

“Set Free” (Galatians 5:1, 13-25)
Sunday, June 26th, 2016
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. In this Pauline epistle we’ve been studying, we see a powerful and straightforward outline. There are six (6) chapters divided into three (3) sets of two. Here are the three sets of the letter to the Galatians:

Chapters 1-2: Paul’s Qualifications OR The Gospel Defended

Chapters 3-4: Gospel vs. Legalism OR The Gospel Explained

Chapters 5-6: Practical Application OR The Gospel Applied

Today in our Galatians’ series we’ve come to the section on “practical application,” that is the Gospel applied to your daily life as a Christian. The fancy word for this is “sanctification,” and it means the holy or set-apart life produced by God’s grace through the work of the Holy Spirit on the basis of your new life in Christ.

This is a vital teaching, because it is impossible to be a Christian without sanctification. If you are Christian, then you are sanctified; if you are not sanctified, then you are not a Christian. There is no third alternative.

This life springs from your being justified through faith in Christ. When God makes you right in His sight as you hold to all that Jesus has done for you through faith, God’s disposition and attitude towards you *changes*. Why? Because the Father now sees you as He sees His Son Jesus. This is the significance of your being “in Christ.” And when this occurs, God chooses to give you gifts, the most important one being the Holy Spirit.

This is the reason Christian that you are now sanctified and holy in Christ.

I hope that this introduction was clear enough, because this topic on sanctification is much-maligned and frequently morphed into something else entirely. In today’s epistle, however, Saint Paul makes the teaching on your new life even clearer: he presents sanctification as being “set free.”

Galatians 5:1: ***“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery...”***

This is a wonderful opportunity for us. In one sense, sermons on the new life are unnecessary. You really can’t be *taught* the new life. Have you ever noticed how when some people are learning something for the first time, that they just seem to take off? They have this innate ability to learn something new at an exponential rate. When you see them do their thing we say, “They’re a natural!” or simply that they’re “gifted” or perhaps that “they were made to do this!” In this sense, this is true for you when it comes to sanctification. You don’t need to be

taught; this is something that God gives you and it is now innate. The Holy Spirit works in and through you and this is just who you are; this is just what you do!

On the other hand, we *do* need to be taught, but not because the Holy Spirit is any way lacking. The reason, however, is that there is another part of you and me that completely resists the work of the Holy Spirit. Yes, you are a new creation (2nd Cor. 5:17), but you still have that old part of you called “the flesh” or “the sinful nature” which hangs around your necks and *always* resists the work of God in your life. This is the reality in us which we easily underestimate. There is an old saying, “the devil made me do it,” but you don’t need the devil to blame when it comes to that part of you which makes excuses for rebelling against God, His Word, and His will. Through the flesh, you are perpetually tempted to place what you want over and above what God wants. Be careful dear Christian!

If this situation gets out of hand, then you could lose the Holy Spirit (not because the Holy Spirit is fickle, but because you would in effect be turning your back on Him) and you would -- in turn -- lose faith. Note that God is always faithful; He promises to always hold you, but He does not hold you prisoner. While nothing can take you from Him (John 10:28), you have the ability to forsake God (it’s called “falling away,” Mark 8:13). This causes us to be constantly watchful (1st Peter 5:8). We have much to lose if we were to choose to reject faith and live in rebellion while giving up repentance. You’ve probably heard the saying, “We have met the enemy, and he is us.” Don’t underestimate yourself. You are capable of cutting yourself off from God.

It is for this reason that God gave us Galatians and a crystal clear picture of the new life called “sanctification.” God is giving you clarity about this new life through the words “set free.” You are “set free” so that you may know what it feels like – so to speak – to live the new life. Even a person who is “a natural” at something thrives when they have a blueprint and a guide which informs them as to the forms and patterns in and through which their innate gifts may shine.

With this insight, when your flesh tries to interfere, there will be no doubt about what is of God and what constitutes the deception of the sinful nature which always tries to deceive you: “Go ahead and do x (something overtly sinful), and it won’t hurt your faith.” This is a destructive lie. Through Galatians, however, you can know what is of the Spirit and what is of the flesh; that which is consistent with darkness and deception; and that which is consistent with light and freedom.

As we delve into this imagery of the new life, we have to remind ourselves – as Luther does – that there are different kinds of “freedoms” in the Bible. Which one are we speaking of here?

Saint Paul is here speaking of *spiritual freedom*. And this concept is absolutely amazing! It is not about trying to keep the Law, but it is rather about wanting to do what pleases God. Note my wording, it is about WANTING or DESIRING to please God! If someone does something “good,” but they do that “good” thing out of compulsion to keep the law of God, then they are not doing what they are doing in freedom, but they are doing what they are doing under threat of punishment. But if you do what you do out of love and joy, then this a spiritual freedom.

Spiritual freedom is doing good because you WANT to do good; because you WANT to please God; and because you consider what you do to be a privilege, not an obligation. Here, the Christians says, this is not about what I MUST do, but it is about what I GET to do...and what I WANT to do!

