

21.05.06 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.

The Liberty of Love

Bible Readings = Galatians 5:13-21; Romans 13:8-14

Introduction:

- (1) We are coming to the end our series on Galatians, and are now in the midst of the section in which the theological foundation of the earlier chapters is now being unpacked for Paul's readers, in terms of their fellowship and life together.
- (2) We remind ourselves that the reasons for the letter were entirely pastoral: the theological issues raised have been the foundation for addressing a pastoral problem, namely the threatened whole-sale abandonment of the gospel of grace for a "gospel" based on 'works of the law'.
- (3) In their initial response to the word of the Cross, the Galatian believers had been a community of love, joy, peace, patience etc...as evidenced by Paul's references to their own shared experience together (e.g. Gal. 3:1ff.; 4:12ff.). In other words they had begun in the Spirit, but now, under the pressure from the false teachers, were looking to take themselves 'forward' by the Flesh.
- (4) As they did so, the deeds of the Flesh were beginning to be manifest among them, such as factionalism, bitterness, envy, 'biting and devouring' one another, etc.
- (5) So Paul's letter is written with urgency, to correct the teaching because of its pastoral implications...to continue to heed the word of the false teachers would be to lose all the liberty, joy, freedom and life of the Spirit.

This week we see that that the real liberty of the Christian life is love, and that this liberty is contested at every turn by the Flesh, but that the answer is found where it is always found: in living by faith.

1. The Positive Nature of Liberty

(1) Paul makes it clear that that the matter of Christian liberty is really at the heart of his concern for the Galatian believers (Gal. 5:1).

- This liberty has a negative and positive aspect to it. See the parallel between Gal. 5:1a and 5:13a
 - We continue in the freedom for which we have been set free by not doing certain things and by doing other things.
- 'Negatively' we do not allow ourselves to come under the Law again as a means of establishing, maintaining or securing our righteousness.
 - In a couple of weeks we will revisit the matter of circumcision...the presenting issue for the Galatian believers. For now we note that the matter is simply reduced to this: is our relationship with God dependent on the law or on grace?

To receive circumcision, in their circumstances and for the reasons suggested by the false teachers who had come to them from Jerusalem, would be to jettison the gospel completely. It would be the same as saying that there is another means of righteousness apart from, or in addition to, Christ. This is unthinkable: see Gal. 2:21.
- Positively, however, the life of liberty is the life of love. Gal. 5:13f.

- This is the life for which we were created by God the Father, who is love. The Spirit has come, shedding the love of the Father into our hearts (Rom. 5:5), and the Son has come in obedience to the Father, to love us by becoming the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10f.)
- This love is not *undefined* love. God has defined the nature of his love for us, in the action of the Cross. (This, and this alone is love...what the world calls 'love' is not that, though everyone thinks they knows what love is!)

(2) Through the grace of adoption, we are the sons of God (Gal. 4:1-6), this means we have the family likeness in us: the character of the Father revealed in us.

- This is the line that John takes: we love because we are born of God (e.g. 1 John 4:19)
- This means that love is the natural state of created humanity...and though it is not the state of fallen humanity, it is the state for which we have been created.
 - Redemption by Love is for love... "it is for freedom that Christ set us free" is another way of saying "it is for love that Christ has loved us". By grace, as we are born of the Spirit and find the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, so love is our home.

This is why we feel it so deeply when we love not!

(3) The Law, given on Mt Sinai, is the expression of love in two ways, love to God and love to one's neighbour. Thus, love is the summary of the law, and the hinge on which the whole of salvation history turns.

- See Matt. 22:36f compared with Rom. 13:8ff.; cf. this passage in Galatians 5.
- All sin is ultimately the sin against love. The history of the entire race is really the history of how we have loved (or not!) and God's love for us who have not loved him.
 - Sin is bondage, love is freedom

2. The Flesh and the Spirit

(1) Galatians 5:17 tells us of the great battle in which we are caught up.

- Not 'our flesh' and 'our spirit', but Flesh and Spirit!
 - We are the subject of great warring forces, and we are led by one or the other!

We are either in the Flesh or in the Spirit (as a natural person or a redeemed person); i.e. these are realms of existence. In Christ we were in the one, and are now in the other (see Rom. 8:9 cf. John 3:6)

- In the Flesh, we were led by the desires of the flesh...without thinking about it and unable to choose differently. Will was bound in sin, and we could not submit to the law of God (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:7).
- We have to be set free in a new exodus. We cannot set ourselves free...hence all the language about slavery, bondage etc. in the New Testament.

(2) In that place, in the Flesh, we were subject to all sorts of bondage and under terrible powers of darkness, though we did not realise it at the time! In the Flesh we did the deeds of the flesh...belong to our own sinful nature. We 'walked according the Flesh'

- The deeds of the flesh are all terrible...but at the bottom line they are all denials of love. They are humanity turned in upon itself, and in its selfishness destroying itself, as it lives under the wrath of God in that place.
- (3) So what has this got to do with Galatians' "gospel" from the false teachers?
- The gospel that they brought came from the Flesh! It belongs to that realm as it places the power within humanity to save itself by its works. It appeals to the ego action of the Flesh and gives us a so-called righteousness in which to boast.
 - And as the Galatians were hearing that message and started walking according to it, they started to experience in their own lives the deeds of the Flesh!
 - They were actually not *of* the Flesh (but the Spirit!), but as they gave a hearing to that word, they started walking as though they were in the Flesh.

Compare with Gal. 3:1ff.

The liberty of love is preserved in the gospel we hear!

- (4) But, given that we do hear the word of grace, we are in that grace free to love. It frees us to love, because it tells us that we have been loved.
- It frees us from the drag of self-justification and liberates us into forgiveness.
 - Ephesians 4:25-5:2; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Cor. 13.