

It Was For Freedom

We've celebrated the birth of America and our independence today and we have honored those who served and are serving in our military. We appreciate the sacrifice made by all of these in the armed forces and by their families as well. They serve to protect and maintain the freedoms we enjoy in this country and we are thankful and grateful.

As our minds are focused on political freedom this week, I want us to focus this morning on the spiritual freedom that is ours in Jesus Christ. Turn to the book of Galatians. The Apostle Paul is writing this letter to churches in the Roman Province of Galatia, what is now Turkey. These were Gentiles, pagans who had come to faith in Christ. Remember, the Christian faith is born out of Judaism. Jesus and his disciples were observant Jews. The disciples were surprised when they discovered God's forgiveness and salvation was available to non-Jews. Even Gentiles, Romans, pagans, could repent of their sins, believe upon Jesus and be saved. So Paul preached to these folks and they repented and placed their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord of their lives. After Paul left, some Jewish believers came to them and said, "That's all well and good that you've asked Jesus into your heart and you believe he has forgiven your sins. Paul did well in telling you that, but he didn't tell you everything. You see, if you are truly going to please God and be in right standing with God then you'll need to trust in and obey all the Law of Moses. You will need to convert to Judaism, the men will need to accept the physical rite of circumcision and you will need to obey the 613 laws of Judaism in order to truly be saved and in relationship with God." They were telling them they had to become Jewish in order to be Christian. Paul's response in the form of this letter is to tell them that is not the gospel. Salvation is not based on our ability to perfectly keep all the laws, instead, we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross. He tells them Jesus set them free for the very purpose that they could live free from sin, free from guilt, free from shame. Salvation and right standing with God is not based on our works or effort but upon the saving grace of Jesus. Paul writes in another letter, "**He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy...**" **Titus 3:5** Paul is writing to help them understand, salvation won't come by perfectly keeping those 613 laws of Judaism, it comes through Jesus and trusting in him. Does it mean that once you are saved you can do anything you want and live any way you want? No! He tells us Jesus set us free from sin by his mercy,

by his grace and because of that, we are supposed to live free and not go back to a life of sin. Grace abounds in our life so we can stay free from sin! Look at what Paul says:

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1 The New Testament portrays Jesus as the ultimate liberator. Greater than Moses who liberated the Israelites from Egypt, Jesus has liberated us from sin and the curse of death. It was for freedom that Christ set us free. Jesus set us free for a reason. I want us to get that. Jesus died on the cross for you, taking your place to liberate you and set you free from the judgment that was against you and your sin. He set you free so you could be free, so you could live free, so you would no longer be bound to the devil or to the destructive habits and patterns of sin. Jesus set you free so you would no longer be a slave to sin and to the personal demons that dominated your life. Instead, you could live the life of freedom Jesus has for you! Are you living free? Are you standing in that freedom or have you gone back to sin and the old life?

It was for freedom Jesus set you free. In another of Paul's letters he says **“I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:12.** Jesus laid hold of you and set you free for a reason. He apprehended you and saved you for a divine purpose, so you could live for him and testify of his grace.

I don't know anything about free agency, but if Lebron James is a free agent, someone will apprehend him, will lay hold of him to get him to play for their team. If he is apprehended for another team, whomever that owner is, he is going to expect him to play ball, to give 100%, to live out his purpose which is to score points and play basketball. Well, you've been apprehended. Jesus saved you, he acquired you by his grace. Are you living out the purpose for which Jesus apprehended you? Are you living out your purpose, living free from sin? He saved you so you could be free. Are you living in that freedom or are you going back to slavery to sin? Paul says, **“Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1**

This is the point of this message today. This is what I feel I've been sent to tell you. Jesus set you free from sin, he set you free from a lifestyle of sin, he broke addictions from your life, don't go back into bondage! Stand firm! You've been apprehended, laid hold of by Jesus in order that you can live free from that sin, that old way of life, so don't go back into bondage! He paid for you with his own blood. He acquired you by his grace. Don't go back to sinful practices

and sinful thinking! Stand firm in the freedom Christ purchased for you with his own life and blood.

As I wrote this message, I felt like I was pleading with someone so listen to what I'm saying. Jesus gave his life to set you free. He liberated you from so much. He set you free for a higher purpose, for a greater calling. He intends for you to be more than you were, more than you are. He has set you free from sin and its condemnation and he has made you his own. He has made you his son, his daughter. He intends for you to live like you are a child of God! He intends for you to live free, not free to live any old way you want, but free to live as that new person in Christ. You are free, not to indulge your flesh, but free to truly live and choose to do what's right, free to please God, free to live without the condemnation of sin, free to live with a clear, clean conscience, free to live knowing your sins have been forgiven. Free, knowing that you have unrestricted access to God and his mercy by his grace. Free to live in and walk by the Spirit of the Living God. It was for this kind of freedom Christ set us free. Don't let Satan lure you away from Christ and back into bondage. You've come too far to turn back!

