

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 7-27-14 AM NOTES
"FREEDOM AND THE FLESH"
GALATIANS 5:13-18
#13 in Series, "Galatians: Living With Roots"

Galatians 5:1 (NASB) "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines license as "a liberty of action, especially when excessive; disregard of law or propriety; abuse of freedom."

Galatians 5:13b (NASB) "...do not *turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh..."

Jude 1:4 (NIV) "For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord."

I. Guard Your Liberty (vv. 13-15)

Exodus 20:8 (NKJV) "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

"So Christians are freed from the law as a way to win merit from God, but we are not freed from the law as a way to please God. Rather, that obligation is increased. For the law is an expression of God's nature and heart, and thus we now doubly owe it to Him to use it to please and imitate Him. We owe it to Him as our creator, since He designed us and owns us, and so He has both the wisdom to know how we are to live and the right to demand that we live that way. On the other hand, we now also owe it to Him as our Redeemer, since we gratefully want to please the one who saved us at such immeasurable cost."
—Timothy Keller

A. Oppose the Flesh (v. 13a)

Walking after the flesh means that we are acting in our own strength following the programming of the old us in Adam.

John 8:34 (ESV) "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin."

B. An Others Focus (vv. 13b-14)

Philippians 2:13 (NKJV) "for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure."

C. Observable Unity (v. 15)

II. Walk in the Spirit (vv. 16-17)

Romans 8:14 (NKJV) “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

A. The Command (v. 16)

Walk—peripateo

Romans 6:12-13 (NKJV) “¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³ And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

B. The Conflict (vv. 17-18)

Galatians 5:17-18 (Wuest Translation) “For the flesh constantly has a strong desire to suppress the Spirit, and the Spirit constantly has a strong desire to suppress the flesh. And these are entrenched in an attitude of mutual opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you desire to do.”

Romans 7:23 (NASB) “but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.”

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV) “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

2 Peter 1:4b (NKJV) “...that...you may be partakers of the divine nature ...”

Galatians 5:17 (ESV) “...the things you want to do.”

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The message of the first 12 verses of Galatians 5 (the passage that we looked at last week) is that in Christ we have been made free. **Galatians 5:1 (NASB)** “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” In Galatians 5:1-12 Paul is saying “**Don’t lose Gospel freedom.**” But in the text we are looking at today, he balances that by saying,

“Don’t abuse Gospel freedom.” On one side is the evil of **legalism** that robs us of the freedom that is ours in Christ, but on the other extreme is the evil of **license** that abuses that freedom that we have been given in Christ. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines license as “a liberty of action, especially when excessive; disregard of law or propriety; abuse of freedom.” To put it another way, to fall back into rule keeping to earn acceptance from God brings the loss of the freedom that is ours in Christ. To fall into license is to abuse our freedom. The freedom that Christ gives is not the freedom to set our own standards of behavior; the Gospel of Christ does not free us **to** sin; it frees us **from** sin. The warning in **Galatians 5:13b (NASB)** is “... *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh...” It was this license that Jude spoke of in **Jude 1:4 (NIV)** “For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.” To paraphrase a quote from Martin Luther and adapt it to this text: “The devil wants you to fall off the truth horse; he doesn’t care if you fall off on the legalism side or the license side!” In today’s text, Paul is saying in no uncertain terms that the freedom we have in the Gospel is not a freedom to sin. We have been given freedom from sin and its condemnation. As we will see in this message, our problem is not the law on the outside; it is the flesh on the inside.

The false teachers that had come to Galatia were saying that Paul’s Gospel was a license to sin. They were saying, “This ‘faith thing’ is OK, but it is not enough. You must put yourself under the law with circumcision, sacrifices, dietary regulations, feast days, etc.” In other words they were saying that what Jesus did is not enough; Jesus must be supplemented by Moses. In this passage Paul is answering the accusation that his Gospel taught license and thus treats sin lightly.

