

THE CONTROLS OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

by
David Artman

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Author: C. David Artman
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Advisor: John A. Sproule

Christian liberty is a subject that has concerned Christians throughout the ages. The misuse of this liberty has also caused many problems within the Church. It is the intent of this author to study two important passages dealing with the subject of Christian liberty for the purpose of determining the Scriptural teaching of liberty and how the Christian is to function within the context of liberty. The two passages to be considered are 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and Galatians 5:13-15.


The meaning of πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν is crucial to the understanding of Christian liberty and its application. A careful study will show that πάντα is not always used as an absolute. There are times when the word means "many" rather than "all." Also the Scripture never teaches that the Christian is free to go against God's law. What is forbidden by God is never to be considered under Christian liberty.

Paul gives the Christian several principles to be used in determining the correct use of liberty. Two of these principles, service to others and self-mastery, are found in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Actions that do not benefit others, or that have a tendency to enslave the person committing them should be avoided.

An understanding of Paul's concept of freedom is also important. He believed that the Christian is free from the penalty of the law so that he might serve God and his fellow man as a servant. He is not free to serve himself. If his actions are not used to serve God and others, then he is misusing his freedom.

To enable the Christian to exercise his freedom wisely, God has given him two sources of power, love toward God and his fellow man and the Holy Spirit. Any Christian who is walking in love and the power of the Holy Spirit will be able to exercise his freedom wisely.

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Advisor

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INTRODUCTION

Since its beginning almost two thousand years ago, the church has had to battle with the meaning and application of Christian liberty. Paul was constantly dealing with those who twisted his teaching concerning this important doctrine. When he wrote to the church at Philippi, he exhorted them to beware of both the Judaizers and the Antinomians. These two groups represent the two extremes that develop when men are given complete freedom, and yet Paul writes in Galatians 5:13 that we are called to freedom. He writes in another passage that "all things are lawful" (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). If these verses do not teach total freedom, then what do they teach?

The problem of Christian liberty was not unique with the apostle Paul. It has continued down through the years. Even great spiritual leaders such as Martin Luther tended to live unrestricted lives at times. Once he broke away from the regimented life of the Roman Catholic Church, an example of legalism, Luther allowed himself to exercise his liberty in a manner not always consistent with the teaching of Scripture.¹ Human nature finds it hard to balance between legalism and license.

¹Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History, 2 vols. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1902), p. 89.

This is still a problem today. Many Christians display by their lives, if not by their doctrine, that the following jingle is the essence of their theology.

Free from the law!
O happy condition!
I can sin as I please
and still have remission.

Is the philosophy summarized in this jingle consistent with Paul's doctrine of Christian liberty? There are also many examples of legalism in present-day Christendom. Many separatist groups have rules of conduct as restrictive as those advocated by the Judaizers of Paul's day. The separatists do not teach that you must become a Jew to be truly spiritual, but they do teach that you must obey their specific rules or suffer the fate of not being as spiritual as they are. The principle is the same, only the requirements to be met are different.

Does the Bible actually teach that the Christian has total freedom because of his faith in Christ; and if so, how is this freedom to be applied in his daily life? Is Paul being consistent when in 1 Corinthians 6:12 he writes, "all things are lawful," then in 1 Corinthians 9:27 he writes, "but I buffet my body and make it my slave?" The purpose of this paper is to show that Paul did teach that the Christian is completely free in Christ to make choices involving anything not expressly forbidden by God, but that with this freedom there is responsibility;

therefore, there are self-imposed limits placed upon this freedom to aid in using it correctly.

Paul was a very logical person and a master of argumentation, thus it is important to understand the circumstances of each situation in order to catch the importance of each point in his arguments. Many groups have gone astray because they have taken one of Paul's statements concerning Christian liberty, isolated from its context, to prove their particular position concerning Christian liberty; therefore, much attention will be given to the background material concerning the people to whom Paul was writing. Knowing something about the philosophy and character of the original readers will aid in understanding why Paul wrote in the manner that he did.

CHAPTER I

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AS TAUGHT IN

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-20

Setting

It has been stated that a glance at the map will show that Corinth was made for greatness. The city was located on the isthmus between Attica and the Greek Peloponnesus giving it access to the Aegean and Ionian seas. This location made it possible for Corinth to have three good harbors. Because of the scarcity of harbors on the Corinthian Gulf, Corinth was thereby able to control the sea commerce of this entire area.¹ The city of Corinth was also located on the main east-to-west highway running from Rome to the east, thus affording it the opportunity of controlling the land commerce as well as the sea. However, with all of its wealth and prestige, the city had a large population of poor people. The estimated population of Corinth at the time of Paul's writing was approximately seven hundred thousand, of whom two-thirds were slaves.²

¹J. E. Harry, "Corinth," The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Vol. II, ed. by James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), p. 710.

²D. Edmond Hiebert, An Introduction to the Pauline Epistles (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), p. 105.

Any large group of poor people depending upon a few very rich people creates a situation conducive to all types of social problems. Coupled with this unequal distribution of wealth was a mixed ethnic make-up of the population brought about by the commercial activities of the city. This social and ethnic composition of the population was one factor that contributed to the moral laxity for which Corinth was noted.

A second factor involved the worship of Aphrodite whose temple had over 1000 female prostitutes who would descend upon the city each evening. It became the Greek proverb, "It is not every man who can afford a journey to Corinth." The Greeks even coined a word "to corinthianize" which meant to live an immoral life.¹ In conjunction with the worship of Aphrodite, the city of Corinth celebrated the Isthmian games at the temple of Poseidon. These games were second only to the Olympic games in popularity, "but with the games there came an emphasis on luxury and profligacy, because the sanctuary of Poseidon was given over to the worship of Aphrodite. . . ."² It was within this moral atmosphere that the church at Corinth existed.

¹James L. Boyer, For A World Like Ours: Studies in 1 Corinthians (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1971), p. 17.

²W. Harold Mare, "1 Corinthians," in Vol. X, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. by Frank E. Gaebeline (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 176.

