

Live Free or Die!

Scripture Text: Galatians 5:1-15

Introduction

For the past few weeks, we have been looking at passages that deal with love, service and teamwork. Those concepts are important for a church to thrive. We must love one another to faithfully to be Jesus' disciples. We must serve one another and work together as a team to help His Church grow. Today, we look at another passage that combines those aspects of love and service with another — freedom. Freedom is a very important concept for most people. We are born with a desire to be independent and do what we want. So free do we want to be that we resist authority whenever it opposes what we want. Some of us, from a very early age, do exactly what we are told not to do, such as jumping on a desk when the teacher explicitly said to remain in your seat.

Freedom is an important part of American culture. Just this week, we celebrated our independence as a sovereign nation. It was a day commemorated long ago for us to remember and celebrate that long and hard fought battle of mere colonialists fighting for their country to be free and independent states. Freedom is one of those ideals that people are willing to die in order to protect it. In fact, many would rather die than to be subjected to the yoke of tyranny or slavery. In 1775, a thirty-nine year old statesman delivered a speech at St. John's Church in Richmond, Virginia that may very well have changed the course of American history. So moving was this speech that it supposedly persuaded Virginia to deliver troops to the Revolutionary War with this statement:

"Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"

That statement is attributed to Patrick Henry, one of the founding fathers of our great nation. Give me freedom or give me death. Unfortunately, some people are willing to exchange that hard fought freedom we have for the temporary pleasures and comforts that government can provide. They do not realize that doing so puts them in bondage. Sometimes we confuse what freedom means and what really enslaves us. The same is true for our spiritual condition. Many people think sin is liberating and following Christ is restrictive. The problem is that sin appears to be liberating, but in reality it is a prison in which we are sometimes all too content to remain enslaved. We just do not realize how bad sin is. Jesus Christ came to set us free, to throw open the doors of prison, and to rescue us from a terrible fate, and yet we are sometimes content to exchange that freedom for the temporary and enslaving pleasures of sin. We are free in Christ, not to submit to the slavery of sin, but to live righteously in love and service for Him.

Christ Came to Set Us Free

Freedom is not free and must be vigorously defended to keep. For Americans, it took countless lives sacrificed to purchase our freedom to be these United States. It did not

end at Yorktown, either. Each generation of Americans has had men and women who sacrificed their lives for you to be free. It was Ronald Reagan who said the following:

“Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn’t pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same.”

For Christians, we recognize that our spiritual freedom was not free. Though we do not fight for it each generation, Jesus Christ died on the cross of Calvary *once for all* in order to purchase our freedom. That is the meaning of *redemption*. You were redeemed, bought for a price, so that you would be free. Look at the following verse.

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

This means that believers were once not free. Think about that! If you have trusted in Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are now free, which means there was a time when you were not free. There was a time when we were all in bondage to sin. We were all enslaved to the flesh and to the desires of the flesh. Jesus Christ is the King Who came to purchase His people’s freedom and Who set the prisoners free. Everyone who comes to Jesus Christ were once prisoners to sin who have now been set free by Christ. It was for freedom that Jesus Christ set you free and saved you.

What is the nature of this freedom? What does it mean to be free in Christ? The freedom we have in Christ is freedom from the old Jewish covenant of ceremonial laws and regulations. It is freedom from the penalty and guilt of sin. It is freedom to live in a relationship with God with no fear of judgement for sin because your debt has been fully paid. Maybe you have felt that you could never be good enough. Maybe we have felt burdened by your sin, or your past. Maybe you have been damaged by someone else. The good news is that Jesus Christ sets His people free from those burdens. Trust Him.

Live As Free People, Not Prisoners

Of course this raises the question: Are we free to do whatever we want? Freedom has limitations. It is not freedom to do what will restrict another’s freedom. It is not freedom to choose your convenience at the expense of another’s life. You are not free to drive a vehicle at excessive speeds endangering other lives. You are not free to take whatever you want regardless who owns it. Likewise, you do not have the freedom to disobey God’s moral standards, though you may be free in Christ. God’s commands are *safe boundaries* meant for our good. Do not use your freedom to sin and do not reject your freedom to submit to the yoke of the Law. Paul mentioned in this passage to “stand firm” in Christ, however, the Galatians thought they must stand firm in something else.

Galatians 5:5–6 ⁵ *For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.* ⁶ *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*

The Galatians must have thought that requiring circumcision was a good thing, but Paul knew that if they require obedience to any one part of the Mosaic Law to be declared right with God, then they were committed to obeying all of it perfectly. This is something no one can do. Therefore Paul wrote, if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. Apparently, there was at least one person stirring up trouble in the churches of Galatia, who was adding to the Gospel Paul had preached. This person was saying that having faith in Jesus Christ was not enough, but Christians must follow the old covenant of the Law in order to be accepted by God. Twice in this letter Paul wrote that “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything.” What really counts is being a new creation in Jesus Christ where your faith is active with love.

