

## July 4 Independence Day – Galatians 6

It's the fourth of July when we celebrate the independence of our nation and the freedom we enjoy as Americans. So American flags wave proudly everywhere today.

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A visitor from Holland was chatting with his American friend and jokingly explained the red, white and blue in the Netherlands flag.

“Our flag symbolizes our taxes. We get red when we talk about them, white when we get our tax bill, and blue after we pay them.”

The American replied “That's the same with us, only we see stars too.”

We've been studying Paul's Letter to the Galatians in which Paul celebrates our Christian liberty and the freedom we have in Christ. The key verse is *For freedom Christ has set us free*. We are not burdened by the Old Testament Law of Moses but we are free under the law of Christ, which is love. Not burdened by the law, Paul says, but guided by the Spirit.

But Paul reminded us we are not free to do what ever we want, for that could lead us back into bondage to our sinful desires. We are free from the power of sin, for we have been given the Spirit to guide us and empower us. Yet we still have free will – and our selfish desires do not accord with the Spirit's desires for us, so there's a conflict within us.

Since we're human we're going to slip up and give in. Then we'll need to be called to repentance – to return to the Lord and His way. Now you may think that's a personal matter and no one else's business. Yet in today's reading, Paul reminds us that we have a responsibility for one another. We're members of the body of Christ and we're all in this together. We're supposed to watch out for each another. So Paul writes:

*If your brother or sister is overcome by some sin, you should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path.* Note those words – gently and humbly.

Paul continues *And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.* Don't be arrogant and think that you're stronger than you are.

*If they've done something wrong, restore them gently, all the while taking heed that you're not tempted.*

The most important point is:

*Share each others troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ, which is love.*

Paul doesn't say judge their sin, but rather share their problems. It's so easy to see the faults of others, but be blind to our own. To think, “Thank God I am not like this sinner” Rather, we are to look at them with compassion and see an occasion for service by which the law of love is obeyed. As you share their burdens– like sharing the pain of failure, assuming a portion of the guilt, and helping in the process of making amends - you will really be fulfilling the law of Christ – loving them just the way Jesus loves.

Those of you in AA or NA know exactly what Paul is talking about - the role of a sponsor - a person who stands beside you - to listen and encourage - and sometime admonish and correct - someone who keeps you connected to the fellowship.

Moral perfection was no more a feature in those first churches Paul knew than in our own. Peace and harmony remained goals rather than realities in his Galatian congregations.

So Paul says “Take seriously your life in the Spirit. If you let the Spirit direct you, then you will be led to restore a brother or sister who has fallen away.”

Your job is to help them with their burden and keep them in the fellowship – to help them re-connect if they’ve wandered away. If they’ve been absent, let them know they were missed - that we care. You are called to represent Christ to others.

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Jesus graciously refuses to work alone. He enlists ordinary men and women to work with him. Jesus doesn’t just call people to him; he sends them out to work for him.

When Jesus invites you to follow Him, it’s an invitation to freedom. Look at today’s gospel. [Luke chapter 10] Jesus sends out the 70 to the places he intends to go later. He was setting up a kingdom based on the idea of spiritual participation – so he invokes the participation of his followers in spreading the message.

He gave them some general instructions, but also gave them the freedom to practice responsibility, discretion, and even the right to shake off the dust from their shoes, as a protest against towns that were not open to hearing their message.

But most important, he gave them independence to be freely faithful.

Freedom for the disciples, in that day however, was risky, because His followers were threatened by the Pharisees and Jewish officials. Jesus told them to expect rejection, which is one of the consequences of true freedom. It is an illusion for us to think we’re just going to hit it off with everybody, and expect all people to agree with what we have to offer. He didn’t tell them they had to be successful. He simply gave them the liberty to share their gifts, be loving and peaceful, and use careful discernment when people would not accept their message.

Jesus gave them the freedom, with all its ramifications, to share his message of love. He just asked them to be faithful and loving, peaceful and discerning.

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### ***Why did Jesus do mission this way?***

The 70 weren’t part of the inner group of twelve disciples. They were pretty ordinary followers. Why send them out to tell others about him?

Because His followers’ involvement gave them a richer experience of following Him.

Near the end of the gospel reading, the 70 came back from their mission trip. It says “*the seventy returned with joy.*”

Their joy was a direct result of how the Lord had used them. They experienced things they never could have from the sidelines. Their involvement led to more satisfaction, even excitement.

In first John, the disciple claims that bearing witness to Jesus is what makes his joy complete. (1:4) Putting your faith into action brings joy and satisfaction.

The Lord has rigged the experience of his followers. Christianity offers fuller satisfaction only through fuller participation.

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The message for us today - get involved - because participation leads to satisfaction. As you put your faith in practice, your faith increases; as you act out your commitment to the Lord, you grow closer to the Lord.

If you are responsible for some aspect of the church's work, then it's up to you to keep inviting others to get involved with you. Fuller satisfaction comes through fuller participation. So you are offering an opportunity to get more involved in the congregation's fellowship and thus increase their satisfaction.

And if you're a member who is currently on the sidelines, please take the initiative and look for ways to get involved. Find a way to share your time and talent in service.

The Bible keeps reminding us that we're responsible for one another – concerned for each other's welfare. The image "*body of Christ*" connotes profound mutually where members have the same care for one another. "*If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one is honored, all rejoice together.*"

Gently restore a missing brother or sister, and bear one another's life-burdens. Bear one another's burdens is a metaphor of grace – it highlights the interdependence that makes members of the fellowship instruments of grace to one another.

So if you noticed someone hasn't been in church for a couple of weeks, that concern should prompt you to drop them a note or give them a call. Let them know we care.

Jesus has given us all a mission - to share His love and message – and the freedom to do it your own way. You can truly experience the kingdom of God by expanding the kingdom of God. How?

Take some time to think about all the people you know in natural circles of relationships – work and school, family and friends, neighbors. Do all those people go to church? If you do think of one or more who don't have a church, then begin to pray for them. Ask God to build their spiritual curiosity. And ask Him to give you opportunities in conversations with them.

Be willing to leave your comfort zone – to risk – by be willing to talk about your experience in following Jesus – or your experience in church. At least let them know that you'd be willing to discuss that sort of thing.

If as Jesus says, the harvest is plentiful, our job is to be available to labor – and to be willing to risk our personal comfort on behalf of people who are not connected to the church – and invite them to church.

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When Jesus calls us to follow Him, he brings us into community with other disciples, so that we may practice *living under the rule of God*.

He gives us a different set of rules to live under –

- *the law of Christ* – the law of love.

*Therefore, as we have the opportunity, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the persons closest to us. 6:10*

