

INTRODUCTION¹

How do you ‘do ministry’? What’s your approach? Such questions raise a basic issue which you ought to be addressing during these days of seminary training. There are powerful forces presently at work in our convention, and nation, which would pressure you into a certain mold. Your ministry should be ‘successful’, put you in the spotlight regularly. If you want to get ahead, you have to dress and act a certain way, carefully develop certain ministerial tones and mannerisms, travel in the right circles etc.

What does all that have to do with Independence Day which we celebrate today? I suspect a great deal. Especially in light of our text for today. Turn with me to Gal. 5:1. I want to read verses one, thirteen and twenty five as the text for the message today. [Read these verses].

Hans Dieter Betz is right in his assessment that these three verses represent the core thought of Paul in 5:1-6:10, the parenetical section of this letter.² The central theme is ‘liberty’— a relevant topic to a message on July 4. The background is simple. The various Christian communities in the Roman province of Galatia were being pressured by some Jewish Christian leaders to accept the demands of Jewish legalism taught in the synagogue as a necessary prerequisite to being a Christian. Paul wrote the letter called Galatians as a substitute for a personal visit in order to prevent these, his own converts on the first missionary journey,³ from yielding to such demands.

This so-called practical section of the letter, 5:1-6:10, constitutes a vital part of the argumentation Paul used to persuade his Galatian readers to stand firm in the apostolic preaching of the gospel. These verses do not constitute a departure from that appeal to his readers in the slightest. Instead, they round out the arguments set forth in the so-called ‘doctrinal’ section of 1:6-4:31.⁴ Only in the imagination of some moderns does such a dichotomy exist between the ‘doctrinal’ and the ‘practical.’ Such never existed in the minds of ancient writers, including the apostle Paul. In the ancient world, ‘right thinking’ was essential to ‘right behaving.’ The two go together in an inseparable bond.

In this section, 5:1-6:10, Paul builds his appeal to the Galatians around the idea of ‘liberty’.⁵ His arguments here represent an application of the position set forth in the preceding passage, the infamous Hagar/Sarah allegory in 4:21-31.⁶ The issue is well defined in the first verse, which is then repeated and extended in verse thirteen, and reaches its climax in verse twenty five. It is the well known ‘indicative/ imperative’ of salvation.⁷ Note: first, a basic fact of divine truth is stated: “For freedom Christ has set you free” (v. 1a); “To freedom you have been called” [v. 13a]; “since we have life by the Spirit” (v. 25a). Then the imperatives, the ethical obligations, of that truth follow: “Stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (v. 1b); “Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, through love be serving one another” (v. 13b); “Let us also keep in step with the Spirit” (v. 25b). Each stanza carries the idea of liberty forward to new application.

Paul, to be sure, comes at this with the Christian life generally in mind. I want to narrow the focus this morning to one important aspect of your Christian life: your life-style in ministry. How are you going to do ministry? What approach will you take?

From this text in Galatians three emphases stand out which address this concern. They are the three ‘imperatives’ of our text:

- Stand your ground in freedom.*** v. 1
- Get your freedom focused correctly.*** v. 13
- Submit to freedom’s power, the Holy Spirit.*** v. 25

Let’s take a look at them.

BODY

I. Stand your ground in freedom. 5:1 (1-12)

“For freedom⁸ Christ has set us free.” What’s Paul talking about? In the context of 4:21-31⁹ freedom is not just freedom from bondage to sin and death,¹⁰ it is most importantly emancipation from a legalistic system of religion. Believers are the true children of Sarah, the free woman (4:31).¹¹ The yoke of slavery¹² in this verse is the religion found in the synagogue where the descendants of the slave girl Hagar are to be found. This yoke is a religion characterized by ‘thou shalt nots’, by stifling boundaries imprisoning the spirit seeking the face of almighty God,¹³ by centuries old traditions and religious structures which have long since lost any connection to biblical truth.¹⁴ It is dominated by little men pompously parading their piety and demanding that everyone else confirm to their ‘authoritative’ interpretation of the Bible.¹⁵

