

Galatians 5:1, 13-25  
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
July 10, 2022

How did you celebrate last weekend? Did you go to the parade, watch fireworks, or have a family gathering? Memories linger of good times. The blessings we enjoy as Americans are worth celebrating. We cherish our freedom. Vigilance is needed to maintain it, for it won't continue automatically. There are enough forces out there that readily encroach on freedom.

In the letter to the Galatian believers the apostle Paul wrote of our freedom as Christians, especially freedom from the law as a means of salvation. His readers were in danger of losing it as false teachers troubled them and wanted them to go back to the Old Testament rules. We all face struggles within because of a law mindset that comes naturally. So Paul calls out to us

LIVE IN GOSPEL FREEDOM

- I. As you serve in love
- II. As you fight sin
- III. As you produce fruit

It is only by living in gospel freedom that you can serve in love. Our freedom was won by Jesus. We were in bondage, slavery to sin, that is. Satan was our master. Gone was any free will in matters spiritual, ever since Adam and Eve plunged the world into sin. We were therefore born in sin, inherited from our parents all the way back to them. We desired only more sinning. That mindset infiltrates every moment, all our thought processes, desires, words and actions. We may think that sinning is freedom from the shackles of God's ways, at least that's how the devil portrays it, but he misleads us. We could do only sin. We reject our Maker. Sin ruins earthly relationships as well.

Jesus changed that dire predicament. He cared about us and did not want us lost eternally, which is what sin deserved. He knew we could not throw off sinful ways nor make up for the wrongs committed. So he came to earth to take our place. He kept God's law to perfection as our Substitute. He did what we are unable to do. But he gives us the credit for what he achieved. Then he took our truckload of sin, really more like a fleet of semis, and paid the price for them. He suffered and died on the cross to make the payment. As God the Son his payment was effective and so he removed the burden that would have doomed us. His life and death supplied everything it took. All is now right with God.

The benefits of his work he brought to us personally through the gospel message. It came to us in baptism, and through the Word we learned of Jesus as our Savior. The Holy Spirit produced repentance and faith in our hearts. We thus have freedom: from sin's curse, captivity and control. We are set free from the demands of the law as a way to save us.

We then use that freedom to serve. The freedom our Savior provided has an effect. Some people get the idea that freedom from the law means we can do whatever we want. That's not really freedom nor is it fun. I might illustrate the thought with a story about ice cream. Sin isn't the issue here, unless it was a matter of gluttony. Ice cream is my favorite food. Early in my college years I had opportunity to travel on a choir tour. Seeing some of the wonderful scenes with which our land is blessed, I encouraged my parents to take a vacation that summer and offered to stay home and mind the farm. (We never really took family vacations.) While they were gone I had free rein to indulge my appetite for ice cream. So the first day I ate it for all three meals. The next couple days I omitted the breakfast serving. After that I had enough and , only dipped in the bucket once daily. You can get too much of a good thing. You can get too much sinning also. Despite the devil's claims, sin is not fun. It hurts and harms yourself and others. God knows a thing or two; there is wisdom in his ways.

There is a difference between liberty and license. Indulging the sinful nature is not freedom. When Christ's love touches a heart, there is an effect. We want to do right, in thanks to our Savior. Recall today's Gospel reading, the parable of the Good Samaritan. Do you think the man who was rescued responded by trying to break the donkey's legs after he was transported to a place for help? No way! Neither do we spit in the face of our Savior! Rather, we show appreciation to him. Our treatment of one another is a way to do so. Paul wrote here, "Serve one another in love." "Serve" is an interesting word. It actually means to be a slave. We move out of slavery to Satan into slaving for each other, placing another's needs before our own. "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" In Romans Paul said, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." He calls for a special love, God's kind of love. It is giving, self-sacrificing, unlimited, unconditional. It seeks the best for others, especially for their souls. You might recall the description from 1 Corinthians 13, where several qualities of Christ-like love are mentioned, such as being patient, kind, keeping no record of wrongs, always protecting, hoping and trusting. Find joy and fulfillment as you look to others with that kind of love.