The congregation of the church at Corinth consisted mostly of Gentiles who came from the pagan background characteristic of the city. They had been taught the Greek philosophy of the day which in essence stated that "man is the measure of all things."¹ This principle translated into universal liberty. Immorality was the way of life with them; therefore, when Paul taught that they were free from the law through Christ, it was easy for them to apply this principle to all areas of their lives including the moral. One would think that Paul would have softened his teaching of liberty when addressing such a group of people; however, such is not the case. In this passage, Paul adopts his regular procedure of dealing with erring groups. He goes along with them as far as he can, then adds some principle to neutralize their excesses.²

The verses under consideration begin with a strong assertion of Christian liberty--"All things are lawful for me." Some believe that because of the strong tone and subject matter of this passage that it is not related to the surrounding context; therefore, they argue that it is a

¹Christian Friedrich Kling, Corinthians in Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, ed. by John Peter Lange, trans. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 130.

²F. F. Bruce, 1 and 2 Corinthians, New Century Bible, ed. by Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black (London: Butler & Tanner, Ltd., 1971), p. 62.

fragment of a previous letter.¹ A close study of the context will reveal that the passage does fit in as a transitional section. Paul has just finished describing some actions that are not to be a part of the Christian life (5:1-6:11). In chapters seven and eight he answers questions that the Corinthians have asked concerning proper behavior. The verses from 6:12 to 6:20 give and illustrate a guiding principle of Christian behavior; namely, the principle of Christian liberty. It is this principle that ties the thoughts of this section together.

The passage also contains in seed form the topics to be discussed in later chapters such as the relation between the sexes, the question of meats offered to idols, and the doctrine of the resurrection. Considered in this light, the passage is an essential part of the overall context of this section of the book.²

Paul has been accused by some of being inconsistent for writing in verses nine and ten of chapter six that the doers of certain acts such as stealing, coveting, and fighting will not inherit the kingdom of God. Then, in verse twelve, he writes, "All things are lawful for me." In response to this objection, it must be understood that the

¹Erick Dinkler, "The First Letter to the Corinthians," in The Dictionary of the Bible, ed. by F. C. Grant and H. H. Rowley (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), p. 177.

²Henry Alford, The Greek New Testament, Vol. II (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1894), p. 516.

Christian is free to choose and act as he sees fit within God's revealed guidelines, but that each action committed by any individual not only affects that particular individual, but also has an effect upon those around him. No one is totally isolated unto himself, and even if he were, he would still be responsible to God. A constant problem of freedom is how to limit individual freedom so that those in contact with the individual are not adversely affected.¹ Rather than being inconsistent, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 is giving principles that will guide the Christian in the use of his freedom so that he might be useful to the Christian community and to God, his Lord and master. As the passage is carefully exegeted, it becomes clear that Christian liberty is not a license to do as one pleases, nor is Paul making an exaggerated statement that is not true. The Christian is at liberty to do anything as long as it brings honor and glory to God. This may sound paradoxical, yet this is what Paul teaches.

The Meaning of ὅσα μοι ἔξεστιν

One of the crucial questions concerning Christian liberty is the scope of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful for me." This particular phrase is only found four times in all of Scripture, twice in verse twelve and twice in verse twenty-three of chapter ten. Each

¹Jacques Ellul, The Ethics of Freedom, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), p. 185.

verse not only gives the bold statement, but also gives qualifications or limits. For this reason some believe that this was a maxim of Corinth which Paul is using in a demeaning way. If this is true, then Paul does not mean what he is saying. He is just overstating his case for effect.

It is true that this statement taken by itself is consistent with the Greek philosophy prevalent at that time, and without qualifications, it fits the moral character of the city as illustrated in the introduction, but if Paul is only quoting one of their trite sayings in a belittling way, he did not indicate it. His normal way of introducing words that were not his own was to begin the statement with ἐπεὶς οὖν to indicate that he was quoting the thoughts or sayings of the people being addressed, and not giving his own words. An example of this type of introduction is found in Romans 11:39 where Paul writes, "You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.'" It seems that if he introduced a quote with which he agreed with the phrase ἐπεὶς οὖν, then he would have done the same when quoting a statement with which he disagreed.

Another indication that these are the words of the apostle himself is that he did not dispute the statement. He only gave two general limitations and a practical illustration of Christian liberty and how it should be used. If Paul did not believe that "All things are lawful" was a true

statement, he certainly would have told the Corinthians. This would have been a good way to refute their immoral behavior. He did say they were applying the principle incorrectly, but he did not indicate that the principle was not true.

A third reason for accepting these words as the words of Paul is that he makes similar statements in other passages. In Galatians 5:1, he writes, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; . . ." A similar statement is found in Galatians 5:13. These verses were written before the letter to the Corinthians and are as strong a statement as that found in 1 Corinthians 6:12, 10:23.

It is easy to see how these statements could be misconstrued, especially by those wishing to excuse licentiousness, but it is evident that these words originally came from the apostle Paul.

The Reason for the Statement

Apparently some members of the church at Corinth were taking Paul's statement of Christian liberty as a license to live as their pagan friends lived. This passage is used by Paul to show that they were applying the principle of liberty incorrectly. It is not that the principle is not true, but there is more to liberty than the right to act as one wills. Christian liberty involves responsibility. Freedom without responsibility leads to anarchy whether in the political realm or in the spiritual. Spiritual anarchy

results in excessive sinful activity. It is rebellion against God. The Corinthian lifestyle demonstrates that when liberty is allowed to become the governing factor in Christian ethics, there is a danger of using it as an excuse for sinful activity. Paul wants the Corinthian church to understand its great responsibility to use their liberty wisely.

The Limitation of πάντα

The context shows that Paul is using πάντα in a restrictive sense rather than as an absolute. Throughout the book Paul condemns different activities that were apparently characteristic of some of the members of the Corinthian church. He told them in chapter five that it was wrong for a man to have his father's wife (1 Cor. 5:1-5). In chapter ten, he warns them that idolatry is wrong (1 Cor. 10:14). The first part of chapter six states that it is wrong to take a Christian brother to court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). If πάντα is to be taken in the absolute sense, then Paul is being inconsistent as charged by some. When he states that "all things are lawful," he must at least be limiting it to those things not mentioned in the other parts of the letter as being wrong. In fact, to be consistent with the totality of Scripture, "all things" must exclude all that God has expressly forbidden.