The Judaizers in Galatia have made powerful appeals to these mostly Gentile Christians: We represent the truth. This Paul is a corruptor of the gospel of Jesus. You can see that no contradiction lies between the Christian gospel and the divinely revealed Torah. The gospel grows out of it; thus to be Christian one must submit to the Torah, that is, you must be circumcised and obey its code. Our fathers rightly interpreted the Law for us; thus you must agree with our interpretation. God is to be found in the synagogue; you as a Christian have to be a part of it.¹⁶

With every ounce of energy available Paul argued against this perversion of the gospel in Galatia. With appeals to Abraham,¹⁷ to the Law itself,¹⁸ to logical reasoning,¹⁹ to the prior conversion experience of the Galatians,²⁰ to his friendship with them as their spiritual father,²¹ Paul passionately admonished them to take their stand firmly in the freedom won for them by Christ. These false teachers, these ‘flesh hackers’ (5:12), must be rejected totally! The Galatians must resist at all costs the lure of Jewish legalism.

Religious legalism still entices victims.²² Like the Venus Flytrap it radiates an appealing fragrance, especially to those beginning their ministry. I have a plaque in my bathroom at home which reads: Old age is when broad minds and narrow waists trade places. I’m not so sure of that any more. At least of the mind part! In my early days as a ministerial student and young pastor, legalism was much more attractive to me than it is today.

You see, legalism offers boundaries. It sees things in black and white; grayish tones don’t exist. It defines things very precisely. You don’t have to struggle with the battered wife who seeks counsel from her pastor about getting a divorce. You don’t have to walk in the shoes of the divorcee who has found a Christian man who wants to love and take care of her in a second marriage. You don’t have to wrestle with the deacon who calls late at night to say that police have arrested his son for peddling dope. “Pastor, help me know what to do with my kid!”

The Bible is clear: truth is truth; wrong is wrong. You thunderously proclaim this clarity on Sunday mornings. “I must be prophetic!” is the motivation, when all the while you come off more like the banty rooster pompously parading around the chicken pen. Or, worse, like the braying of a donkey! Such is the appeal of legalism to the young preacher. The coupling of a quest for authority and power with a high degree of idealism can easily create this monster of legalism.

Paul’s call is this: Don’t be snared by this yoke of slavery! Stand your ground in freedom. Be free to love people in crisis, to walk in their shoes, to cry with them, to stand by them through thick and thin. Walk with the apostle in the path set forth in verses five and six: “For we by the Spirit await the hope of righteousness from faith. Now in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision amounts to anything; instead, faith working through love.” Here is a worthy signet to characterize your ministry. Take it, march

under it!

II. Get your freedom focused correctly. 5:13 (13-24)

How can we successfully resist the lure of legalism? The second expression of the foundational principle in verse thirteen points us to the answer. “To freedom you were called, brothers; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. Instead, through love be serving one another.”

Put simply: Get your freedom in focus. That is, focus it outwardly, not inwardly. The imperative in verse thirteen contrasts two areas of focus: one, inwardly on yourself; the other, outwardly on others. The inward focus is the stance of legalism; the outward, that of freedom.

Here is a basic issue which you need to come to grips with in your seminary days. “Will I be more concerned about my personal ‘success’ in ministry? Or with unselfish ministry to others?” Some basic convictions need to be developed now, for virtually every day of your ministry will confront you with these alternatives and temptations. What kind of church do you want to pastor? Is this church I’m at now just a stepping stone to something better? Can you compassionately minister to hurting folks in the pew? Can your ego successfully handle the platitudes tossed out at the close of the Sunday morning service?

Legalism pulls everything toward the ego. “Look what I’ve done!” Pride and arrogance are unleashed and run rampant. Then all the trappings have to be added: the fancy car, the big parsonage, the flashy clothes. Before long, some gorgeous young lonely wife comes into your study needing reassurance from her pastor and the vicious cycle engulfs you. Why? How?

Paul’s answer in verse thirteen is clear: the flesh! Here is the trap door in legalism which you fell through. The flesh in Paul’s thought is — in the words of the NIV — “the sinful nature” which we inherited from Adam and worsened through our own rebelliousness against God.²³ It is a powerful force in your Christian life; don’t ever forget that! As Paul says in verse seventeen, it can fight the Holy Spirit to a draw. In your own power you don’t have a prayer against it! To not take the flesh seriously can be deadly. The fallen TV evangelists of our day are a vivid reminder of that danger.

