



GALATIANS

VERSE-BY-VERSE



SESSION 15 | GALATIANS 5:13-21

GALATIANS 5:13-26 | THE SPIRIT OR THE FLESH

- Verse 13 –
 - Having told the Galatians they do not need to listen to the Judaizers, Paul emphasizes that **ye have been called unto liberty**.
 - This they knew from Galatians 5:1. Now Paul emphasizes that liberty can be abused as **an occasion to the flesh**.
 - A liberty which cannot be abused is not liberty at all, and therefore true Christian liberty must, by its nature, have opportunity for abuse.
 - Some are uncomfortable allowing an abuse-prone liberty, but the alternative is anything but liberty (and thus cannot be, in honesty, called liberty).
 - Note: Baptists (in the free church movement) and Calvinists (in the Protestant movement) were historically fearful of liberty of any kind, often prohibiting activities because they might *lead to* sinful activities. This is a legalism that is different than the Judaizers but a legalism nonetheless.
 - Rather than use liberty selfishly, Paul wants the Galatians to **serve one another** and to do so **by love**. Paul also writes similar words in 1 Corinthians 7:22 and in the form of a personal testimony in 1 Corinthians 9:19.
- Verse 14 –
 - Two problems arise out of this verse. First, how could Paul claim that **all the law is fulfilled in one word**?
 - Jesus said that treating others as we want to be treated **is the law and the prophets** (Matt. 7:12).
 - However, much trouble (and much ink) would have been saved by simply handing down this word to Mt. Sinai, rather than the entire Torah (not to mention the prophets).
 - This is a place in which the *plain sense* doesn't make *common sense*.
 - Furthermore, Jesus spoke another time speaking of *two* great commandments, and the second was to **love thy neighbor as thyself** (Mt. 22:37-40). Logically, if there are *two* great commandments, and the *second* concerns love, then this love-related commandment by Paul cannot be the total summary of the law.
 - The word **fulfilled** is literally, "to fill up." Therefore these discrepancies cause us to conclude that the law isn't *summarized* in love nor is it *completed* in love, but it is "filled up" or "finished off" with love. That is, love is an essential "completion," but is not the substance of the law.
 - Second, why would Paul be speaking of law in the context of freedom from the law?
 - The key to this dilemma is to avoid the separation caused by versification and put verse 14 as the completion of the closing command of verse 14.
 - The Judaizers were insisting on the law of circumcision, but certainly were not expressing any kind of love, and thus they themselves were not fulfilling the law.
- Verse 15 –
 - This is another way of saying, "live by the sword, die by the sword" (Mt. 26:52).
 - Liberty opens **an occasion to the flesh** (v. 13) and also an occasion to **bite and devour one another**. The results are not to be desired for either occasion.
- Verse 16 –
 - The solution to the liberty problem is not to abolish liberty, but to **Walk in the Spirit**, for the one who does so will not **fulfil the lust of the flesh**.
 - Note that the **ye...fulfil** is a good example of the "ye +" rule.
 - Ye + a plural is a message to individuals who are part of a group.
 - Ye + a singular is a message to the group itself.

- Since fulfil is in the plural, this is a message to individuals.
- Verse 17 –
 - This is not a mysterious concept, but rather a simply stated truth: there is a battle taking place, and it is within each of us, even after our salvation.
 - This battle is between **the flesh** and **the Spirit**, and these two have competing and mutually exclusive desires.
 - Because of this battle, **ye cannot do the things that ye would** (note the ye+plural). During war time, a life of ease (doing the things you want to do) is often impossible. Because the war is within us, we cannot live *casually* but must live *diligently*.
- Verse 18 –
 - The English wording of this could cause confusion. Is a person who walks in the flesh **under the law**?
 - Since the law has been set aside for faith, nobody is under the law today, whether they be spiritual or fleshly.
 - In Greek, any “if” word connected to a subjunctive verb is a true “if/then” proposition. However, any “if” work connected to an indicative verb is not a “possibility” but rather a statement of fact and could be translated “since.”
 - The point of this verse is not to say, “those led by the Spirit are free from the law, while those not led by the Spirit are still under the law.” Rather, the point is to say, “you are clearly not under the law because you are led by the Spirit.”
- Verses 19-21 –
 - Paul lists 16 **works of the flesh**. There are certainly others, but these are listed as those which **are manifest** (i.e.: visible). This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, as seen from the concluding words of the list: **and such like** (v. 21).
 - Now Paul gives some startling words: **they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God**. If (as taught by the evangelicals) the **kingdom of God** can “be equated to the sphere of salvation” (www.gotquestions.org/kingdom-of-god.html) then we have two HUGE theological problems.
 - The Kingdom of God is somehow an inheritance.
 - Salvation *may* be granted by grace through faith, but it is retained by avoiding the works of the flesh.
 - The website “Got Questions” states the following: “More narrowly, the kingdom of God is a spiritual rule over the hearts and lives of those who willingly submit to God’s authority. Those who defy God’s authority and refuse to submit to Him are not part of the kingdom of God; in contrast, those who acknowledge the lordship of Christ and gladly surrender to God’s rule in their hearts are part of the kingdom of God.” (<https://www.gotquestions.org/kingdom-of-God.html> - accessed June 23, 2020). This presents a works-based salvation that involves willing submission and “surrender to God’s rule.” Only by linguistic gymnastics can such submission and surrender not be considered works.
 - So then, how should we interpret this warning?
 - First, we should understand Kingdom in the same manner in which it is always understood in Scripture: *the future, physical reign of the Messiah on earth, such reign being the inheritance of Israel*.
 - Second, we should recognize the consistency of Hebrew Scripture which teaches that inheritance requires holy living.
 - Third, we should recognize that the Jewish nation was still very much in existence and was very strongly being taught a Kingdom Gospel, and therefore a message to the Jews about their Kingdom was still in order at that time.
 - Note that Paul says **they which do such things** rather than *ye who do such things*. Why did Paul switch from *ye* (vv. 13, 15, 16, 17, 18) to **they** in verse 21? It must be because Paul has a message to THEM, that is, to the Jewish nation, rather than the Galatians.
 - Note: the fact that Paul mixes Kingdom messages into grace epistles does not allow us to mix Kingdom and grace today. We are obligated to notice that the grammar and context always clarify that the Kingdom message and the Grace message are never given to the same people. This displays to us that we have a period of overlap in these messages. This overlap has now concluded (in my opinion, in 70AD with the destruction of the nation to which the message was given).