

### Review Questions (Lesson #15)

#### Answer T for true, F for false

1. Love is the exact opposite of selfishness.
2. Biblical liberty is a total absence of restraint.
3. "Flesh" as used in Galatians 5:13 refers to various parts of the physical body.
4. God calls us through the gospel.
5. There is a constant tension between our flesh and our spirit.

#### Give short answers:

1. If God had no requirements for people in the New Testament age, what two things would be impossible for us to do?
2. From what two things are we free in Christ?
3. Briefly explain what Paul was talking about when he wrote that the law was fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself":
4. Contrast the primary concern of the Law of Moses and the main focus of the New Testament:
5. What is the likely reason the Galatians were "biting and devouring" each other?

#### Fill in the blanks:

1. We are not to misconstrue Christian \_\_\_\_\_ as a \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. A selfish person's motives spring from "\_\_\_\_\_." Lovingly \_\_\_\_\_ each other, however, concentrates on the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, not the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Here in Galatians, as in \_\_\_\_\_, Paul took pains to emphasize that \_\_\_\_\_ does not mean \_\_\_\_\_; \_\_\_\_\_ does not permit \_\_\_\_\_ behavior.
4. Someone focused on self-\_\_\_\_\_ will gratify his \_\_\_\_\_ in any convenient way, many of which will be \_\_\_\_\_ & even \_\_\_\_\_.
5. When you have subjected your \_\_\_\_\_ to God's Spirit, you do not feel \_\_\_\_\_ by His \_\_\_\_\_.

## Galatians: Guarding the Gospel of Grace

### Lesson #15 Liberty or License? (Galatians 5:13-18)

Freedom. Liberty. Those noble words denote cherished concepts, both politically and spiritually. Patrick Henry declared, "Give me liberty or give me death!" But even that heroic patriot recognized that liberty is not absolute. Anarchy is not freedom! Living in a free country doesn't mean you can just do whatever you please. Neither does liberty in Christ mean we may live and worship (or not worship) however we please. Here in Galatians, as in Romans, Paul took pains to emphasize that liberty does not mean license; grace does not permit gross behavior.

The Judaizers were pressuring the Galatians to return to bondage under the Law of Moses. Paul urged the brethren not to surrender: "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty" (Galatians 5:13a). The Lord called us through the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Christ's gospel does not call us to the bondage of the Law, but to liberty in Christ. In Galatians 5:1 he had exhorted them to "stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free." That liberty included freedom from the slavery of sin (see John 8:32-36). When one obeys the gospel, he no longer serves sin, but righteousness (see Romans 6:17-18). But more to the point in Galatians, liberty means freedom from the bondage of the Law (see Galatians 3:22-23, comments in lesson #8).

Liberty absolutely does not mean a total absence of restraint. "Only do not use your liberty as an opportunity for the flesh" (Galatians 5:13b). Paul's word "opportunity" is a military term for a base of operations. We are not to misconstrue Christian liberty as a launching pad for immorality and vice.

Flesh, as used in 5:13, refers not to the elements that comprise our physical body, but to the whole person given over to satisfying selfish desires. Some such behaviors relate directly to the physical body, but others (such as jealousies and outbursts of wrath, v. 20) do not. Someone focused on self-satisfaction will gratify his appetites in any convenient way, many of which will be sinful and even immoral. But, as Paul wrote elsewhere, "God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:7). Peter concurs that we are free, but must not use our liberty "as a cloak for vice" (1 Peter 2:16).

Question: If liberty is not to be misused as an opportunity for the flesh, then what does God want us to do with it? Answer: "But through love

serve one another" (Galatians 5:13c). Love is the exact opposite of selfishness. A selfish person's motives spring from "I want . . ." Lovingly serving each other, however, concentrates on the needs of others, not the desires of self. One of the paradoxes of the gospel is that we are free to serve! Worldly minds see freedom and serving as polar opposites. God, however, blesses us with liberty to enable us to serve through love. In fact, "love is the fulfillment of the Law" (Romans 13:10). "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14).