"All" is not always used as an absolute. To say that "all the church is behind the pastor" does not mean every

single person agrees with him. It simply means that most of the people are in agreement. The Scripture does not always use "all" as an absolute either.¹ "All the sick" in Matthew 7:24 is one example of its restrictive use. Matthew is merely saying that many of the sick were brought to Jesus. Many other examples can be cited to illustrate πάντα being used to mean many. Therefore, Paul is not misusing the language when he uses πάντα instead of πολὺς. It must be concluded that "all things are lawful" refers only to what God has not excluded. To say that "all things are lawful" is not to say that all things are neutral.² Only those actions that are considered neutral are to be considered under Christian liberty.

Limitation of ἔξεστιν

ἔξεστιν is defined as "an action that is not prevented by an higher power."³ The word limits itself to those things not specifically stated unlawful by the supreme authority of the society. For the believer, God is that supreme authority; therefore, His law must be the first limiting factor in Christian liberty. Even if the statement

¹Bo Reicke, "πᾶς," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. V, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 896.

²Ellul, The Ethics of Freedom, p. 198.

³Werner Foerster, "ἔξεστιν," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. II, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 560.

"all things are lawful" is taken at face value, it has to apply to the individual in relation to the authority of his society. The Corinthians, as Roman citizens, understood that Paul was not giving them the right to break the Roman laws without being accountable to the Roman authorities. Liberty in any realm is limited by the rules of the society granting the liberty. The Christian is a member of two societies, the political nation in which he lives, and the kingdom of God. Paul is not excusing him from the laws of either.

It can be concluded that Christians are free to make choices concerning any action not prohibited by the laws of his nation or of God. Paul realizes that freedom without guidelines for its use will soon lead the free individual to destruction. The individual has to know how to make his choices. In making these choices, he must remember that freedom has a purpose. For the Christian, the purpose of his freedom is that through his freedom he might glorify God. Freedom is truly freedom when it is used to choose actions that benefit the individual, the community, and God.

Two Limiting Principles in the Use of Liberty

After making the assertion that "all things are lawful," Paul gives two principles that must be used in the exercise of this liberty. These may be considered by some as limitations, and in a sense they are, but for the Chris-

tian they are self-imposed limitations. They are not laws that must be obeyed, but principles that should be followed. Paul is holding the absolute statement of liberty in tension with two principles of relativity.¹

Service to Others

"Many things in themselves harmless in the abstract, do harm to others in the concrete."² No individual can act without such action affecting the community around him.

Some interpreters say that Paul is referring to what benefits the individual in 1 Corinthians 6:12 and what benefits the community in 1 Corinthians 10:23.³ Normally, Paul places the community of believers above the individual, and there are several reasons to support such an interpretation for this verse.

First, the context with the use of the effect of fornication upon the body of Christ illustrates that Paul has the community of believers uppermost in his mind.

Secondly, Paul's normal use of *συμφέρει* is in connection with what is profitable for the Christian community

¹William Baird, The Corinthian Church--A Biblical Approach to Urban Culture (New York: Abington Press, 1964), p. 80.

²Archibald Thomas Robertson, The Epistles of Paul, Vol. IV, Word Pictures in the New Testament (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), p. 120.

³G. G. Findlay, "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians," Vol. II, Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 818.

and the cause of Christ.¹ This can be seen with the usage of συμφέρει in 1 Corinthians 10:23,24, where he writes, "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor." All agree that this passage is dealing with what benefits the community. Since the passages are so similar and use the same word, it must be assumed that Paul has the same application in mind for both. Another use of the word used in reference to the community is found in 1 Corinthians 12:7. Paul writes, "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." "Common good" is a translation of the Greek word συμφέρον.

Thirdly, this interpretation accounts for the lack of the word "me" in the phrase "not all things benefit." Paul begins the verse with the phrase "all things are lawful for me," but when he gives the principles of limitation, he excludes the "me," indicating that he was thinking of an universal application.

To correctly understand what Paul means by this limitation, it is important to know what Paul considered profitable. Individuals and cultures differ in their estimation of value. Any action that benefited the city was considered profitable to the Greek; whereas, only those

¹Konrad Weiss, "συμφέρω," Vol. IX, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 77.

actions that led toward a national theocracy were of value to the Jew.¹ Throughout Paul's writings, service to others is placed before service to self. He writes in 1 Corinthians 10:33, "Just as I also please all men in all things, but not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many." In 2 Corinthians 8, he exhorts the Corinthians to abound in love as service to others. Using the example of Christ as an illustration, he writes in verse 9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." Service to others can be seen as a theme of Paul's message throughout his writings, and here in 1 Corinthians 6, it is used as a limiting principle for Christian liberty. Every action of a believer should be considered in the light of its profit to others.

Self-Mastery

Paul realizes that what affects the individual affects the community, thus he gives another principle of limitation aimed at the individual. Not only is Christian liberty to be limited to those actions that are worthwhile to the Christian community, but Paul also states that no action regardless of its lawfulness should be taken that will in the end control the executor of that action. Some actions tend to create in some persons an irresistible habit. These

¹Weiss, "σθμφέρω," TDNT, Vol. IX, p. 77.

habits deprive men of self-control and must be avoided even though in themselves they are lawful.¹

Paul in stating this limiting principle, οὐκ ἐγὼ ἐξουσιασθησάμαι ὑπὸ τινος employs a play on words using the passive of ἐξουσιάζω and ἔξεστιν in the previous phrase. The basic meaning of both words involves the concept of power or authority.² A good English translation using this play on words is found in Lange's commentary where the phrase is translated, "All things are in my power, but I will not come under power to anything."³ It is foolish indeed to use your liberty in such a way that you become enslaved again. This is what Paul is warning against.

The word ἐξουσία has the sense of absolute power.⁴ Paul is saying that in the area that pertains to Christian liberty the believer has absolute power or authority, but to have the power to act does not mean that the action must be taken. If by overeating, the believer is in danger of

¹Joseph Agar Beet, A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1892), p. 107.

²William F. Arndt and Wilbur P. Gingrich, "ἐξουσιάζω," A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 274, 278.

³Christian Friedrich Kling, "Corinthians," Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, ed. by John Peter Lange, trans. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 131.

