

Intro:

Last week we talked about the first threat to Christian liberty. Who can recall what that first threat is?

- The first threat is the imposition of religious ritual as a means of gaining acceptance by God.

There are many examples of people who succumb to this threat. We mentioned some of the churches that fail God in this way last week. I want to add an emphatic statement:

Any church or person who assumes that God will accept a man based on something that man does is believing and living another gospel and is under the curse of God.

- This includes all those groups that teach any kind of salvation by works.
- This includes liberal Christianity that denies the gospel and preaches morality.
- That includes people in independent Baptist churches who think they have prayed ‘the right prayer’, or have been properly baptized, or have the right doctrine, therefore they are Christians.

Essentially, what Paul argues against in Romans 2 is the Galatian error broadly expanded.

This error absolutely destroys the gospel and also destroys Christian liberty, because the conscience is bound to keeping some kind of work in order to be approved by God.

Besides this threat, another threat looms against Christian liberty, one that today is too often simply dismissed.

To introduce this threat, let me use a simple illustration.

In our country, we have political freedom – we can vote for whoever we like, we can criticize whoever we don’t like, and we can do so publicly.

- Don’t like what the prime minister is doing? Take out an ad in the paper and rip him to shreds. You have the freedom – the liberty – to do that in this country.
- In the days of the Soviet Union, the people of Russia didn’t have that kind of freedom. An old joke about it went this way:

A Russian and an American were arguing about civil liberties in their respective nations.

The American said, “I can tell President Kennedy at any time that I don’t like what he’s doing.”

The Russian excitedly replied, “Oh, I can do that, too!”

“I can tell Mr. Khrushchev at any time that I don’t like what President Kennedy is doing.”¹

- You see the difference? One man has liberty and the other doesn’t.

But suppose either man were to advocate for the *assassination* of their political leader in either country?

Could the American in particular take out an ad in the newspaper for that?

The second threat to liberty comes from the lack of all restraint, something we call *license*.

Read Gal 5.13-15

Last week’s proposition: Any work deemed to be essential to salvation besides faith alone in Christ alone will destroy liberty and the gospel itself.

This week:

Proposition: Any attitude that insists on free reign for the flesh contradicts and counterfeits the liberty found in Christ.

I. Identifying the liberated (5-6)

As we get to our text, I want to make a point by reviewing some of the verses I skipped over from last week’s text.

A. Paul is very emphatic about who he is talking to in v. 13: “You”

1. Pronoun is not just contained in the verb, it is stated separately – makes it emphatic
2. Pronoun is the first word of the verse – makes it even more emphatic

B. The one’s addressed share a liberated spiritual status

1. The ‘we’ of v. 5 (5)
 - a. Generic ‘you’ in v. 2, 4
 - b. General ‘every man’ in v. 3

¹ Guenter Lewy, *Biblical Evangelist*, 11/01/88, p. 6.

c. Emphatic 'we' in v. 5

2. Identifying marks of 'we' (5)

a. We wait in the Spirit (identifying 'we' as in the Spirit)

b. We wait out of faith (identifying 'we' as operating out of faith)

c. We wait for 'the hope of righteousness'

1) Justification is the declaration of righteousness on the basis of faith in Christ

2) Sanctification is growth in righteousness through the operation of faith in Christ

3) Glorification is the hope of righteousness awaiting those who have faith in Christ

"In contrast with legalists, true believers **by faith** (not works) **eagerly await** ... the consummation of their salvation (cf. Rom. 8:18-25)."²

- The legalist looks forward with dread, hoping that his works have accomplished his purposes...

3. Significant spiritual work in the 'we' (6)

a. Not the presence or absence of circumcision: this is irrelevant

b. Rather, faith working through love (διὰ)

"The faith by which believers are justified is the faith which operates through love; it was by hearing with faith, the Galatians have already been reminded, that they received the Spirit (3.2). Justification by faith and life in the Spirit are like two sides of one coin; neither is present without the other. 'Works based on faith are wrought through love, but man is not justified by love' (M. Luther, *In epistulum Pauli ad Galatas*, 1535, WA 40/2, 35)."³

² John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, 2:605 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985).

³ Bruce, p. 233

II. Specifying the liberty (13-14)

A. The liberty that is not license

1. Don's literal wooden translation:

For **you** unto liberty were called, brethren: only not the liberty [which is] in an occasion for the flesh, **but** through love be enslaved to one another.