I. Guard Your Liberty (V13-15)

One of the difficulties we face in understanding and accurately applying the principles of Galatians is rightly defining the word “law”. “Law” is a general term. It most often refers to the Law of Moses, but sometimes it is simply referring to the general approach of keeping rules to earn righteousness (acceptance) with God. When it comes to the Law given to Moses, there are three categories of the law (I am admittedly oversimplifying it). First there were the civil laws to govern Israel under a theocracy (God rule). These were the laws that dealt with governing the people in everyday life. There are some tremendous principles that governments can learn from today by examining the civil law that God gave to Moses. It dealt with different crimes and the punishment of those crimes, restitution when a person was wronged, liability of property owners, and much more. While there is much to learn from the civil laws, there is no theocracy in civil government now and we are told in Romans 13:1 to be subject to the governing authorities we are under. The second category of the law is the ceremonial and separation laws. These laws dealt primarily with the sacrificial system, feast days, dietary laws, laws about clothing, etc. The dietary laws, the laws dealing with clothing and such were given to keep the Jews separate from the nations because it was through this special people that the Messiah would come. The feast days were to remind the Jews of God’s care for them. The instructions about the sacrifices were to teach that sin was costly and atonement involved the shedding of blood – the giving of life.. The sacrificial system prepared the world for the sacrifice of Christ and His atonement for sin through the shedding of His own blood. The sacrifices were the picture and Jesus was the reality. Once the reality has come there is no need for the pictures. The third category of the law is the moral law of God. The moral law is summarized in the 10 Commandments. All of the 10 Commandments are affirmed as the will of God in the New Testament except the 4th Commandment – **Exodus 20:8 (NKJV)** “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” Jesus actually fulfilled the Sabbath – He is our Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4). When the law is affirmed in the New Testament, it is speaking of the moral law of God.

How do Christians relate to the moral law of God? Tim Keller gives a great answer to that important question. “So Christians are freed from the law as a way to win merit from God, but we are not freed from the law as a way to please God. Rather, that obligation is increased. For the law is an expression of God’s nature and heart, and thus we now doubly owe it to Him to use it to please and imitate Him. We owe it to

Him as our creator, since He designed us and owns us, and so He has both the wisdom to know how we are to live and the right to demand that we live that way. On the other hand, we now also owe it to Him as our Redeemer, since we gratefully want to please the one who saved us at such immeasurable cost.” [Timothy Keller, *Galatians for You*, page 143].

While we are not obligated to obey the law to merit salvation, our love for the God who saved us by grace through faith compels us to obey the moral law because it pleases Him.

Let’s see how we guard our liberty.

A. Oppose the Flesh (V13a)

When Paul uses the term “flesh” it is the Greek term *sarx*. Flesh as it is used here is more than just the human body. Since the word “flesh” is nowhere clearly defined, we must look at the various places it is used and discern its meaning. When the word “flesh” is applied to a Christian it is referring to the condition of yielding to the programming of the old man that was in rebellion against God. The flesh is patterns of behavior we have learned to enable us to cope with or deal with living on a fallen planet. **Walking after the flesh means that we are acting in our own strength following the programming of the old us in Adam.** The flesh is often called the self life. It is always self centered and acts as if the Holy Spirit doesn’t exist. As we will see, the opposite of living controlled by the flesh is to live controlled by the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word translated “opportunity” comes from the military world. It was used to refer to a central base from which all of the operations of a military campaign originated. Paul is saying, “Our liberty in Christ is not a base of operations from which the flesh can carry on a campaign to control our behavior and attitudes.” The fact is that anyone who uses freedom in Christ as an excuse to indulge the flesh gives proof that they are still in bondage to sin. Jesus said in **John 8:34 (ESV)** “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who **practices sin** [sin is the pattern of their life] is a slave to sin.” Let me repeat what I just said; anyone who uses freedom in Christ as an excuse to indulge the flesh gives proof that they are still in bondage to sin. While every Christian has the flesh, every Christian hates the flesh and opposes it and desires to walk in victory over the flesh.