Keep in mind that the other part of you, the sinful flesh, resists this freedom, but be encouraged, it does not cancel or eradicate this freedom. This freedom you still have, because you are sanctified!

One of the best illustrations of this kind of freedom that demonstrates that this is NOT about obligation or slavery or a forced attitude and that it is NOT about anything evil or sinful that profane, insult, or hurt the beloved receiving or being affected by the action is to think of the courtship of two people in love: the lover gives to his beloved his full attention and care not because he feels obligated, but because it is a JOY to do so! He totally WANTS to love her this way! There is nothing forced and there is nothing harmful or hurtful...this is spiritual freedom!

So what comes next is that blueprint, pattern, and form I mentioned before. Saint Paul teaches us what fleshly rebellion looks like on the one hand; and then he teaches us what spiritual freedom looks like. He gives in Galatians 5, sixteen snapshots of the life of the flesh which lives against God; and 9 snapshots of the life of the Spirit which loves and honors God. One way leads to hell, the other leads to heaven. Here they are, but first an important qualifier. Saint Paul writes this about the life of the flesh I'm about to present:

Galatians 5:21b: *"I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."*

The verb is present tense and is denoting a constant action. We must understand that Saint Paul is describing persistent, intentional, deliberate, habitual, and again -- constant -- behavior. Scripture is describing a life-style which has rejected faith and turned from Christ. All of this is to say that this section of God's Word is NOT describing sins of weakness! The Christian will certainly be able to relate to these sins, but not in the sense of embracing them, but in the sense of battling them even while knowing that they have committed them.

OK, so what are those sins of the flesh that fight against our freedom in Christ? The catalog is in Galatians 5:19-21: My attempt here is to take the list in Scripture and "translate" these as clearly as possible:

1. Sexual sin
2. Moral uncleanness (impurity)
3. Wild living (throwing off self-control)

4. False worship (idolatry)
5. Witchcraft (appealing to the devil)
6. Hatred (wishing evil on someone else)
7. Discord (pride that destroys peace)
8. Jealousy (of the selfish kind)
9. Outbursts of anger/fits of rage
10. Disputes (very close to #7 above); arrogant arguing
11. Dissentions (divisions flowing from #10)
12. Factions (resulting from #11 again from pride)
13. Envy (very close to #8 above)
14. Drunkenness (self-explanatory)
15. Carousing and orgies (Luther warns: “for the flesh is usually powerfully stimulated after excessive drinking and gluttony (LW 27, p 92).”)
16. And things like these...

Again be clear: God is NOT saying that you will not enter the kingdom of God if you've EVER committed these, or even if you are currently STRUGGLING with any of these...the warning pertains to the person who *claims* to follow Christ and yet who ALSO strives to remain in these as a lifestyle. The Christian cries out in their struggle like Saint Paul did in Romans 7, “Sinful man that I am! Who will save me from this body of death?!” The Christian also knows the answer to this question: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:25a)!” so that the Christian is moved to the free desire to serve Christ *over* sin.

But what do you do when your soul sinks and when you feel convinced that you've allowed your flesh to take over your life? The answer dear Christian is to return to your freedom! Remember the opening words of our epistle: “Christ has set us free.” Christ set you free from the law's condemnation when He lived to keep every law of God you've ever broken. He didn't do it for Himself – He was already perfect and holy – but He did it for you. Christ set you free from sin's devastation when He heaped your sin upon Himself on the cross, being counted among sinners and having God's wrath for sin fall on Him. Christ set you free even from eternal death when death couldn't keep Him down and when you were baptized, you joined Jesus' liberating resurrection over death.

This is your freedom Christian...freedom from the guilt of sin; freedom from the condemnation of the law; and freedom from everlasting death! Christ has set you free. This gift of freedom is yours every day of your life. As you are fed with the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion, Jesus sets you free by giving you His life that is the difference between living in the new life over and above the old life. Yes, you will always fight with the old life, but the old life doesn't own you anymore. The bonds of the old life don't define you, because Jesus took your old life and put it on Himself. He says, "I'm your old life and now you're my new life. Live it out, because I've given it to you out of my eternal love for you dear child." Christ has set you free to know how much you're already loved and this leads me to this wonderful assurance that the Kingdom is truly yours:

Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

Because you know that you are freely loved by Christ, you love; because God rejoices in you since He has found you in His Son, your joy is free; because you have peace with God through Christ, you freely share peace...and patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...these have been freely given to you; and now these you freely give. Yes, you still battle your flesh, but now the new free life is also yours Christian! Be bold and courageous in this freedom, because Jesus allowed Himself to be killed on the cross for you, so kill your flesh with its passions and desires (put to death whatever is contrary to God's Word in your life) so that in this way, your freedom will result in a clear conscience and a confident spirit to celebrate the truth about your new life: On account of Jesus, you are quite simply...set free!