

THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

"Constrained Liberty"

Galatians 5:13-15

Review

1. The documents on which our translation of Scripture is provided are historically accurate. We have no valid reason to reject the Bible as the Word of God.
2. Being the Word of God, we accept the testimony of the Bible as to the only means by which sinful humanity may be accepted in the presence of the one only holy triune God. This is: by grace through faith in the completed work of the Lord Jesus Christ i.e. His death, burial, resurrection and ascension (1 Cor. 15:1-11).
3. If one questions the grace through faith system by which a sinner is declared righteous before the triune holy God, then serious and incalculable issues result. Among them are these: 1. Christ profits nothing (5:2). 2. Indebted to entire Mosaic law (5:3). 3. Christ is void (5:4). 4. One is fallen from grace (5:4). 5. It is disobedience to the truth (5:7). 6. Rejection of God's calling (5:8). 7. Brings in evil admixture (5:9). 8. Questions Paul's persecution (v. 11). 9. Sets aside the Cross-scandal (v. 11).
4. In view of the above imposing list, it is not difficult to understand the expression of the Spirit through Paul to "cast out" (4:30) and "cut off" (5:12 any law - works system. Anything which is in disharmony with the Truth must be eliminated. But there are safe guards to the liberty of the grace - faith system. Study them:

1. SAFEGUARD #1 Restricted Liberty v. 13

a. For "brethren"

There is no question that the Galatians have not fallen prey to the false teaching offered them. They are still considered as "brethren" and part of the family of God.

b. For "called"

The verb is aorist passive in form. Moreover, the pronoun "ye" is emphatic. Thus, the thought is clear: the Galatians have been called of God. This is a divine work (cf. 5:8 where the present tense is employed). Other Scriptures point to the importance of God's call in the "chain" of salvation (Rom. 8:30).

c. For "liberty"

The use of the connective "for" traces the argument back to 5:1 as if all intervening is a parenthesis. The having been called "for the purpose of liberty" is not to be questioned. This "liberty" has a reference to the social fabric of the day (apostolic times). For a slave to be liberated, his master accompanied him to the temple of a deity. There money was paid to the deity and a document indicated the purchase price. From that point, the slave was now at "liberty." The slave thus became the property of the deity. We also are set at liberty by Christ Who purchased us at a price. He did at His own cost what the god did fictionarily with money provided by the slave in apostolic society (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19; 1 Cor. 6:20).

d. For "occasion"

The liberty, however, is not to be used "unto" or "with a view to" an "occasion to the flesh." Privilege is always attended by the danger of abuse. Liberty can be misused. How tragically true this is! The term "occasion" means a base of operation in war. Contextually the warning is not to allow liberty to be a base for the operation of the flesh! See other uses of this word in Rom. 7:8, 11 (law

providing sin a base to attack the soul), 2 Cor. 5:12 (the irreproachable conduct of Paul provided friends a base against enemies), 2 Cor. 11:12 (Paul's refusal to accept money was a base against enemies), 1 Tim. 5:14 (unguarded behavior of widows provided Satan a base against the faith).

NOTE: Yes, Christian liberty, BUT NO without restrictions!

2. SAFEGUARD #2 Commanded Liberty v. 13

a. To "serve"

The verb is a present tense i.e. "let it be your habit to serve." How different this is from the thought today -- "what can I get out of this or that?" Scripture is: "how can I put into this or that." What a paradox: "for freedom . . . be servants."

b. Through "love"

A life of self renunciation is a life of liberty! To put oneself in another's place and act towards that other as though he were one's self. Scripture is replete with how the Lord demonstrated that true love is the motive of true service (cf. John 14:31; Phil 2:8; John 13:1; Eph. 5:25; 1 Cor. 9:19). Service is without constraint where there is true love. Otherwise service becomes irksome.

c. For "one another"

The best way to save "liberty" from self indulgence is to hold liberty as a trust given by the Lord so as to pour it out upon the interest of the brethren. The welfare of others -- that's the goal of liberty!

3. SAFEGUARD #3 Related Liberty v. 14

As a support for the commanded liberty and if anyone really want to be under the law (a works system), let him remember this -- the whole law stands fulfilled (perfect tense) in loving your neighbor as yourself (cf. Lev. 19:18). Both the full intention of the law and the observance of the one precept capture everything in the law. So accepting the grace - faith system enables you to demonstrate the will of God. The grace faith system goes further than Moses. The standard is higher. We are to "love as I have loved you" (cf. John 13:34; 15:12; Eph. 5:2).

4. SAFEGUARD #4 Endangered Liberty v. 15

This is an open accusation against a law-works system. It finds fault and has a censorious spirit. Hence, Paul argues (obviously by the Spirit's inspiration) that the legal works system which was foisted upon them.

a. Assumed "biting" and "devouring"

The first class condition shows that the Galatians were actually engaged in doing these things. The verbs are used metaphorically, but the truth is nonetheless literal. A spirit of violent strifes, debates, and disputes apparently filled the assembly.

b. Assured "consuming"

The figure of speech called climax is illustrated here: bite, deserve, and now "consume" (cf. John 10:10 steal . . . kill . . . destroy). The verb "take heed" suggests to be on guard about this matter. "Liberty" is no sphere in which to fall asleep!

Postview What a law-works system proposes only ends in horrible strife. Grace-faith, properly conceived and appropriated, avoids the flesh, results in love service, and ultimately brings about edification (Eph. 4:16). This is only accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit within a grace-faith framework (5:16). Amen.