Stand in that freedom. Paul writes, **“For you were called to freedom; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh...” Galatians 5:13** What does he mean by “an opportunity for the flesh?” “Flesh” is referring to our old sinful nature – that part of us that wants to live outside of God's will, to live apart from God's design and God's commands. Jesus set us free and is trusting us to make the right choices, to live according to the desire of the Holy Spirit that is at work in us rather than living according to the desires of our flesh.

Paul mentions specifically some of those desires of the flesh that are at war against God's will. **“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing and things like these, of which I forewarn you...those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21**

Notice the first three have to do with sexuality – immorality, impurity, sensuality. They refer to both actions and thoughts. Immorality is any kind of sexual sin, any sexual activity outside of the God-ordained marriage covenant between a man and a woman. Impurity is referring to impure thoughts; sensuality refers to what the Living Translation calls “eagerness for

lustful pleasure.” How easy it is to be drawn back to sexual immorality, to these desires of the flesh. But Jesus has set us free so we can live free from immorality, even in our thought life.

Paul refers to idolatry and sorcery, spiritism, witchcraft. We’ve been set free from sin and idolatry so we can worship the Living God and not serve any kind of idol or false god, including the idols of sex or money or fame. We can seek help from the Living God and not from demonic sources or spirits.

Paul then mentions areas of the sinful nature that effect relationships. The Living Bible reads, **“...hatred and fighting, jealousy and anger, constant effort to get the best for yourself, complaints and criticism, the feeling that everyone else is wrong except those in your own little group...”** Hello! You were called to freedom, to stand free, to live free, and to never go back to a life or a lifestyle that gives opportunity for these kinds of things to run rampant in your life! It was for freedom Christ set you free, not for factions and fighting. Are you free?

The last things Paul mentions are drunkenness, carousing, a “party spirit”, a lifestyle out of control. He says these things separate you from God and you won’t inherit the kingdom of God. You aren’t going to heaven if you give yourself to this kind of life instead of giving yourself to God. Jesus gave himself for you so you could be free from this kind of life.

Look at verse 13 again. **“For you were called to freedom brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Galatians 5:13-14**

Don’t turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh. Paul uses a word that in other places suggests a base of operations. Don’t allow your freedom to serve as a base of operations from which the devil can gain a stronghold in your life. Don’t give into the desires of the flesh or you’ll find yourself enslaved again. You become a slave of whatever you serve. Don’t go back to sin. Don’t go back to selfishness, living only for yourself, instead, “through love serve one another.” Here is the whole law – Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus didn’t set you free so you could live selfishly. He didn’t set you free so you could serve yourself. He set us free so we could live for Him, so we could serve Him and serve others. He didn’t set us free so we could disregard the law of God but rather that we could fulfill all of God’s law by loving our neighbor and living according to the Spirit of God.

How can we stay free? Paul says, **“But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” Galatians 5:16.** Walk by the Spirit. Paul seems to be referring to the fact that when we repented of our sins and placed our faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit took up residence in our life. We have been made new creations through the work of the Holy Spirit. He is reproducing the life of Christ, the qualities of Christ in us. Paul refers to this as the fruit of the Spirit. **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control.” Galatians 5:22-23**

Walk by the Spirit and you won't surrender to or re-engage in those “desires of the flesh” we mentioned before. But notice, this isn't automatic. You are going to choose whether you will walk by the Spirit or will you choose to give in to the desires of that old nature, that sinful nature. Paul tells us the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. There is a battle going on, but Jesus has set you free from the power of sin to dominate and control your life. He has provided victory for us and He has called us to freedom, to live a life of freedom, but we have to choose to stand firm and not go back into slavery to sin.

Are you living in freedom today? Are there areas of your life where you aren't free? Are there areas where you have started surrendering to old patterns, an old lifestyle, that old sinful nature? What about your thought life? Are you free? Are you in bondage in sexual sin, impure thoughts, bound to pornography, bound again to addictive behavior, to alcohol, drugs, gambling. Are you in bondage in the area of relationships, envious, hyper critical of others, judgmental, refusing to forgive someone for something in the past? Trying to get even. You are driven to behavior you know is not pleasing to God. That's bondage. Bound by jealousy, driven by lustful behavior, driven by anger, rage. **“It was for freedom that Christ has set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”**

If there is any area of your life where you feel like you are in bondage, that you aren't truly living in the freedom that you believe Christ wants for you, I want you to stand and meet me at the altar and we are going to pray and ask God for his grace so we can keep standing firm in the freedom he has secured for us.