

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Freedom in Christ Means Freedom to Serve Others Galatians 5:13-23

You were called to freedom (Gal 5:13a)

- "You were called" = this is stated *passively* but we could restate it *actively* as "God called you to freedom!" It is GOD who does the work that results in freedom for us.
- Our Christian freedom is a gift from God, as is every aspect of our salvation. It is ALL the work of God on our behalf.

The *practical* side of Paul's epistle (Gal 5:13b-15)

- Paul changes direction here and begins to provide practical guidelines for living in our freedom in Christ.
- He realized how easy it would be to abuse this freedom or to assume that Christ set them free from all limitations when He freed them from the bondage of the Law. The question is, "If a Christian is free from the Jewish code of conduct, then how *should* he live? How *should* he use his new-found freedom in Christ?"
- On the negative side, Paul cautions them that their freedom is not to be used for selfish indulgence - it is not a license to sin. They were not to give in to the passions of the *flesh* (through selfishness and lack of dependence on God).
- On the positive side, Paul states that true freedom will always lead to loving and serving others, rather than indulging the selfish desires of the flesh.
- To illustrate this truth, Paul quotes a Scripture passage that supports the Law of Christ he mentioned previously: "You shall *love* your neighbor as yourself." He is explaining that even though believers are free from the Mosaic Law, they are still obligated to behave in ways that are consistent with the freedom they have been given. Since the freedom we now have was given to us by God, then this godly freedom must be characterized by the *attributes* of God.
- In light of the situation in the churches of Galatia, Paul specifically cautions them not to indulge in conflict and infighting. He may have received a report that the churches were filled with bickering, and Paul explains what the consequences will be if they continue this kind of fighting.

The WAR between the Spirit and the *flesh* (Gal 5:16-18)

- "But..." = *in contrast* to this kind of conflict, Paul urges them to *walk by the Spirit*. The word walk indicates *habitual conduct or lifestyle*.
- Every believer has two natures which are in opposition to each other: the old fallen nature that we will continue to carry around with us until we shed our earthly body, and the new spiritual nature that we received when we trusted in Christ for our salvation. Paul describes this WAR in more detail in Romans 7:5-25.
- These two natures are in opposition - the flesh works toward the goal of keeping you from doing the things your spirit desires to do. But even though the flesh is strong, the Spirit is stronger and can enable us to say "No" to the flesh.
- We might have expected Paul to say here, "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the

flesh." But by saying, "you are not under the law," Paul is equating the Law with the flesh. The ordinances of the Law were works of the flesh - a religious system of self-effort seeking to attain self-righteousness.

Describing the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21)

- Here Paul gives a list of some of the tendencies of our fleshly, fallen nature. He gives four groups of sins: sexual sins, sins of idolatry, sins of interpersonal relationships, and sensual sins.
 1. Sexual Sins include immorality (*porneia*, prostitution, harlotry), impurity (*akatharsia*, moral impurity), and sensuality (*aselgeia*, debauchery, orgies). Sexual sins of all kinds were common in paganism.
 2. Sins of Idolatry include idolatry (*eidolatreia*, worship of idols) and witchcraft (*pharmakeia* from *pharmakon*, a drug, administering drugs). The sorcerers used this in their magical arts and rituals of idol worship.
 3. Sins of Interpersonal Relationships include enmities (*exthrai*, personal animosities), strife (*eris*, rivalry, discord), jealousy (*zelos*, our exact term), outbursts of anger (*thumos*, stirring emotions resulting in explosions), disputes (*eritheiai*, from *erithos*, a day laborer, guild worker, therefore "party spirit"), dissensions (*dichostasiai*, "splits in two" or divisions), factions (*haireseis*, showing favoritism), and envying (*phthonoi*, feelings of ill-will).
 4. Sensual Sins include drunkenness (*methai*, drunken excesses) and carousing (*komoi*, drinking parties like those in honor of Bacchus).
- This list is not meant to be exhaustive but representative. The habitual practice of *things like these* indicate that a person may not have the Spirit.

Describing the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23)

- In contrast to the previous list, Paul identifies some of the qualities that should characterize a believer who has received the gift of salvation by grace and in whom God is at work.
- Paul changes the word from "works" to "fruit" - this indicates that these qualities are things that *grow* as a result of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- These qualities characterize God Himself, and He desires that those who belong to Him should become more and more like Him as His Spirit works in the new nature.
- The "fruit of the Spirit" can be viewed as a cluster of attributes whose primary characteristic is love. The love of God expresses itself in many other qualities, including joy and peace in the midst of trial, patience under stress, kindness and goodness toward others (particularly those who oppose us), faithfulness to God and to our commitments, gentleness/meekness, and self-control (specifically, exercising control over our fleshly tendencies).
- The Law can bring no charge against virtues such as these! They are godly, true, and right - they cannot be condemned.

We are no longer in bondage to the fleshly nature (Gal 5:24-26)

- Here Paul reminds us of what he said in Gal. 2:20. The old nature has been crucified with Christ. We can imagine that our old nature has received a fatal wound with Christ on the cross.
- Believers are no longer *bound* to submit to its influences - we now have a choice!
- Since we now have a new life by the working of the Holy Spirit, let us also behave in harmony with the Spirit's character and desires for us.
- In the last phrase, Paul reminds the Galatians to live at peace with each other and to stop the

boasting, envying, and fighting that was going on in the churches as a result of the controversy stirred up by the false teachers.

Living in the power provided by God's Holy Spirit is the only way we will be able to say "No" to our fleshly nature and "Yes" to loving and serving others. We must continually allow the Spirit to do His work in us.

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