Is this a problem in the church today? Do we add to the Gospel by placing burdens on those who want to follow Christ? Yes! Some Christians believe you must observe many ordinances of the church and be purged of all sins after death in order to enter Heaven. It is like Jesus’ work on the cross was insufficient to pay the debt of sin. There are those who believe that one must speak in tongues in order to be right with God. I wonder what they think of the Holy Spirit’s role to give spiritual gifts as *He chooses*. (1 Corinthians 12:11) Some Christians are legalistic, using God’s Law to judge others, ignoring grace and Christian liberty. When it is your works that make you right with God, rather than your complete trust in the Jesus’ work on the cross, it is adding to the Gospel.

Earlier in this letter Paul mentioned about the necessity of faith, that we are declared right with God not by our works but by our faith in Jesus Christ. But, what if we try to make ourselves right with God by following the Law *after* we have trusted in Jesus? That is what Paul meant in verse one of this passage by “stand fast and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” That is, do not let people confuse you into thinking that any outward act of obedience can be offered to God which will make you right with Him. If you do that, you are trying to rebuild the old covenant that was torn down by the blood of Jesus Christ, and that is sin. Listen to Paul’s word from chapter two of this letter:

Galatians 2:18–19 ¹⁸ *For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.* ¹⁹ *For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.*

If you are free people, then live as freed people. Do not live under the Law and do not live as prisoners to sin. You were freed from that. God wants us to have ultimate joy that is found only in Him and we sometimes refuse that for the temporary pleasures of this world. Do you think the early Americans who had vigorously fought for their independence would have cast that freedom aside to live under the yoke of tyranny again? What sense would that make? Do not miss the joy of God by settling for what the world has to offer. Live as free people and not as prisoners enslaved to sin.

Use Your Freedom to Love and Serve

So, this raises another question: How are we to use our freedom? A strange thing can happen when a person is set free. We can be like the dog who has been caged for so long that when he is set free and sees the whole world in front of him, he does not know

what to do with himself. So, if we should not submit to the yoke of slavery, but rather live as free people, what does that look like? Are we like that dog who has been set free? What are we to do with our freedom? Paul painted a picture of this in verses thirteen and fourteen of this passage.

Galatians 5:13–14 ¹³ *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.* ¹⁴ *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

Far from the Christian life being enslaving, it is the only way to resist the various slaveries offered by the world. But this does not mean that Christians can do whatever they want. Rather, serving and loving others is the route to escaping bondage and ultimately fulfilling the Law. By the work of the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to live a new life characterized by love. Paul wrote in this passage that the whole Law of God is fulfilled in the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself.” This is the reason Paul gave for why we ought to serve one another. It is called the Law of Love — serving one another in love fulfills the Law. Obedience, love and service are not the means of being declared right with God, but they are crucial components of the Christian life.

Freedom and love does not mean the same thing for everyone, though. The world defines love and freedom differently. Last week the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted to recognize same-sex marriage. This week Burger King offered a “Proud Whopper” showing their support for same-sex marriage. We are all created to be free and Christ has set Christians free. We are just not free to sin. Use your freedom in Christ to love one another deeply and serve one another graciously. That is why we have focused on small groups and ministry teams. We believe that through these efforts we will learn to love one another better and serve one another more. In so doing, we will build up God’s church here at Good Hope. Live as free people loving and serving one another.

Conclusion

Are you free today? Are you living as free people? Do you believe Jesus Christ has set you free from sin and death and has given you new life? Then live like it. Do not be burdened by your past? Trust that God has set you free from it. Do not enslave yourself, to the Law and neglect the freedom Christ has given you. When Christ broke the chains of sin and death on your life, He made you free indeed. You do not need to work your way to salvation, indeed you cannot.

Have you decided to follow Jesus but think you are free to live like the world? That is not the nature of Christian freedom. That is living in slavery. Jesus saved you from sin so that you would not sin, but rather live righteously in Him. Do you pervert the grace of God, making it cheap, by living in sin? Repent of that! We are free in Christ, not to submit to sin, but to live righteously in love and service for Him. Only realize you cannot do it alone. You must rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to obey God and to trust Him?

What are you doing with your Christian freedom? Are you loving and serving each other? Is there anyone who you do not love as yourself? What can you do to love each other better? Do you lack the desire to serve your church family? Are you finding ways to use your freedom to serve each other and build up the church, or are you quietly waiting for something to happen? Are you eager to love and work with each other while we have time, or are you just waiting for Jesus to come? There is a lot of work to be done. Let us use our time, energy, gifts, and freedom to love one another and serve one another. Thanks be to God. Amen!