⁴Foerster, "ἐξουσία," TDNT, Vol. II, p. 564.

becoming a slave to his appetite, then he must restrain the use of his liberty in this area or face the possibility of being controlled by his natural desire for food.

Many individuals believe that only people have the power to enslave other people. Such is not the case. In this verse, Paul is talking mainly about things becoming masters of people. *τις* is neuter and refers to anything that is included in the *πάντα* in the beginning of the verse.¹ Anything that renders a believer useless for the cause of Christ is in a sense enslaving him and should be avoided. As Paul will illustrate in his application of this principle to the act of fornication, each believer is a member of the total body of Christ. The believer has been freed from the bondage of sin to serve Christ. Liberty used for any other purpose is misapplied liberty.

The Application of Christian Liberty

The application of the principle of Christian liberty should be an elementary task easily performed by every believer, using the principles of limitation set forth by Paul, but this is not always true. Some of the believers at Corinth misapplied their liberty in one area that should have been obvious to them. Determining those actions which are expressly against God's will can at times be difficult,

¹F. Godet, Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, trans. by A. Cusin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), p. 305.

especially if, as in the case of the Corinthians, the individual's background has been one in which certain immoral acts were considered the norm. The Scripture is absolute on adultery, but somewhat vague on fornication. It can be rationalized that technically fornication is not adultery; therefore, it would belong in the neutral area. This was the reasoning of some of the believers living in Corinth without the benefit of the New Testament. In the matter of liberty, moral judgments are necessary. "Moral judgments, however, require discernment, and distinction must be made between matters such as food, which are questions of expediency, and immoral acts, which are sins against the Holy Spirit."¹ Apparently because of their pagan background, the Corinthians reasoned that if eating, the response to a natural drive, was under the area of Christian liberty, then fornication, also the response to a natural drive, must be neutral. They probably also reasoned that since Paul gave them permission to eat meat offered to idols, then fornication, another part of their previous idol worship, must also be a part of their new liberty. Paul in his argument against their justification of fornication, indicates that there are certain facts that must be known by the Christian in order for him to apply his liberty wisely. The main thrust of his argument is that: (1) Fornication is a violation of the intended use of the body; (2) It is a desecration of the members

¹Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), p. 444.

of Christ; (3) It is an abuse of the body which is the temple of God; (4) It is robbing God of what He paid such a high price to obtain.¹ In presenting his argument, Paul also appeals to three facts that should have been known to the Corinthians: (1) Our bodies are members of Christ; (2) Fornication makes the two partners one; (3) Each Christian's body is a temple of God.

The Purpose of the Body

Paul begins his case against fornication by showing that fornication is not an action that comes under Christian liberty. To parallel eating and food with fornication and the body is illogical. The parallel breaks down in two areas. First, the two are in different realms. The belly is in the realm of the temporal, and the body is in the realm of the eternal. Christ is going to transform our bodies so that they will exist forever (Phil. 3:21). Paul is telling the Corinthians that as far as the belly and food are concerned, there will be a time when they will no longer be needed. He uses *καταργέω* to describe this situation. It is translated in the NASB as "do away with." The KJV reads, "but God shall destroy both it and them." Both of these translations give the idea that there will be a time when food and the parts of the anatomy involved

¹Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), p. 151.

in its process will no longer exist. This is not necessarily true. Essentially the word has the sense of "to render idle."¹ The belly will only perform its function as long as the body remains alive, whereas the body will perform its function in relation to God forever. The belly and food fall in the area of liberty. The body and its use is to be under the direction of God. The Christian is not free to use it as he chooses.

Secondly, the parallel breaks down in relation to the purpose for which the two were created. The only purpose of the intestines is to prepare food for use by the body. It has no function in the worship of God. The body, on the other hand, was created to serve and glorify God. This point is amplified by Paul later in his argument. For now, he is merely saying that the Corinthians misapplied the principle of liberty in regard to fornication because they failed to realize the nature and purpose of the body.

To illustrate this high purpose for which the body was created, Paul refers to the resurrection. The body is so valuable to God that some day in the future he will raise it with the same power that He raised Christ.

Throughout this passage, Paul emphasizes the close relationship of the believer to Christ. There are certain

¹Leon Morris, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, in The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. by R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958), p. 49.

facts about this relationship that should have been understood by the Corinthians. Paul bases the last three points of his argument upon these facts. He begins with οἴδατε ὅτι, the phrase frequently used to introduce a well-known fact.¹ In this passage, it is used as a rhetorical question expecting an affirmative answer. This is indicated by the use of οὐκ instead of μὴ. In Greek, when the context is ambiguous, it is normal to use οὐκ when expecting a positive answer and μὴ for the expectation of a negative answer.² Paul truly expects the Corinthians to agree that the facts are true, and if applied as presented will eliminate fornication from the area of liberty. In fact, the Corinthians should have known that fornication was not to be considered under liberty because it was expressly forbidden by God. That fornication is related to adultery is shown by Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:28 where He states, "Every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart." By using πᾶς ὁ, Jesus has included the unmarried as well as the married. The passage goes on to use πορνεία as a synonym for μοιχεία in verse thirty-two.

¹Arndt and Gingrich, "οἴδα," p. 558.

²F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, trans. by Robert W. Funk (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 226.

Even though the Corinthians should have known that fornication is considered the same as adultery, some of them apparently did not consider it as such. It may be that since they were not Jews and according to their culture fornication was acceptable that they did not consider it wrong. Paul is arguing that it is wrong, and not to be considered under Christian liberty.

Desecration of Christ's Body

To show that fornication is a desecration of the believer's body, Paul presents the first fact. The bodies of the Christian are members of Christ. The word μέλος (members) is used elsewhere to indicate the different parts of the human body. In Romans 12:4,5, where Paul is again using the analogy of the human body to explain the relationship to Christ, he writes,

For just as we have many members (μέλη) in one body and all the members (μέλη) do not have the same function, so we who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members (μέλη) one of another.

