
- ❖ Say thanks to the Lord, because he sends us preachers, evangelists, missionaries who are calling us to be free.
  
- ❖ John Stott: “Everyone who has been truly set free by Jesus Christ expresses his liberty in these three ways, first in self-control, next in loving service of his neighbour, and thirdly in obedience to the law of his God”<sup>16</sup>
  - The fruit of the Spirit (5:22, 23): “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” It is not by accident that Paul lists love first and self-control last.

### Unfree/slaves

- ❖ Most people (non-Christians) are unaware of the fact that they are not free but enslaved.
  - By their religious beliefs/idolatry superstition.

<sup>15</sup> Arichea, D. C., & Nida, E. A. (1976, p. 132).

<sup>16</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1986, p. 143, 144).

- By their desire for power/wealth/ status.
- By their addictions and desires: alcohol, drugs, sex.
- By their search for the certainty of faith apart from Christ, by keeping certain customs/traditions/ commandments.
  
- Witherington remarks: “Surveys have shown that perhaps no value is more highly prized by those who live in the West than freedom. Usually what is meant by freedom is something very different from what Paul has in mind here. In the modern world freedom usually means freedom to do as one pleases, freedom to live as one pleases, freedom to be left alone, freedom to be an individual without having to worry about encumbering laws or requirements or stipulations. In other words, freedom is defined in very individualistic, indeed egocentric, ways in our culture. What underlies this is the fundamental assumption that individual identity is more primary and important than community identity, an assumption grounded in the pervasive myth of the rugged individual who accomplishes great things by sheer willpower and ingenuity.”<sup>17</sup>

#### What kind of freedom?

- ❖ “There are the famous four freedoms first enunciated by President Roosevelt in 1941, when he spoke of ‘freedom of speech everywhere, freedom of worship everywhere, freedom from want everywhere and freedom from fear everywhere’.”<sup>18</sup>
- ❖ The freedom, Paul is reminding us, is not freedom of speech, nor freedom of worship, nor freedom from want.
  - Freedom of speech can be abused to “biting and devouring each other” (Gal 5:15), by words, nor by cartoons.
- ❖ **It is the freedom of the Christian conscience and the Christian character. It is the freedom given by the Spirit.**
  - Examples are found in Romans 14:1-8 (see below) and 1 Corinthians 8:1-13.
    - “One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. (...) One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. **Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.** He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. **For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to**

<sup>17</sup> Witherington, B., III. (1998, p. 139).

<sup>18</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1986, p. 139).

himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord” (Rom 14:1-8).

- Also, a slave was called to be free in Christ (Eph 6:5-8).
  - “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, **doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly,** as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.”
- ❖ Freedom in the Old Testament:
  - “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Ex 20:1, 2).

#### Serve one another in love

- ❖ “The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’” (Gal 5:14; Lev 19:18). After Paul has rebuked the Galatians because of their surrender a kind of teaching of the law, which made them slaves of the law, this is a positive statement about the Old Testament Law
- ❖ “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Cor 13:4-7).
- ❖ Love is the fruit of the Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Gal 5:22, 23).
- ❖ “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2).
- ❖ Jesus Christ has set the example when he washed the feet of disciples (Jn 13:1-20; see also Jn 15:9-17).

#### But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature

- ❖ **Christians, and Christian leaders, in particular, need to be accountable for their words and actions.**

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