## II.

With a changed heart, one's life also changes. Live in gospel freedom as you fight sin. We are engaged in a battle. Our sinful nature still resides inside us as long as we live on this earth. It doesn't give up but fights tooth and nail, wanting control back. We complain about the allurements to sin that surround us in advertisements to indulge oneself and the lack of morals in a society that has lost its moorings and sees sin as virtue, but we can't point fingers of blame only at others. Evil lurks within; we're filled with it. Christians are not exempt as Paul warned the Galatians about biting and devouring one another. As we stand up for what is right we need to watch out that we do not become guilty of the same loveless behavior that we lament in others.

There is another side in the battle. The Holy Spirit has produced faith in our hearts. The Christian in us is a renewal of the image of God, so we desire to do right. Thus there is a conflict, a war for control, and you are the battleground—or the rope in a tug of war, being pulled one way and another. It can be exhausting and leave you weary. Don't despair as you feel the struggle, for it shows you are on the Lord's side. When there is no struggle it means that Satan has won.

Put simply, sin stinks. We hear the ugly list: "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like." There are sins against the Sixth Commandment, relating to desire and action, by married and single. There were items of false worship. What is translated as "witchcraft" is the origin of our word "pharmacy." Drugs, magic potions and salves were used in some rites. Those magic arts were influenced by the devil. Other matters on the list related to interpersonal problems with anger and jealousy and fighting that comes from selfishness. At the end was a lack of self-control, excess in our habits.

Paul issued a warning: "Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." That causes a big gulp. "Oh, no! I'm doomed." The Apostle was not condemning everyone who ever once lapsed into any of the sins on the list, or even multiples of them. Writing to some others with a similar list of bad actors he said, "That is what some of you were." They were guilty but had turned from those ways. We're not always successful in making a clean break because of that old Adam inside. Paul spoke against those who "live like this," who make those sins their way of life. They're not fighting the temptations, not turning away in repentance and seeking forgiveness and strength from the Savior. So don't give up. Seek God's power.

### III.

He will supply it, with the result that you produce fruit. We hear a much prettier list. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Love is the basic item and source of the rest. We spoke of it before. It is patterned after God's love. His love is intelligent and purposeful. It seeks the best, especially spiritually. We are filled with joy. The Christian heart delights in the gospel so is upbeat and optimistic. We live in peace. It starts with the peace we have with God through the forgiveness of our sins and then is reflected as we interact with others.

We show patience or are longsuffering. We will endure slights and hold firm when provoked. Retaliating does not win friends or converts. Kindness and goodness are similar qualities. We will be helpful and generous as we seek to benefit others. Faithfulness relates to both God and man. We keep our word. We are dependable. "Gentleness" conveys the picture of being mild, not bitter or violent. "Self-control" relates to both habits and emotions. We are not captivated by drug or alcohol use. We do not fly off the handle or make threats.

Paul termed those qualities "the fruit of the Spirit." They are the result of faith. He wasn't drawing up a to-do list for us to draw on our own resources to improve relations with people. Rather, they are produced by God's love for us. It is our nature as Christians. We want to live in those ways. We seek the power of the Spirit, offered to us in God's Word and sacraments. That's why we keep coming to church and why we use the Word individually on our own time. Daily we drown the old Adam with sorrow for the sins it leads us into and God's forgiveness freely offered to us renews our desire to live in his ways, as well as supplying the ability to do so.

That sinful nature was crucified when we were brought to faith. You can't reform the bugger—it has to be killed. It happened, it is a fact, the tense of the verb shows. Daily we keep putting down the evil and building up the Christian within us. "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." The Holy Spirit leads and guides us. I think of a marching band. Keeping in step takes practice. So the marchers in the Spirit's band keep receiving the gospel and keep responding to Christ's love.

Blessings result. The Savior is honored. Others are helped, who may give us an opening to share the saving message with those who do not know it and to build up those who do. Keep doing so as you follow the Savior and live in gospel freedom. Enjoy your freedom, now and eternally!