B. An Others Focus (V13b-14)

True liberty sets us free from self-centeredness, from a flesh controlled life and puts our focus on the needs of others. There is a glorious paradox here: When Christ frees us from slavery to (serving) sin, we give ourselves to serve others. The word “serve” here means to do that which is for the advantage of someone in need. In verse 14 we see that when we have liberty with love, we don’t even need the outward standard of the law hanging over our heads with its threats; our desire and longing is to act in accordance with the law. If His love is permeating our hearts, we love Him supremely. We hate having other god’s before Him. We don’t want to worship Him in a way that is displeasing to Him; we don’t want to take His name in vain. When we love God supremely we love others as ourselves. If we love others, that includes our parents and we want to honor them. If we love someone, the last thing that we want to do is murder them. If we love our spouse, we would never be sexually unfaithful to him or her. If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we’re not going to steal from them or lie against them or covet their house or their wife or anything else that is theirs. **Galatians 5:14 (NKJV)** “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*’” Because we have been made a new creation in Christ, we don’t need the law like a club held over our head; we long to love God and love others.

When it comes to the law for a Christian who has been set free in Christ, even though we are free from the law, there is a desire in our hearts for it. **Philippians 2:13 (NKJV)** “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.”

C. Observable Unity (V15)

These words speak of wild animals in a deadly struggle. This is where legalism leads. This is the opposite of love. The people in the church that are always in a fuss and busy opposing this or that are generally those eaten up with legalism. Legalism never promotes love. It creates a judgmental censorious spirit that results in conflict like a bunch of wild animals snapping and biting each other. Those of you who have ever been through this know how horrible and damaging it is. The law itself is powerless to

enable people to obey it. The law serves to show how much we need to be supernaturally changed in our heart! Grace that leads to a changed life and freedom also enables us to will and to obey the law.

II. Walk in the Spirit (V16-17)

We end up abusing our liberty when we walk according to the flesh; we live out our liberty when we walk in the Spirit. The reason that liberty from the law does not mean a license to sin is because the Holy Spirit indwells the person who has been set free from sin. The Holy Spirit is prominent in the book of Galatians. The Spirit is referred to by name 14 times in this short book. While God the Son is the member of the Godhead most associated with justification by faith (being declared righteous before God because we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ), God the Holy Spirit is the member of the Godhead that is most associated with sanctification (growing in Christ-likeness).

There are two “pulls” in every Christian. There is the pull of the flesh and the pull of the Holy Spirit. The pull of the flesh is the pull to yield to that power called sin that dwells in our members; it is that pull to do things in our own strength following the old patterns (ruts) that have been programmed in us by the old man in Adam. The Spirit is called in Isaiah 11:2 the “Spirit of counsel and might”. He is always guiding, drawing us to that which pleases God. **Romans 8:14 (NKJV)** “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” The pull that we follow sets the direction of our life and reveals the reality of whether or not we have been set free from sin.

A. The Command (V16)

Sanctification (spiritual growth) does not come from spiritual disciplines – Bible study, Scripture memorization, prayer, meditation, good stewardship, witnessing, etc. Spiritual growth comes through the work of the Holy Spirit within us. Now let me hasten to say that the Holy Spirit uses the spiritual disciplines as tools in His hands to make us like Christ, but we don’t glorify the tool; we glorify the One who conforms us to Christ – the Spirit of God. Even a lost person can read and study the Bible, meditate on the Bible, go through the motions of praying, and even sharing the Gospel with others. All of the disciplines apart from the Spirit can become legalism’s servants.