Paul is teaching in Romans 12:4,5 as well as in 1 Corinthians 6:15 that the individual Christian is one component part of Christ's body just as the individual's arm is a component part of his own body. Though it is made up of many members, the human body is only controlled by one part, the head. Likewise, the body of Christ, though made up of many members (human beings) should be controlled by one head--Christ himself. Just as certain actions of the

human body are performed by habit rather than by a direct command from the brain, the members of the body of Christ are allowed to perform certain actions without a direct command from Christ. These actions fall within the area of Christian liberty and must be chosen in a manner consistent with the nature of the body. It is an eternal spiritual body, not a temporal physical body.

To further cement this truth in their minds, Paul appeals to the Old Testament to show them the source of the first fact and how it applies to the exercise of liberty. According to Paul's interpretation of Genesis 2:24, the sexual union is what makes the two partners one.¹ Thus, it is not marriage itself that the passage in Genesis is describing, but rather any sexual union. This then places fornication with adultery which is expressly forbidden by God.

This is not the main point of Paul's argument, for he continues by saying, "But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him." Just as sexual union makes two people one, the act of faith makes a Christian one with Christ. As such, they are to be governed by the same principles of life. The Christian must act in a manner consistent with this exalted relationship. That Christ would commit an act of fornication is unthinkable; therefore,

¹Morris, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, p. 102.

it should be unthinkable for a member of His body to commit fornication since they are really one body.

Paul also claims that the act of fornication is somehow different from other sins. Many interpretations have been given for the phrase, "but the immoral man sins against his own body." Godet writes, "Fornication involves the Christian in a degrading physical solidarity incompatible with the believer's spiritual solidarity with Christ."¹ This is true as far as it goes, but in the passage, Paul is arguing for more than a spiritual solidarity with Christ. He argues that the whole person, body and spirit, is part of Christ's body. This is evident throughout his discussion, especially in verses 13 and 14 where he writes that the body will be raised to continue forever. At this point, the Corinthians' main problem was with sin in connection with the physical body, not sin dealing with the spiritual realm. Paul instructs them that the physical body is as much one with Christ as the human spirit. The Christian's relationship with Christ involves both the physical and the spiritual.

Another interpretation states that "other sins against the body use things outside of the body. They are sinful in the excess. Fornication is sinful in itself."²

¹Godet, Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, p. 315.

²Morris, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, p. 103.

Robertson adds, "In fornication the body is the instrument of sin and becomes the subject of the damage wrought."¹

The last two interpretations suggest that the difference is that the person's body is the instrument of sin. Added to this is the fact that his body is not really his own to control as he wishes. Each individual Christian is only a part of the body of Christ which is his true identity. The fornicator is taking that which rightly belongs to God to commit an act of sin against God. He is not at liberty to do this because in so doing he causes the whole body of Christ to suffer. This same argument can be applied to other sins as well; therefore, it does not explain why fornication is said to be different.

Paul is not arguing that fornication is different than other sins. He is only concerned about fornication in this passage because it was a problem with the Corinthians. The passage reads that every sin is outside of the body, and this includes fornication. When a man sins, it is his person, body and soul, that sins and not just his body. Fornication is just one of many sins that affect the body. Paul could have mentioned others, but he did not because they were not causing the people at Corinth any problems at this time. When commentators say that fornication is different than other sins because a man takes

¹Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. IV, p. 122.

part in the act as a totality,¹ they are not considering that $\pi\alpha\nu$ in the first part of the verse includes fornication. All sin involves the whole person.

Misuse of the Temple of God

Paul's third argument against fornication is that it is a misuse of the temple of God. To make his point, he appeals to a third fact that the Corinthians should have known. The body of every believer is a temple in which God Himself dwells. Apparently the Corinthians had failed to realize the importance of this fact.

The Jews believed that the temple was where God dwelt and were very particular about how it was used so as not to dishonor God by desecrating His house.² By this time in history, the Jews had allowed many things to come into the temple that were not honorable. Christ on two occasions had to drive money-changers out of the temple (Jn. 2:15; Lk. 19:45), but even as bad as the conditions were, the people still had respect for the temple. This was especially true of the inner temple, the dwelling place of God. Paul implies that if the temple at Jerusalem was so

¹Edward Schweizer, " $\sigma\tilde{\omega}\mu\alpha$," Vol. VII, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 1063.

²Morris, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, p. 103.

highly regarded, then the human body ought to receive the same respect. For now, since the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, God is dwelling in the body of the individual believer. This fact alone should cause every believer to re-evaluate his thinking concerning the exercise of Christian liberty.

Both σῶμα and ναός are singular which has caused some commentators to say that Paul is referring to the Church as the one body made up of all believers.¹ If this is the correct interpretation, then when an individual Christian sins, he is causing all members of the Church to sin. The context argues more for the idea that each believer is a temple of God.² Paul is talking about the responsibility of individuals and how their actions affect Christ, and not how they affect other believers. This is not the only passage that calls the human body a temple of God. Second Corinthians 6:16 reads, "Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God." Paul tells Timothy to "guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasures which have been entrusted to you." Both of these references refer to

¹F. W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, in The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. by F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 152.

²Mare, "1 Corinthians," The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. X, p. 225.

individuals and not to the Church. God dwells in the Church only in the sense that He dwells within each member of the Church. When a believer commits sin, he is desecrating the very house of God, and fornication is sin.

To emphasize the point that the inner temple is in mind, Paul uses the word ναός instead of ἱερόν. Although there is not always a distinction made between the two words, usually ναός means "the innermost part of the temple,"¹ the dwelling place of God. In light of this, how we use our bodies is very important in the sight of God. There are some actions that are not to be considered. Fornication is one such action.

God Owns the Christian

Paul's last point is that the Christian does not have the right of ownership to his body. It has been said that there are two demonstrations of ownership, occupancy and purchase.² Paul has just proven that God occupies the believer, now he shows that God has also purchased the believer. The word translated "bought" in verse 20 comes from ἀγοράζω meaning "to buy as property."³ Paul is

¹George Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, "ναός," A Lexicon Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 457.

²S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "1 Corinthians," The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, ed. by Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 606.

³Arndt and Gingrich, p. 12.

giving the picture of a man buying a slave so that he might own him. All that is involved for the slave is a change of ownership from one master to another. Since God has paid the price for the Christian's ownership, the Christian is not to serve his old master. The Christian is to serve God, his new owner. The person who thinks that he can do anything that he pleases once he has been freed from the bondage of sin and death is badly mistaken. Man is set free so that he might be able to serve God. "Believers may not live as they please. They must abstain from unholiness and give themselves to the service of God."¹

¹Grosheide, Corinthians, p. 152.

