

June 27 - *For freedom Christ has set us free.*

After a couple of weeks studying Paul's letter to the Galatians, we have gotten to the key verse, the center of the book.

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

It's all about the freedom we have been given by Christ. We must stand against those who would enslave us with rules - things Christians shouldn't do or stuff we have to do to be saved or grow in Christ.

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Speaking of rules and laws, in old days in Texas, the crime of **rustling** - stealing cattle - was punished by hanging. Punishment was swift and certain.

A old *West Texas cattle rancher* discovered a young cowhand had been caught in the act of rustling some of his cattle.

When the young man was dragged before him, he looked down at him and said: "Hang him. Nothing personal - I like you, but we have rules in Texas - if you seal cattle, you get hung.

"Besides, it will teach you a lesson."

Being a Christian is not about laws, but about faith.

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become servants to one another.

Galatians 5:13

Paul's idea of freedom may be different from yours. Christ came to set us free - but not free to do whatever we want, because that would lead us back into slavery to our selfish desires.

Paul distinguishes between freedom to sin and freedom to serve. We are freed from self - from our ego - taking the focus off me. Paul defines this freedom as becoming servants of one another.- an opportunity to turn outward toward others "through love".

What is this freedom we have in Christ?

Because God accepts us and forgives us - freely offers His grace - we don't have to ask if we have done enough to be saved. The good we do - the love we show others - is done freely and not to satisfy some demand.

Our actions are not determined by what sort of response we'll get from others. We have freely received God's grace and love and we freely pass it on.

We are free to look beyond our problems and our needs - freed from selfish preoccupation - so we can see others as Christ does.

Live by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what our sinful human nature wants us to do is the opposite of what the Spirit desires - for these are opposed to each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. 16, 17

Two competing masters: the spirit and the flesh.

The flesh - self-indulgence - will actually prevent you from doing what is best for you - even doing what you want. If we rely solely on our own wisdom, we will make wrong choices. As Christians we still have the capacity to sin, but we have been set free from

sin's power over us. So we don't have to give in to our sinful desires. We've been given the spirit to empower us.

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It's been a hot week –especially hot if you're from up north. When I feel like complaining about the heat, I remind myself of those cold, snowy winters I've escaped. I remember driving on slushy highways. After they put salt on the ice and snow, the roads are a mess.

I remember driving one night when I noticed that I couldn't see clearly. I wondered if my headlights were malfunctioning. Lights on the dash were on – I switched the switch off and on, but no noticeable results.

I pulled over to investigate and found the wet spray from the traffic had caused a slimy film to cover the headlights and prevent the light from coming through. So I took a cloth and cleaned the headlights. The light came streaming out once the blockage was removed.

In our spiritual lives, other things get into our lives and block the light of Christ. The problem is that our human nature – what comes naturally – can become the norm by which we live. Then there is no openness to the Spirit.

Clean off the smudges - get rid of what is hindering the Spirit's work in your life - so the light of Christ can shine through.

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In case we're not clear about what Paul means by “works of the flesh” - or desires of our sinful nature - he writes: *Now the works of the flesh are obvious:* and then lists 15 examples.

His list includes the obvious: *fornication, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, drunkenness, carousing...*

But two thirds of Paul's list of vices have to do with sins of the heart and mind. *hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, quarrels, dissension, factions, envy...* 19-21

What these vices have in common is a power to disrupt relationships - both our personal relations and our fellowship - our common life in the church.

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By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. 22, 23

Fruit – singular. The fruit of the Spirit is one and indivisible.

All are manifestations of love and self control – the virtues that enclose and frame the others. And all of them nurture our personal relationships and enhance our community life.

If you desire to have those qualities of life - like patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness - then you can be sure the Holy spirit is leading you. Your desire for them is evidence of the Spirit's work within you. Being led by the Spirit involves the readiness to hear and obey God's word. Then the words of Christ will be in your mind, the love of Christ in your heart, and the power of Christ's Spirit in your life.

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When we are not motivated by love we become critical of others. We stop looking for the good in them and see only their faults. And that can break a relationship. Have you focused on others short-comings rather than their strengths? Remind yourself of Jesus command to love others as he has loved us.

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The fruit are “descriptive marks of love” - evidence the Spirit’s presence:

Patience – being long suffering toward those whose conduct may be calculated to provoke anger.

Faithfulness – reliability when you are the victim of someone’s unreliability.

Gentleness – avoidance of unnecessary anger and bruskeness.

The promise is that the Spirit will bring specific qualities of love which make for well being and peace.

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The fruit – the result of living by the Spirit - reflect the light and love of Christ into the lives of others.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. 24

The fruit of the Spirit are the result of the Holy Spirit working within us, so that our words and action reflect Christ.

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Like other clergy, sometimes as a pastor I called to the bedside of someone who is dying to offer final prayers, commending them to the Lord. Who am I to shepherd a soul to the edge of the next world?

When I expressed that concern to my wife, she relied, “Of course you’re inadequate to the task. You’re not worthy of that.”

Having deflated me - a major responsibility of a spouse - she added “No one is adequate for that task. That’s okay, though. You’re not doing it. It’s being done through you”

We bring light into this world not as a source, but like a mirror. The light of Christ can flow through us. Just as electricity requires a conduit, so the Spirit moves through ordinary human beings like you and me to touch others at crucial times. You and I can be a blessing to others because it does not depend on us. We’re simply allowing the Holy Spirit to work through us.

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Today Paul reminds us -

**When Jesus invites you to follow Him,
it is an invitation to freedom**

It is the freedom to be different the freedom not to treat others the way they treat you

It is the freedom to live a BETTER WAY

The Spirit of Christ would lead us in a different direction than the way of the world:

Not **dissension** but peace

Not *quarrels*, but patience

Not **strife**, but kindness

Not *jealousy*, but generosity

Not **anger**, but gentleness

Not *self-indulgence*, but self control

Freedom ***FOR*** Christian love and service. Freedom **guided not by rules but by the**
Holy Spirit