Let’s examine this command in verse 16. The word “walk” (*peripateo*) literally means “going from place to place”. In ancient Greece, Aristotle’s students were called “the Peripatetic School because their teacher taught them while he was on the move. In somewhat the same way, the way we learn the Christian life is to walk with the Holy Spirit and continually look to Him for guidance and power and listen to Him for direction. To walk in the Spirit is not a passive, “let go and let God”; we choose moment by moment to listen to Him and to trust Him for the power to do what we cannot do. **Romans 6:12-13 (NKJV)** “¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body [that doesn’t sound passive], that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³ And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.”

What is the result of walking in the Spirit? We do not fulfill the lust of the flesh. We need to be sure that we understand that word “lust”. In English, this word means almost exclusively strong sexual desire. The Greek word is broader than that. The word “lust” is translated “desires” in many translations. That translation doesn’t really get at the real meaning of the word. The word means “an inordinate desire” or “a consuming controlling desire”. It could be the consuming desire for acceptance by others, success, material things, notoriety, prestige, revenge, and a host of other things. It could be a consuming desire for good things, neutral things, or evil things.

When we walk listening to and trusting in the Spirit for guidance and power, we will walk in victory over the consuming desire of the flesh. Again, what is the flesh? It is living in our own strength and thus dominated by the programming of the old us in Adam – the sin nature. Depending on our personality type and our background (programming), we might have USDA Choice flesh or rotten putrid flesh. Our programming might be people pleasing flesh, gain acceptance by hard work flesh, out perform everyone else flesh, do a good job that would enable us to make lots of money so we can impress others with what we drive and where we live and where we go on vacation flesh, or proud moral flesh. On the other hand

our flesh may be insecure flesh, fearful flesh, lazy flesh, mean flesh, immoral flesh, escape through drugs, alcohol, or video games flesh. The outworking of the flesh looks different in each of us because we have different personalities, different parents, different programming, and different painful life experiences. When we are controlled by our programming and we are seeking to cope in our own strength, we are fulfilling the strong desire of the flesh and we are not walking in the Spirit. One of the most basic things that every Christian needs to ask the Lord to do is to reveal to you your own version of the flesh. You need to know what your lust of the flesh looks like. In next week's text, we are going to see some examples of what a flesh driven life looks like.

B. The Conflict (V17-18)

I like New Testament scholar Kenneth Wuest's translation of these two verses: **Galatians 5:17-18 (Wuest Translation)** "For the flesh constantly has a strong desire to suppress the Spirit, and the Spirit constantly has a strong desire to suppress the flesh. And these are entrenched in an attitude of mutual opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you desire to do." Doesn't that sound like a battle? It is a battle! The battle is constant and never lets up for a Christian until we leave the flesh behind and we are absent from the body and present with the Lord. If there is no battle in you, you need to carefully examine your life to see if you are in the faith. When the Lord saves a person, the old man (also called the sin nature, the adamic nature) is crucified with Christ. That is real, and the old man is dead and buried with Christ (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20). But there is still a power in us called sin. We are given its location in **Romans 7:23 (NASB)** "but I see a different law in **the members of my body**, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members." In addition, the Lord doesn't wipe out the programming of that old man and his desires and tendencies. Here is what the Lord does: First, He gives us a new nature that desires to please God and loves the things of God. That is what **2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)** is referring to when it says "Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." **2 Peter 1:4b (NKJV)** "that ... you may be partakers of the divine nature..." But most importantly, He gives us His Spirit – the Spirit of God to dwell in us to enable us us to walk in victory over the flesh and the power or law of sin. In verse 17, that phrase "the things you want to do" (ESV) is the function of the new nature. Every true Christian wants to please and obey God, but in the flesh we don't have the power. The power is in walking in the Spirit who indwells us.

Verse 18 is a warning to those who would minimize grace and put themselves under the law. To live under the law is to live by the flesh and the flesh is powerless to please God and to obey the law. To be led by the Spirit is the same as "walking in the Spirit" (verse 16). When we walk in the Spirit we walk in obedience to the law by the enabling of the Spirit and that is the only way to walk in obedience to the law.