

Galatians 5:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

Analysis

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. Paul transitions from polemic to ethical application. "For, brethren" (hymeis gar ep' eleutheria eklēthēte, adelphoi)—you were called to freedom. Eleutheria (έλευθερία) is the freedom Christ won (5:1). God's calling includes liberation from law's bondage. "Only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh" (monon mē tēn eleutherian eis aphormēn tē sarki)—don't turn freedom into opportunity/pretext for the flesh. Aphormē (ἀφορμή) is base of operations, springboard, opportunity.

Freedom isn't license for fleshly indulgence. This anticipates antinomian misunderstanding: if we're not under law, can we sin freely? Paul answers: No! "But by love serve one another" (alla dia tēs agapēs douleuete allēlois, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις). The verb douleuō (δουλεύω) means to serve as slave—paradox of Christian freedom: freed from law-slavery to become love-slaves to one another. True freedom serves; false freedom serves self. The Spirit produces love that voluntarily serves; the flesh produces selfish license.

Historical Context

Paul consistently addresses potential antinomian abuse of grace (Romans 6:1-2, 15). Freedom from law doesn't mean lawlessness but slavery to righteousness and love. The ethical life flows from union with Christ and Spirit-empowerment, not

external legal compulsion. This is higher ethics, not lower: love fulfills law's intent (5:14) while surpassing law's external demands. Christian ethics aren't situational relativism but Spirit-produced fruit of love serving others. This challenged both legalists (who couldn't conceive of morality without law) and libertines (who saw freedom as license).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How do you avoid both legalism (using law for righteousness) and license (using freedom as excuse for sin)?
2. What does it mean practically to be free from law-slavery while becoming a love-slave serving others?
3. In what areas are you using Christian liberty as 'occasion to the flesh' rather than opportunity to serve in love?

Interlinear Text

Ἐγενέντος δὲ ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἐπὶ ἐλευθερίαν ἐκλήθητε ἀδελφοί· μόνον

ye For unto liberty have been called brethren only
G5210 G1063 G1909 G1657 G2564 G80 G3440

μὴ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν εἰς ἀφορμὴν τῇ σαρκὶ ἀλλὰ
use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh but
G3588 G1657 G1519 G3588 G4561 G235
G3361 G874

διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις
by love serve one another
G3588 G26 G1398 G240
G1223

Additional Cross-References

1 Peter 2:16 (Parallel theme): As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

1 Corinthians 9:19 (Parallel theme): For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

1 Corinthians 8:9 (Parallel theme): But take heed lest by any means this liberty of your's become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

Galatians 5:14 (Love): For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Ephesians 5:21 (Parallel theme): Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Galatians 6:2 (Parallel theme): Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Isaiah 61:1 (Parallel theme): The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

Jude 1:4 (Parallel theme): For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 20:35 (Parallel theme): I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

2 Peter 2:19 (Parallel theme): While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

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