Note the word fulfill. Paul did not say that the Law merely summarizes the command to love, but that it is complied with by loving one another! Paul did not talk out of both sides of his mouth here. He did not say with one breath that Christians are not under the law, and then with the next breath say that they are under it. Rather, he said that Christians, by using their liberty to serve one another through love, are doing what God desired in the Law, even though they aren't under the Law. By contrast, the Judaizers claimed to observe the Law carefully, but utterly failed when it came to loving other people and God. With all of their arguing and commotion about circumcision and Law-keeping, they were "biting and devouring one another" (see 5:15a). Very likely those in Galatia who didn't go along with the Judaizers fell into the same behavior as they sought to defeat the false teachers. Bottom line, they were in danger of being "consumed by one another" (5:15b). That still holds true today. False teachers are quite likely to resort to harsh, ruthless tactics to bully people into submission; but that does not justify us using similar tactics to resist them. As our parents told us, "two wrongs don't make one right."

In verse 16, Paul returns to his subject of abusing liberty as a license to sin. "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Does this refer to the Holy Spirit, or to our human spirit? Since he contrasts "spirit" with "flesh," there is good reason to think Paul refers to the human spirit, just as flesh means human flesh. However, it could also be the Holy Spirit. Certainly it is safe to say that when our human spirit submits to the Holy Spirit's will as revealed in the inspired Scriptures, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

There is, however, a constant tension between our spirit and our flesh. Part of us says, "You're free – do anything you want!" The other part of us says, "You're free in Christ, do what you ought!" As Paul says, "The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are

contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (5:17). It's a spiritual tug-of-war. Sometimes you really want to do right, but you let the flesh get the upper hand and you end up sinning. Sometimes you want to yield to the flesh, but your spirit resists so that you don't fulfill that lust. A common result is that you aren't as bad as you used to be, but you're nowhere near as good as you ought to be and want to be. Hopefully, as time passes, you grow in Christ and, as a result, you resist the lusts of the flesh and use your spirit to keep your flesh in subjection to God's Spirit to a greater and greater degree.

Paul concluded this section with an interesting and controversial statement: "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (5:18). As with 5:17, "spirit" can mean your human spirit, God's Holy Spirit, or perhaps your spirit under subjection to God's Spirit. We will view it here as we did previously: the human spirit in submission to the will of God's Spirit as revealed in His word. But what does Paul mean by saying "you are not under the law"?

Paul has shown repeatedly throughout Galatians that we are not subject to the Law of Moses. The Law was concerned primarily with things of the flesh (See Hebrews 7:19; 9:9-10; etc.). By contrast, the primary focus of the New Testament is on the inner person (spirit). This should not be taken to the extreme of saying God has no requirements for His people in this New Testament age, but some have done just that – and this is where the controversy arises. If God had no requirements for us, it would be impossible for us to sin, and we would not need the blood of Jesus. On the other hand, it would be impossible for us to obey, for how does one obey non-existent requirements? Certainly the New Testament expresses God's will for us, and Paul recognized that he was "under law to Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:21).

Interestingly, Paul did not use a definite article ("the") before "law" in 5:18. He literally said, "you are not under law." There is a sense in which we are not "under" (burdened and oppressed by) any law. When you have subjected your spirit to God's Spirit, you do not feel oppressed by His requirements. Obedience is a joy, not a burden. Cattle in a pasture full of fresh, green grass see a fence and respect it. They satisfy themselves with the grass on their own side. But some cattle are fence-jumpers. They feel imposed upon by the fence, and refuse to be content with the grass on their own side. God's word is like that fence, and some people are fence-jumpers. Obedience feels oppressive to them. They are led by the flesh, not the spirit. Submit your spirit to God's Spirit, and His "fence" will not afflict you!