The flesh’s partner in this enterprise is legalism. It is no accident that Paul speaks of “the works of the flesh” in verse nineteen; a phrase deliberately playing off the frequently occurring “works of law” (2:16; 3:2, 5, 10). Also notice the declaration of verse eighteen in the context of verses sixteen through twenty-one: “If you are being led by the Spirit, you are not under law.” The lure of legalism masks the danger of the fleshly nature. Like the fabled Trojan Horse, the destructive potential of the flesh is hidden from view. Like the worm with the fish hook inside, it promises one thing and delivers something entirely different.

The alternative, the outward focus comes from freedom. Notice the second imperative in verse thirteen: “Instead, through love be serving one another.” The call of the gospel, the example of our Lord himself, the foundational principle of the Old Testament revelation so frequently cited in the New Testament²⁴ is: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (5:14). Christ’s freedom liberates us from the shackles of fleshly pursuit; we are free to reach beyond our own self-centered tendencies; free to care about, free to reach out to others in ministry and service. Such comes from confidence; the confidence which walking with the Spirit produces (5:16). Instead of the Pandora’s box of ‘fleshly deeds’ wrought in legalism (5:19-21), there is the beautiful potential of the ‘fruits of the Spirit’ described in 5:22-23.

Therefore, get your freedom focused—not inwardly on yourself, not on your own ‘success.’ Rather, get it focused outwardly—on others in loving, caring ministry, on sacrificial giving of self away in the needs of others! Here is the cure to the lure of legalism.

III. *Submit to freedom's power, the Holy Spirit. 5:25 (5:25-6:10)*

This brings us to the final point: submit to freedom's power, the Holy Spirit. The final expression of the core principle of Paul in 5:1-6:10 is expressed most succinctly in verse twenty-five. "Since we live — have spiritual life²⁵ — in the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." The admonition here "πνεύματι καὶ στοιχώμεν" is often translated "let us walk in the Spirit" in an identical way to the similar expression in 5:16, πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε. Although the concepts are closely connected, they are different in their emphasis. The NIV has correctly captured this difference in its rendering of 5:25 as "let us keep in step with the Spirit." The source, I suspect, of J. I. Packer's helpful book on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit entitled *Keep in Step with the Spirit*.²⁶ The 'walking' metaphor in 5:16 stresses the ethical, moral aspect, while the emphasis in 5:25 is upon submission to the control and guiding of the Spirit. It is dynamical. We are moving, in motion, headed toward importance objectives. The background is, in part, that of a group of soldiers marching under the direction of their leader.²⁷ The believer is not only to find his spiritual existence in the work of the Spirit, but also his direction and strength in the Spirit.

Only through the Spirit are there the resources to reach out to others in a positive, constructive ministry. The adequacy of those resources in the Spirit are beautifully described in the 'fruits of the Spirit' passage in 5:22-24. Note the emphasis which falls in 5:26-6:10 on destructive and constructive ways of reaching out to others. The principle of the Spirit's role in 5:25 is foundational to proper relationships to others in ministry. The potential of ministry in the Spirit's power is described in 5:26-6:10. Note where these steps of the Holy Spirit will lead you.

First, the Spirit is the key to avoidance of the fleshy tendency toward arrogant pride which destroys relationships (5:26). Note: failure to submit to the Spirit leaves us sitting ducks for the onslaught of the flesh at two crucial points: an inflated, egotistical pride²⁸ which inevitably leads to broken relationships.²⁹

But in sensitivity to the Spirit we can constructively restore the wayward and bear the burdens of others (6:1-5). The key: ὑμεῖς οἱ πνευματικοὶ (6:1). What is spirituality? In Paul's view, it is submission to the Spirit's leadership.³⁰ Notice also the self examination emphasis in this section in verse four. Submission to the Spirit's leadership is absolutely crucial to getting our perspective toward ourself, as well as toward others, in proper focus.

Notice the emphasis on sharing with leaders in 6:6. The Spirit's guidance enables us to reach out in generosity toward those spiritual leaders who have invested themselves in our life. Here is one of those objectives which the Spirit's steps would lead us toward.