CHAPTER II

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AS TAUGHT IN

GALATIANS 5:13-16

Setting

Paul's opponents at the Galatian churches were of a different background than those of Corinth. One difference was the fact that they were not all members of the same church. This is the only letter written by Paul addressed to a group of churches. There are two main theories identifying the location of these churches. The oldest theory, North-Galatian Theory, uses the term Galatia in its ethnographic sense for those churches in the northern part of the Roman province of Galatia. This was the area of Asia Minor first settled by the Gauls. According to this theory, these churches were established on Paul's second missionary journey with the writing of this letter coming after the Jerusalem conference.¹

The second and more recent theory is the South-Galatian Theory. This view was first promoted by the

¹J. B. Lightfoot, The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1951), p. 20.

work done by Ramsay, and since that time has gained many supporters.¹

According to the account of Paul's travels found in the book of Acts, this is the view which best fits the cities visited. The churches addressed were in the southern part of the province of Galatia. These churches were established on the first missionary journey, and this letter was probably written before the Jerusalem conference. The churches of this area were made up of mostly Gentiles with a small nucleus of Jewish converts. The Jewish converts were the cause of the problem that prompted the letter. At Corinth the people were abusing their liberty. The Galatians were being urged to go to the other extreme and adopt the rules and regulations of Judaism, especially the rite of circumcision. This was promoted by the Jewish nucleus who were Jews of the "sharp Pharisaic type unclouded or unrelieved by any haze of Essene Mysticism."² They were therefore very legalistic.

The struggle that was to erupt many times during the years of the church had its beginning in the Galatian

¹Homer A. Kent, Jr., The Freedom of God's Sons: Studies in Galatians (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1976), p. 22; James Montgomery Boice, "Galatians," Vol. X, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. by Frank E. Gaebeline (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 417; W. M. Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1951), p. 38.

²Lightfoot, Galatians, p. 27.

area. The question causing the problem was the relationship of the believer to the law of Moses and to Judaism as a system.¹ The book of Galatians is Paul's first written work addressing this problem. As in 1 Corinthians, he maintains that the believer is free, but that he must use his freedom wisely.

It appears that Paul is answering several charges that were being directed against him. His accusers must have said that: (1) He was not a true apostle; (2) His gospel was not the true gospel; (3) His gospel would lead to immoral living.² It is the last charge that Paul is answering in Galatians 5:13-16. Paul's critics were correct in assuming that freedom leads to immoral living, that is if it is not regulated. Given in this passage is Paul's definition of freedom and a principle of regulation which when applied to freedom produces a believer who is living in harmony with God's Word without the aid of external restraints. Love is the restraining force that guards freedom from becoming a license to satisfy selfish desires or an opportunity for the free man to be enslaved to a new master. This is the key to understanding Paul's concept of freedom.

¹Boice, Galatians, p. 410.

²Ibid., p. 411.

Paul's Concept of Freedom

Throughout the Greek world freedom was mainly a political concept dealing with the relationship of a slave to his master.¹ As long as one was a slave, he could not determine his own destiny. He could make few basic decisions concerning his life, but once he was granted his freedom, he was free to determine the course his life would take. Freedom in this context was determined by whether a person was a slave or a master. Later the political concept of freedom turned into a philosophical concept.² At this point, man is more concerned about theoretical freedom; man making choices according to his own nature apart from the rules of any governing society. Paul's concept of freedom fits more closely with the earlier Greek concept. He constantly uses the illustration of the slave-master relationship. In this passage, he does not give a precise definition of freedom, but rather explains what it is not, then what it is.

To show that in his mind, freedom is not a philosophical concept whereby the individual is free to make choices dictated only by his own nature, Paul writes, "Do

¹Heinrich Schlier, "ἐλεύθερος," Vol. II, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 488.

²Ibid., p. 493.

not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh" (Gal. 5:13). As in 1 Corinthians, Paul makes an absolute statement for freedom, then limits it with two basic principles. Negatively, freedom is not a basis for self-serving. Positively, freedom is continual service to others through love and the working of the Holy Spirit.

Negative Principle

To understand the first limiting principle, an understanding of the phrase "opportunity for the flesh" is necessary. The word ἀφορμήν translated "opportunity" originally had the meaning of "the starting point of an military expedition."¹ The word is also used in 2 Corinthians 11:12 where it clearly has the sense of "opportunity." Freedom is not to be used by anyone as the starting point or used as the basis for any activity considered fleshly.

Paul's concept of flesh was somewhat different than that of the Greeks or Romans. When he uses the word σάρξ as a metonymy, he is not talking about man as a "corporeal organism with its passions and appetites, but of his whole nature ethically viewed as under the dominion of sin--sense and selfishness."² Burton describes the word as "things

¹Arndt and Gingrich, p. 127.

²John Eadie, A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1869), p. 401.

pertaining to the secular."¹ Dr. Kent states that flesh refers to "all that man is apart from God."² Combining these into one common thought, it can be said that anything a man does without reference to God is fleshly. Paul is emphatic in asserting that freedom does not give the Christian license to live in a natural way.

Positive Principle

Paul states the positive aspect of freedom in these words, "but through love serve one another." As in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul's teaching of freedom is paradoxical. Freedom and slavery do not normally go together, and yet that is what he is saying. δουλεύετε, the word translated "serve," comes from δουλεύω meaning "to be subject to someone."³ Paul often makes reference to the fact that he was freed from the slavery of the Jewish law so that he might be free to serve Christ as a slave (Rom. 1:1). This concept is applied to all believers in 1 Corinthians 6:20 where he teaches that all Christians were bought by God for the purpose of being His servants. In Galatians 5:13, Paul is

¹Ernest De Witt Burton, The Epistle to the Galatians, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1977), p. 492.

²Kent, Galatians, p. 154.

³Arndt and Gingrich, p. 204.

saying that Christians serve God when they serve each other as slaves.