- a. The qualifying phrase is awkward – no verb
- b. I have supplied 'which is', the KJV and others supply 'use'
- c. The qualifying phrase is describing the *kind* of liberty Paul is not talking about

2. Taking opportunity: abusing the good as a pretext for evil

- a. 'Opportunity' has a negative connotation in the NT: 'pretext'
- b. Liberty is the freedom and power for godliness, not against it

"The liberty we enjoy as Christians is not a licentious liberty: though Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, yet he has not freed us from the obligation of it; the gospel is a *doctrine unto godliness* (1 Tim. 6.3), and is so far from giving us the least countenance to sin that it lays us under the strongest obligations to avoid and subdue it."⁴

- c. The flesh is "that self-regarding element in human nature which has been corrupted at the source"⁵

- 1) It has appetites and propensities
- 2) It produces the catalog of 5.19ff.

"The 'flesh' is the sinful human nature that every person, saved or unsaved, possesses. It is possible to conclude that since it is unnecessary to keep the Law to be saved, it is unnecessary to pay attention to the Law for any reason. However, Paul was not urging his converts to burn their Old Testaments. ... For the Christian the Mosaic Law has *revelatory* value (2 Tim. 3:16–17) even though it does not have *regulatory* value, controlling our behavior."⁶

⁴ Henry, VI, p. 675

⁵ Bruce, p. 240

⁶ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Ga 5:13 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

d. Instead, we are called to liberty in a way that restrains the flesh
... ‘but’ – very strong adversative...

B. The liberty that is slavery

1. “Serve” = δουλεύω – ‘be enslaved’ (Imperative)
2. You were in bondage, now you are liberated, so be enslaved (a sanctified paradox)
3. But we are enslaved by faith
 - a. Remember how faith works? (see 5.6) faith works through love
 - b. Through love (the working of faith) be enslaved to one another

The life of the Spirit (liberty) restrains us from sin not by law or external restraints, but by the internal restraint of faith working by love committed to the good of one another.

- This is the power of NT ‘ecclesiology’ – the doctrine of the church.

4. Liberty as a concept:

- a. Gk: freedom to act as an adult under the law in the polis (citizenship)
- b. Stoic: freedom from the shackles of the passions
- c. Christian: the life of the Spirit devoted by faith to the service (slavery) of Christ expressed in love for one another

C. Christian liberty is designed to finally give men the spiritual power to fulfill the law: love one another (14)

“Grace does not set us free *to* sin, but it sets us free *from* sin. You see, the believer should desire to please God, not because he must please Him like a slave, but because he is a son and he *wills* to please his Father. He does what God wants, not because he fears to do otherwise like an enemy, but because he wants to do it, for God is his friend. God is the One who loves him. He serves God, not because of pressure from without such as the Law, but because of a great principle within—even the life of Christ that is within him.”⁷

⁷ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary*, Based on the Thru the Bible radio program., electronic ed., 5:187 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981).

III. Liberty abused by license (15)

- A. Our usual conception of pretexts for the flesh
 - 1. The Great Lust of immorality in its many forms
 - 2. The Great Lust of addictive behaviours (drunkenness, drugs, etc.)
- B. The most common expression of pretexts for the flesh – biting and devouring
 - 1. Likely consequence of the presence of Judaizers: controversy and conflict
 - 2. A constant theme through the following verses, even the ‘works of the flesh’ list emphasizes sins of anger: the focal point of the list
 - 3. The idea of bearing one another’s burdens seems to have a backdrop of conflict from giving free reign to the flesh (6.1-10)
- C. The ultimate consequences of unchecked rule of fleshliness is disintegration: “consumed” (5.15)

“The introduction of the new teaching into the Galatian churches appears to have provoked controversy and quarrels: this was not the least of the troubles caused by the agitators. Internecine strife is the only ‘work of the flesh’ against which Paul specifically warns the Galatians... The vice against which he does warn the Galatians here is serious enough; if not checked, it could lead to the disintegration of their fellowship and the disappearances of the churches in Galatia. The language which Paul uses suggests a pack of wild animals preying on one another: ‘if you keep on biting one another and tearing one another to pieces, take care lest you be annihilated by one another.’”⁸

“Christian churches cannot be ruined but by their own hands.”⁹

⁸ Bruce, p. 242

⁹ Henry, VI, p. 675

Conclusion:

Proposition: Any attitude that insists on free reign for the flesh contradicts and counterfeits the liberty found in Christ.

The believer must be committed to the Spirit walk and the Spirit-filled life – it is the way of liberty, it is the way of joy, it is the way of light in the face of Christ.

You will not find this kind of light and life by requiring some kind of external rite for salvation.

But you most certainly will not find this kind of light and life by insisting that anything goes for the Christian, now that he has liberty, he is free to do whatever he desires: this will not produce light but rather it will produce self-destruction.

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