

Abiding in Liberty Galatians 5: 13-18

Tomorrow we celebrate a special day in America – Independence Day. While many may not pause to reflect on the significance of the holiday, it stands in remembrance of a special event that separates America from other nations. We celebrate the day we declared our independence from Great Britain, becoming a free and sovereign nation.

As you consider the character of our great nation, you might hear a term known as *American Exceptionalism*. This is the idea and belief that the United States possesses a unique character – being a free nation based on her democratic system of government and the personal liberties of every citizen. This exceptionalism has drawn countless immigrants to America since her founding. No doubt we all enjoy the liberties we have as American citizens.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that many of the liberties we once enjoyed are now in danger of disappearing. Many in positions of leadership and authority have begun to question the long held principles of the Constitution that shaped this great nation. Liberty in America is changing, and those changes have consequences for all who live within her borders.

As I considered the liberties and privileges we enjoy in America, I was reminded of the great liberty and blessing the saved by grace have in Christ. Many today will disagree, but I am convinced the believer enjoys Christian Exceptionalism. Those who are in Christ have been set apart from the rest of the world spiritually. There is none who compare to our Savior and no other means of redemption and reconciliation to God. He alone has the ability to set people free from the bondage and death of sin. Genuine liberty is obtained in Christ alone.

Paul understood the liberty available in Christ, and he also understood its neglect and abuse. The believers enjoyed something very precious, but like many in our day, some had begun to question the sovereign principles related to Christian liberty. Paul knew if they were to enjoy and exercise Christian liberty, they had to possess a proper understanding. I want to examine the [insights](#) of Paul in the text as we consider: [Abiding in Liberty](#).

I. The Restraint through Liberty (13-15) – While Christ affords great liberty, Paul also knew that measured restraint was necessary. Being in Christ was not a license to live as one pleased. These principles remain true for our generation as well. Consider:

A. Our Calling (13a) – [For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty](#). Notice Paul referred to the hearer as brethren. He is speaking to those who are saved by grace, those in Christ. They were

not called to live a life of bondage, but to liberty in Christ. Many of the Jews continued to teach a doctrine of legalism under the law. Paul reminds them that they are no longer under the law, but under grace. Salvation in Christ set them free from the bondage of the law.

- As believers in Christ, we too have been called unto liberty. I am thankful for liberty in Christ, being set free from the demands of the law. The law declared that man must do something for God while grace reveals what God did for man. I have been set free in Christ, no longer bound or condemned by the law. My righteousness and acceptance to God is dependent upon the sacrifice of Christ, not in my ability to keep or conform to the law. **John 8:36 – If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.**

B. Our Constraint (13b) – *only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.*

Paul knew there had to be balance in the Christian life. While some became legalistic, holding to the demands of the law, others became very liberal and lax in their walk with the Lord. They viewed their liberty in Christ as a license to indulge the flesh and live as they pleased. He reminded them that although they were no longer in bondage under the law, they must not use their liberty as an occasion to sin. The grace of God is no license to indulge in sin.

- Even in America, as many ignore the Constitution and long held principles, sin abounds. Many of our laws have legalized behaviors and actions that are contrary to the Word of God. Just because something is permissible by man's laws doesn't make it right according to the Word.
- This attitude and behavior has crept into the modern church. Many feel as if they can do as they please as long as they seek forgiveness. They use grace as an occasion to sin and indulge the flesh. This is dangerous. Salvation was obtained with a great price. Jesus offered Himself on the cross to purchase our redemption. He gave His best for us. Those who are genuinely saved will have a compelling desire to live in a way that pleases and honors the Savior! We cannot live above sin, but we must never actively seek to indulge the flesh simply because we feel it is permissible under grace.

C. Our Command (14) – *For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* Paul affirms the command of Christ – we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. When Jesus was asked to define a neighbor, He responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan. Our neighbor is in reality anyone we meet in life's journey, regardless of their social status, geographic location, or religious affiliation. Simply we are to love all we meet as we love ourselves. Genuine liberty in Christ allows and supports such love.

- I have dealt with this many times in the past, but it is a theme that is consistent in Scripture. Loving others as we love ourselves requires commitment and sacrifice. We must love sacrificially as Christ did. We must be willing to put the needs of others above our own. We must live and love in such a way to bear witness of our relationship with Christ. We will never reach anyone apart from love, but through genuine love we can reach even the hardest of hearts!