Finally, the steps of the Spirit lead in the direction of spiritual stamina for the long haul of ministry (6:7-10). Oh how much you and I need this: the strength to 'keep on keeping on'. Ministry is demanding, exhausting. The temptation to turn and run is ever present. But the steps of the Spirit lead us toward this objective of perseverance, of faithfulness. The promise of harvest day is sure: "for in due time we shall reap if we do not faint" (6:9). The focus of these steps of the Spirit: "doing good to all, especially to those of the household of faith" (6:10).

CONCLUSION

Here is freedom's offer to you in ministry! It was Paul's passionate appeal to the Galatians. The freedom wrought by Christ makes no hollow, empty promises. It is no Trojan Horse, no tantalizing street walker, no worm with a hook concealed inside! Freedom's promise is real! The offer of meaningful service to others; of a rich, deeply satisfying life in the virtues which far outlast the flashy clothes, big parsonages, and name recognition in the convention. For you see, freedom's ability to produce is predicated upon the power of the Spirit of God. A power readily accessible to you and me through our walk, yea our 'keeping in step' with Him.

To be sure, these steps of the Spirit may take many paths. Through the ghetto, in paths where the hurting and battered live, in the paths of the market place, in strange paths where the language is foreign and the customs are peculiar, in paths a long way from home and family and the familiar. You don't know which paths lie out there in ministry. But, be certain of this one thing: the Spirit of God is out there, beckoning you and me to get in line and start marching. We need to "keep in step with the Spirit."

Oh, my dear friends, on this Independence Day let us hear the apostle to the Gentiles afresh: "For freedom Christ has set us free; therefore, stand your ground and do not again be entangled in a yoke of slavery."

¹Lorin L. Cranford, SWBTS chapel, July 4, 1989. GAL5_1-26.MSS
 TEXT: Gal. 5:1-6:10 (esp. vv. 1,13,25)
 C.I.T.: Paul set forth the nature of Christian liberty to his readers.
 THESIS: We need to live our life in true Christian liberty.
 PURPOSES:
 Total: Abundant Life
 Major: Actional
 Specific: That my hearers will resolve to carry out their ministry in true Christian liberty.
 TITLE: Born Free

²Hans Dieter Betz, Galatians. *A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, in Hermeneia-A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 253-55.

³Acts 13:13-14:20.

⁴Or 3:1-4:31. For especially helpful assessment see Robert G. Hall, "The Rhetorical Outline for Galatians: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987):277-87, esp. 281, 284-86. Hall convincingly argues that Galatians is a type of *deliberative* letter where **exhortatio** plays a vital role as a part of the 'proof' in the argumentation for the proposition of the author.

⁵Carolyn Osiek, *Galatians*, vol. 12 in New Testament Message (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1980), 59-60: "It [freedom] is, I believe, the keynote of Paul's theology of union with Christ, the point around which all else revolves. Because of this fundamental conviction nothing, including the Mosaic Law, can come between Christ and those who believe in him."

Also helpful is Gerhard Ebeling, *The Truth of the Gospel: An Exposition of Galatians*, trans. David Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985),239-45.

⁶Betz, Hermeneia, 254 [fn. 17]: "The restatements refer to 4:31 (conclusion of the *probatio* section) and, by implication, to the entire preceding argument."

⁷Betz, Hermeneia, 254-55; Ronyald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, in The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1988), 217.

⁸See Franz Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief*, vol. 9 in the Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, 4th edition (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1981), 342: "Wie ist der Dativ τῆ ἐλευθερίᾳ zu verstehen? Man kann ihn am besten als »Dativ des Zieles« bezeichnen, wie er häufig bei Verben der Bewegung, auch in übertragenem Sinn, vorkommt: Christi Befeiungstat hatte als Ziel die Freiheit des Menschen."

⁹Especially note the 'hooking' in 4:31, 5:1: . . . τῆς ἐλευθέρας. τῆ ἐλευθερίᾳ . . . Such was commonly used to link concepts together. Such close relationship between 5:1 and 4:21-31 is reflected in the tendency of some to list 5:1 with 4:21-31: e.g., UBS³. Although correctly identifying the common motif

of ἐλευθερία such fails to understand the pivotal role 5:1 plays in 5:2-12.

