

Week of August 26-Sept 1

## **MAGNA CARTA**

**Scripture Reading:** Read Galatians 5

The Magna Carta, Latin for the Great Charter, stands as one of the greatest documents in western civilization and is recognized as a cornerstone of the idea of the liberty of citizens. Issued in the year 1215 and signed by King John of England, it limited the powers of the monarchy and was a concession by the king to the fundamental principle that even he was not above the law. The charter was an important part of the historical process that led to the rule of constitutional law in the English speaking world and influenced our own Constitution and Bill of Rights.

The book of Galatians has rightly been called the “Magna Carta of Christian liberty.” Martin Luther’s study and lectures on this book (along with Romans) spawned the Protestant Reformation and restored true freedom and spiritual life to a church in need of both in his day.

In this epistle, Paul passionately lays out for the Galatian believers the only true basis for freedom from sin, the curse, the law. salvation by the grace of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Such freedom, according to Paul, does not come and, indeed, cannot come through our own efforts, through the works of the law, or any sacrifice on our part. It only comes because God has shown us mercy through his Son and we receive his gift of life by faith.

The necessity for this message from Paul to the Galatian churches arose because false teachers had wormed their way into the churches and were teaching a “Grace Plus” message. Grace plus keeping the law. Grace plus circumcision. Grace plus special feast days. Grace plus \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank). Paul’s response was that the gospel was never Grace Plus but Grace Period! To add anything to grace as a basis for salvation, according to Paul in the opening verse of this chapter, was to allow oneself to be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Paul would have none of it. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free, he notes, and to fall under the yoke of legalism would be to return to a bondage from which we had been set free.

This freedom, however, was not to be used as a cover-up for evil as some were doing in the Galatian churches. Rather than falling into the trap of legalism, these believers were abusing grace and using it as a license for sin. Paul would have none of that either as he makes clear in verse 13. Paul understood that when we abuse our freedom and indulge the sin nature, we will eventually find ourselves falling right back into the bondage of sin from which Christ set us free. Instead, God has given us freedom to do what we ought to do -- love and serve Him and others. The freedom of the new life, empowered by the Holy Spirit, results in the fruit of the Spirit found in verses 22-23.

**Action Step & Prayer Focus:** Go back through the book of Galatians and see how many times Paul makes a reference to freedom or liberty in his book (Hint: In the New International Version, you will find 10 such references!). Ask the Lord to teach you how to live in true freedom, avoiding both the traps of legalism and license.

**Take-a-way:** ***Our liberty does not come from the Great Charter but from the gift of grace given by the Great King!***