The Enabling Power

Love

Basically man does not have the power within himself to exercise his freedom wisely. The Christian, if left to himself, will use his freedom to satisfy his own desires at the expense of the needs of others. God never asks His people to do anything that they are not able to accomplish without providing the enabling power. Paul gives two sources of power for the Christian: love and the Holy Spirit. The first force working within the Christian, enabling him to be what God wants him to be, is love. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ controls us . . ." Christ's love for the Christian and the Christian's love for Christ is so great that it manifests itself in service to others. No longer is being a slave something to be dreaded. Now the Christian is free to serve others voluntarily. His only compulsion is that of love.¹

Verse 14 gives the reason why love is important. Paul writes, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

¹R. A. Cole, The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. by R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958), p. 155.

Paul introduces the sentence with γάρ to indicate that he is now giving the reason love is necessary. In this case, γάρ might be better translated "because." Some members of the Galatian churches were seriously considering becoming Jewish proselytes. This would necessitate their keeping the laws of Judaism. Paul is saying, "If you really want to keep the laws of God, here is how to do it." Herein is another paradox in the passage. Paul's purpose for writing the book is to discourage the Galatians from becoming Judaizers bound by the law of Moses. Now he is telling them how to keep the law. By referring to the law and its fulfillment, Paul is acknowledging that the law is important to the believer. Believers are still responsible before God to live a holy life, but for them the demands of the law have been met. He is no longer a slave to law. He is free to obey fully the law as God intended it to be obeyed.

Meaning of ὁ πᾶς νόμος

To clearly understand the passage, it is necessary to understand Paul's use of law in this passage. Many interpretations have been offered for this phrase such as: (1) Christian law; (2) All the divinely revealed laws; (3) Moral law; (4) Second table of the decalogue.¹ The

¹Henry Alford, "Galatians," Vol. III, The Greek New Testament (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), p. 85.

differences in interpretation arise because Paul does not always use νόμος in the same manner. Also as proven earlier, πᾶς is not always an absolute. The context will offer some help in determining which of the uses of "law" best fits this passage. Paul is writing to a group of people who were about to place themselves under the Jewish religious system. This system not only had the Torah, it also had many laws derived from custom. Whether the people in the Galatian churches considered the law as just those laws contained in the Torah or included the more numerous laws of custom is not certain. Judging from the background of the Judaizers, they probably understood the law to mean the Jewish religion because by this time the law and its observance were the central point of Jewish piety.¹

Paul basically used νόμος in two ways: (1) To refer to Divine law as a legalistic system; (2) To refer to Divine law as interpreted by God.² Up to this point in the letter, Paul has been using νόμος as a reference to a legalistic system. He is urging the Galatians not to become slaves to a religious system. His argument is that if they intend to justify themselves before God by such a system, then Christ's work on the cross was useless. In this argument, when he uses νόμος, it is in terms of the people's definition.

¹Arndt and Gingrich, p. 544.

²Burton, Galatians, p. 459.

A shift of reference is apparent in verse 14. No longer is Paul talking about "law" from man's view. Now he is looking at it from God's view. It seems that he is mainly referring to the Mosaic law as found in the Old Testament because he uses a quote from Leviticus 19:18. This verse was also used by Christ to summarize the laws of Moses in Matthew 22:39. This fits the Jewish theology of that day which taught that the summation of the Mosaic law was found in Leviticus 19:18.¹

The use of the article with νόμος may indicate that Paul was thinking only about the Old Testament law. At least this was a common means used to make such a distinction. When the article was not used, the word was usually viewed qualitatively.²

It has also been suggested that the placing of the article before πᾶς indicates that Paul had in mind the total law of God, not just some part of it.³ The Galatians would then understand that if Paul were correct, they would never have to be concerned about not being good enough in relation to the standard of the law.

¹Cole, Galatians, p. 156.

²Burton, Galatians, p. 459.

³Blass and Debrunner, p. 144.

The Meaning of πεπλήρωται

Paul's statement concerning the law must be understood in relation to the meaning of πεπλήρωται. The word can either be translated "obeyed fully" or "completed." The latter has the sense of summation. Although completed is a common interpretation of the word, it is never used by Paul or any other New Testament writer in this sense. In fact, in Romans 13:8,9, Paul uses two different words to convey the two ideas, πληρόω for fulfilling and ἀνακεφαλαιόω for summation.¹ If he is careful to make such a distinction in the Romans passage, it is logical to assume that if he wanted to say "summed up," he would have used ἀνακεφαλαιόω.

The Galatians were interested in placing themselves under Judaism which would require the individual to keep every law for justification. Believers, on the other hand, can fulfill the whole law by loving God and their neighbors. The passage is stressing the keeping of all the law rather than one law being the summation of the law of the Old Testament.

The perfect tense of the verb indicates that the action was completed at some point in the past and the results continue until the present. Christ kept the law for the believer, thus releasing him from its penalty. The

¹Burton, Galatians, p. 295.

believer's only responsibility is to love God, which is demonstrated by his love for others.¹ For the Christian there is a higher law far superior to the law promoted by the Judaizers. The Christian, because of his love for God and his neighbor, will not take advantage of his freedom.

Guiding of the Holy Spirit

Christians not only have the principle of love working within them to guard their freedom; they also have the Holy Spirit to guide them. Paul cites an illustration of what can happen if freedom is not controlled. He uses a metaphor of the biting of snakes and the eating of wild animals to illustrate the behavior of some human beings. It is not certain whether Paul is implying that the animalistic behavior is already in progress in the Galatian churches, or if he is telling them what will happen if they do not control their freedom. Εἰ with the indicative is the normal way of indicating a first class condition which places an emphasis upon the reality of the assumption. With conditional sentences of this class, the premise is assumed to be true. This phrase can also be translated "if therefore" to give the results of what has just been said.²

¹John Calvin, Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, trans. by John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprinted 1948), p. 160.

²Blass and Debrunner, p. 189.