D. Our Caution (15) – *But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.* Here Paul warns of the consequences realized when love is absent. When people fail to love one another, they literally devour one another. Paul doesn't refer to a physical act, but spiritually and emotionally. Churches have split due to the absence of love. Homes and relationships are damaged when love is withheld. Where love is absent, destruction and ruin are certain to appear.

- If we are to serve and reflect the Savior, we must possess genuine love. If churches are to remain vibrant, love must be shared among the congregants. We will never grow in grace or reach the lost and unsaved apart from love. If we will commit to loving as Christ commanded, we could experience and mighty move of God in our land. I am sure you would agree it is needful. Many of the problems and divisive issues would cease to exist if our hearts were filled with love!

II. The Responsibility in Liberty (16-18) – Here Paul offers insight to the great responsibility believers share in the liberty we enjoy in Christ. Consider:

A. The Counsel (16) – *This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.* Paul shares the key to Christian liberty and victory over the flesh. If we are to please the Lord while serving Him, we must walk in the Spirit. Through the Spirit we find wisdom and guidance. Rather than seeking the ways of the world or the fulfillment of fleshly pleasure, we will find the grace and ability to walk with the Lord.

- This is a simple concept that is easily conveyed, but it is quite difficult to practice. The flesh longs to be satisfied. Our human nature rises up within us and demands to be accommodated. Our only defense against such strong temptation is to abide in the Spirit. We must follow the leadership of the Spirit rather than the desires of our heart. The common philosophy today is to follow one's heart in life. This is a dangerous and deceptive approach. We must follow the Spirit, even at the expense of our heart's desire. *Jer.17:9 – The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

B. The Conflict (17a) – *For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other.* We discover the conflict that rages within the hearts of believers. The flesh has one goal – to fulfill its lust and desires. The Spirit leads in a way that honors the Lord and follows His direction. The flesh and the Spirit are contrary to each other. It is impossible to please the flesh and the Spirit at the same time. It is a continual battle that each of us must face. Our greatest hindrance in life is the body of flesh in which we dwell. This conflict will not be resolved until we depart this life and receive a new, glorified body. *Rom.7:18 – For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.*

- In order to overcome, we must strive to suppress the flesh while seeking to abide in the Spirit. We cannot serve both. They are contrary and have no fellowship together.

C. The Confusion (17b) – *so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.* Paul saw the frustration and defeat of many believers in Galatia and other regions. He also understood the source of their defeat. They tried to please the flesh and the Spirit at the same time. They genuinely longed to serve the Lord and please Him, but their flesh hindered their pursuit. As long as they were unwilling to crucify the lusts of the flesh, they could not live for the Lord as they hoped.

- Why do we see such confusion and hurt in society and even within the church? We need to look no further than our text. Many today are striving to straddle the fence. They want to satisfy the flesh and serve the Lord at the same time. This is a recipe for disaster. While committed to pleasing the flesh, (its arrogance, greed, jealousy, etc.,) we will never live victoriously in Christ. You will never be all Christ desires or effective in Christian service while seeking to please the flesh. You must choose one or the other. Until you are willing to make that difficult decision, you will remain defeated and confused.

D. The Conquest (18) – *But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.* Paul offers the key to overcoming the legalism of the law and the liberalism associated with the flesh. The key to balance and victory in Jesus is being led by His Spirit. Although this is difficult, Paul knew it would bring success in the Christian life. If the Galatians would submit their lives to the leadership of the Spirit, they could enjoy victory over the many obstacles they faced.

- This is a simple truth, but it is very profound. Many today struggle with besetting sins. They live in defeat, feeling inadequate to discern God's will for their lives. I am not implying living the Christian life is easy, but we make it much harder than it has to be. The key is a Spirit filled, Spirit led life. If we will submit daily to the Spirit, we will enjoy victory in life and fellowship with the Lord.

Conclusion: Christian liberty is available and it is attainable. However, we must seek it according to the principles in Scripture, not based on the opinions or dictates of man or culture. Genuine liberty involves measured restraint and committed responsibility. Are you struggling in the journey today? Are you battling the lusts of the flesh or feeling defeated by the restraint of legalism? If so, come to Jesus and receive the liberty that He alone can provide. Seek His guidance and walk with the Spirit and you can experience Christian liberty as the Lord desires.

If you remain unsaved, never responding to the call of Christ in salvation, you remain in bondage to sin and death. You may have liberties as an American citizen physically, but you remain in bondage spiritually. Come to Christ with a heart of repentance for sin and be saved today!