¹⁰Cf. 2:20; 3:11;6:8.

¹¹See Jürgen Becker, “Die Brief an die Galater,” *Das Neue Testament Deutsch*, vol. 8, 15th rev. ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 59: “Die Freiheit ist für die Leser nach 4,21-31 in doppelter Weise bereits festgelegt: sie korrespondiert der Freiheit Saras und Isaaks. Verheißung und Erbe sind darum ihre Insignien. Aber sie steht zugleich im Gegensatz zu dem, was die Magd Hagar repräsentiert. Es geht also im umfassenden Sinn um die Freiheit als Lebensordnung, um die kompromißlos vollzogene Trennung vom Gesetz und den Weltelementen (vgl. 4,3.9). Freiheit, das ist hier, auf einen Begriff gebracht, das ganze Anliegen der paulinischen theologischen Konzeption.”

¹²Betz, *Hermeneia*, 258: “Both meanings [ζυγῶ δουλείας and ἐνέχεσθε] recall the imagery of cruel subjection of the slaves under their masters, and the heavy burden of suppression which the enslaved have to bear.”

¹³2 Cor. 3:6. ὅς καὶ ικανώσεν ἡμᾶς διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης, οὐ γράμματος ἀλλὰ πνεύματος· τὸ γὰρ γράμμα ἀποκτείνει, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζωοποιεῖ.

¹⁴Mark 7:8-9. ὀφέντες τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ κρατεῖτε τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων. ⁹Καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς, Καλῶς ἀθετεῖτε τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα τὴν παράδοσιν ὑμῶν στήσητε.
Also Gal. 4:9-10.

¹⁵Matt. 6:1-18; Gal. 4:17; 6:12-13.

¹⁶For helpful homiletical treatment of this from Gal. 5 see the sermon of Manfred Mezger, “Reformationsfest,” *Göttinger Predigtmeditationen* 18 (1964):364-69, esp. § 3. Dialog.

¹⁷Gal. 3:6-9.

¹⁸Gal. 3:10-4:7.

¹⁹E.g., Gal. 3:2-5, 15-18; 4:8-11, 16.

²⁰Gal. 3:1-5.

²¹Gal. 4:12-20.

²²J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1984), 112-14: “Legalism means two things: first, supposing that all the law’s requirements can be spelled out in a code of standard practice for all situations, a code which says nothing about the motives, purpose, and spirit of the person acting; second, supposing that formal observance of the code operates in some way as a system of salvation by which we earn our passage to glory or at least gain a degree of divine favor that we would not otherwise enjoy” (112f.).

²³Cf. Rom. 5:12-21. For helpful discussions see Betz, *Hermeneia*, 272-73; Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), s.v. “σάρξ, σαρκικός, σάρκινος” by Eduard Schweizer and Rudolf Meyer. Note especially § II. Paul, 125-38.

²⁴Lev. 19:18; Matt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mk. 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Jas. 2:8.

²⁵Cf. 3:2-3, 14; 4:6, 29. TEV: The Spirit has given us life.” F.F. Bruce: So then, if our principle of life

is in the Spirit, . . .” JBD: “Wenn wir nun durch den Geist das Leben haben, . . .”

²⁶J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1984).

²⁷See Betz, *Hermeneia*, 294 [fn. 13], for details.

²⁸μή γινώμεθα κενόδοξοι.

²⁹ἀλλήλους προκαλούμενοι, ἀλλήλοις φθονοῦντες.

³⁰Only here in Galatians but found in 1 Cor. 2:13, 15; 3:1; 12:1; 14:37. For helpful secondary references see fn. 40 in Betz, *Hermeneia*, 296. See also Daniel C. Arichea, Jr. and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translators Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, in *Helps for Translators* (New York: American Bible Society, 1975), 145: “Those . . . who are spiritual are those whose lives are guided by the Spirit. This is made clear in some translation (e.g. NEB ‘endowed with the Spirit’). . . Those of you who are spiritual may be rendered as ‘those of you whom the Spirit guides,’ or ‘those of you who do what the Spirit of God says you should do.’”