Either interpretation would fit the context, but judging from the nature of the problem being addressed, it seems better to understand the phrase to say, "If you keep on fighting."¹

The two words that Paul uses to describe the fighting show something of the intensity of the trouble caused by the Judaizers. *ἀσυνω* literally means "a snake bit," and is used figuratively to convey something as serious.² *κατεσθῆω* is used figuratively for "to tear to pieces."³ It describes animals as they are eating other flesh. Such behavior in believers is the result of freedom not exercised with love and guided by the Holy Spirit. Paul gives the end result of such activity in the word *ἀναλίσκω* which means "to destroy by fire." The result of which is nothing.⁴ Freedom was not given for such ends. According to Paul, the Christian is free so that he might be all that God wants him to be. A person serving his neighbors, not destroying them.

Paul's answer to the Galatians' manner of living is found in verse 16 where he writes, "But I say, walk in

¹Cole, Galatians, p. 157.

²Arndt and Gingrich, p. 169.

³Arndt and Gingrich, p. 423.

⁴Cole, Galatians, p. 158.

the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." Paul's use of λέγω δέ makes the statement emphatic. He has just reviewed the situation as it existed in the Galatian churches; now he is giving the antidote. For Paul, freedom was not a theoretical concept allowing men to be governed by their natural desires. Freedom, according to Paul, is a practical concept whereby the believer is free so that God can work through him. Allowing the Spirit to guide is the answer to the problems caused by a misuse of freedom.

Πνεύματι has several uses in the New Testament. It can be used for: (1) wind; (2) breath; (3) spirit of man; (4) Holy Spirit. When it is used as the "spirit of man," it means that part of man that lives, feels, wills, and perceives.¹ In this passage there is a difference of opinion whether Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit or the spirit of man.

Lenski argues that Paul is referring to the spirit of man so as to contrast it to the flesh of man. Because of the lack of the article for πνεύματι, this is a possible interpretation. Usually when πνεύματι is used with a passive verb, then it becomes an instrument of agency

¹Burton, Galatians, p. 490.

referring to the Holy Spirit.¹ This is the case for the reference to πνεύματι in verse 18. Since both words refer to the same subject, it can be said that verse 16 also is speaking of the Holy Spirit.

Another argument against translating πνεύματι "spirit of man" is that the spirit of man is part of what is called the flesh of man. Paul gives a list of sins of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. Some such as jealousy manifest themselves in bodily action, but basically they are sins dealing with the inner man. Paul does not separate the spirit of man from his body. When a man sins, he sins in totality, body and spirit.

The real contrast of the passage is between the flesh and the regenerated spirit of man which is controlled by the Holy Spirit.² Clearly, Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit and how important it is for the Christian to allow Him to guide in his life.

Paul pictures this relationship with the Holy Spirit as a walk together. He uses the word περιπατεῖτε, a word often used by him to refer to a moral walk of life. Literally the word means "to walk around" and is used as such in 1 Peter 5:8. When it is used figuratively, it is either

¹H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (Toronto: The Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 91.

²Kent, Galatians, p. 156.

used with a preposition, as a comparison, or with the dative.¹ In this verse, it is used with the dative πνεύματι. Freedom for the Christian is the opportunity to live his life as a walk with the Lord. The person who has this close personal relationship with God through His Spirit will not allow his freedom to become a license to follow his natural desires.

Paul is emphatic about the results that will be obtained by walking with the Spirit. If the Spirit is guiding, "you will not (οὐ μή) perform the desires of the flesh." The double negative serves to make the negation more emphatic. If τελέσητε is future as interpreted by some commentators, then this becomes the most definite form of future negation.² There is no way for the Christian who is walking by the Spirit to abuse his freedom.

¹Arndt and Gingrich, p. 655.

²Blass and Debrunner, p. 185.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Two questions must be considered concerning Paul's teaching of Christian liberty before an accurate conclusion can be reached. First, did Paul intend his readers to understand "All things are lawful" and "You were called to freedom brothers" as literal statements? If they are not literal, then they are some form of hyperbole. Secondly, was Paul consistent in his teaching of liberty? Until these questions are answered, it is impossible to understand Paul's principle of Christian liberty.

Literal or Hyperbole

Many feel that since hyperbole is "exaggeration for effect" that there is no place for it in the Scriptures. This is a false conclusion because there are many instances of hyperbole, John 21:25 being a good example. Few people believe that it would literally be impossible to write enough books to cover everything that Jesus taught. Hyperbole is a common way to express large numbers and common knowledge. Whether the statements are accepted as some form of hyperbole or not, it must be admitted that Paul qualified them so that they cannot stand alone.

Are Paul's Teachings Consistent?

How can everything be lawful if some things are virtuous and some are prohibited? Within the same context, Paul gives lists of things that may not be done, along with bold statements of Christian liberty. As mentioned before, both passages dealt with in this paper are in a sense paradoxical, but if understood in light of Paul's thinking, are reconcilable. As Calvin wrote,

Liberty and its use are two different things. Liberty lies in the conscience and looks to God. Its use lies in the externals and deals not with God only but with men.¹

Paul taught that before God the Christian was truly free, but in his relationships with others, choices must be made which involve restraint.

The law of liberty does not involve freedom from restraint. But it shifts the source of restraint, so that it is no longer applied forcibly from without, but flows freely from within.²

In respect to his total teaching, Paul was always consistent whether writing to the libertines at Corinth or the Judaizers in the Galatian churches. The message was always, "All things are lawful," but in the presence of others, this freedom consists in specific choices.³ The lists of virtues

¹Calvin, 1 Corinthians, p. 100.

²Robert F. Campbell, Freedom and Restraint (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1930), p. 181.

³Ellul, The Ethics of Freedom, p. 219.

were given by Paul as examples to the believers of proper conduct. This gives the basis upon which to make the choices.

Summary of Paul's Teaching of Liberty

Paul's teaching of Christian liberty is rooted in the statement "all things are lawful" for the Christian which are not expressly forbidden by God, and fornication is expressly forbidden. Within this area of freedom, the believer must make choices to insure that his actions are beneficial to himself and others. Actions which result in control of the believer must be avoided. In exercising his freedom, the believer must remember that he was bought by God to be His servant. He is free only to serve his new master.

Freedom without restraint can become a license to satisfy self. To insure that this does not happen, God has given the Holy Spirit to guide the believer so that he might serve his neighbor and God through love. Freedom must have purpose, for the Christian the purpose of freedom is to love and glorify God which involves making choices that are in accord with His will.

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