

## People Got to Be Free

Galatians 5:1-6

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, July 4, 2021

### Sermon Text, Galatians 5:1-6,

<sup>1</sup> It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

<sup>2</sup> Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. <sup>3</sup> Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. <sup>5</sup> For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

### Sermon, "People Got to Be Free"

About the time I decided what I would preach today, I went on-line and 'googled' the words to a poem which I had remembered from my pre-teen years.

I found that poem, written by the eminent theologian Felix Cavaliere:

*All the world over, so easy to see  
People everywhere just wanna be free  
Listen, please listen, that's the way it should be  
Peace in the valley, people got to be free*

That, of course, is the chorus to the 1968 hit "People Got to Be Free" by the pop/rock band, The Young Rascals.

I remember waiting for that song to come on the radio and turning the volume up when it did. And to my wizened eleven-year-old mind, that song seemed so relevant in the turbulent summer of 1968.

Our country has produced lots of excellent anthems about freedom. I think of the patriotic tunes of George M. Cohan and John Philip Sousa.

I also think of the many Black spirituals our nation has produced, several of which are included in our hymnal, songs such as "Go Down, Moses," "O Mary Don't You Weep," and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"—songs of freedom, all.

One of the arguments which the advocates for slavery used to defend their position was that by bringing the Africans to America, they were in a better position to be taught the Word of God and won to Christ. What they didn't count on was the way in which the black slaves latched on to the story of the Exodus and the miraculous way in which God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt.

For the slaves, the southern slave states became their Egypt; the Ohio River became their Red Sea and the North became their Promised Land.

"Go down, Moses, and deliver your people."

"Go down, Harriet Tubman, and deliver your people."

“Let me get on board that gospel train—that Underground Railroad—and ride it across the Red Sea into the Promised Lands of Illinois and Ohio and Pennsylvania.”

“O freedom! O freedom over me. And before I’ll be a slave, I’d be buried in my grave, and go home to my Lord and be free.”<sup>1</sup>

The great irony of freedom is that there is both the perception of freedom and the reality of freedom. It’s like the third grade teacher who became exasperated with one of her students who refused to be seated. “Sit down!” she’d demand, but to no avail.

Finally, after many attempts, that teacher succeeded in connecting the bottom of the boy to the top of his chair. But as he sat down, he muttered, “I may be sitting down on the outside but I’m standing up on the inside.”

Felix Cavaliere was free when he wrote that song. In fact, he had already put together an impressive string of Top 40 hits and should have been fairly well-off. He wasn’t forced to live in some Soviet gulag like Alexander Solzhenitsyn! I don’t mean to pick on poor old Felix; he was just one of many, many songwriters from the sixties writing songs yearning for freedom when in fact they were free.

On the other hand—and I don’t mean to trivialize their suffering or enslavement—but those slaves of centuries past, who found their own hope for freedom in the scriptures, captured the truth expressed by that insightful third grade boy: “I may be sitting down on the outside but I’m standing up on the inside.”

“I may be in slavery on the outside, but on the inside, I’m free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, I’m free at last!”

There is both the perception of freedom and the reality of freedom—and those are two very different things.

The book of Galatians was written to a group of churches in Asia Minor who thought they were free but who really were in bondage. Their perception of freedom did not match their reality of freedom.

How were the Galatians in bondage?

Throughout the book of Galatians, Paul builds a case for establishing a relationship with God. Paul argues that if we choose the route of the law, then we are really choosing a route that renders us as slaves. And slaves, he argues, are not heirs. Slaves receive no inheritance.

On the other hand, because of the work of Jesus Christ, we have the right to enter into a relationship with God as children with full inheritance rights. And of course, our ultimate inheritance is eternal life in glory with God.

Furthermore, the law represents human effort, which is contrary to faith. True freedom can only be found through God’s efforts in Christ who conquered death for us all.

And God’s efforts predate the law, for Abraham “believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3).

Think of it! Before Abraham knew the name of Jesus, he believed in God and in God’s ability to save us from our sin, and Abraham was saved. Only afterward did he submit himself

---

<sup>1</sup> Felix Cavaliere, “Freedom of the Will,” in *The Best of Felix Cavaliere*, 1970.

to circumcision—not to justify himself (he was already justified!)—but as a sign of his covenant relationship with God.

Because of Christ's redemptive work on Calvary, Paul makes it clear that that old covenant is no longer necessary or relevant. In fact, if we try to follow it by adding anything to it, we are really rendering Christ's redemptive work as null and void.

We have a new covenant, and the sign of our covenant is the bread and the cup of Holy Communion. Properly understood, this table excludes no one. As Paul writes to the Galatians, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" (Galatians 3:28). All have freedom in Christ.

We live in a free country. And this week we will celebrate our freedom for the 245<sup>th</sup> time in our nation's history. But what is the nature of our freedom?

According to our Constitution and its Bill of Rights, we are guaranteed freedom of religion, speech, and press. We have the right to peaceably assembly as well as the right to petition the government.

We are free to keep and bear arms and own private property. We are protected from unreasonable search and seizure.

We have the right to the due processes of the law, including a trial by jury, without the threat of double jeopardy or self-incrimination.

Those are our rights as citizens of the United States of America.

Let me also dare to say that in 2021, we also have the right to receive the Covid-19 vaccination, just as we also have the right to refuse the Covid-19 vaccination. As of Monday, only 46.3 percent of the U.S. population was fully vaccinated, even though anyone age 12 and up may receive it.

I received my first dose on January 11; my second on February 11. Candice and I have a son who is a Doctor of Pharmacy in research at the University of Iowa. He has researched all three vaccines and will tell you that your health is at much greater risk if don't get vaccinated than if you do. And if freedom is an issue for you, I will add that you will have much more freedom with the vaccine than without it.

In 1955, the polio vaccine was made available to Americans and because so many people received polio vaccination, our country has been polio-free since 1979.

The difference is that the polio vaccination was not politicized the way the coronavirus pandemic and vaccine have been. Please: don't let politics dictate your life and bring possible harm to you, your family, your friends, your neighbors, and your church. Let's give Covid-19 the polio treatment it deserves and wipe it from this land: please, get vaccinated.

Let me talk politics for just a moment: If you think the Republicans were behind the pandemic, remember that the vaccine was developed during a Republican administration, so get the vaccine.

If you think the Democrats were behind the pandemic, remember that the vaccine is being distributed during a Democratic administration, so get the vaccine.

If you think Big Pharma or the Chinese or the Trilateral Commission or the military-industrial complex were behind the pandemic, get the vaccine anyway.

If you think the government is going to track you, well, Amazon, Google and Facebook are already doing a much better job of tracking your every movement than the government could ever do.

Do something for yourself, for your family, for your church, for your neighbors, for your country, and for the world and get the vaccine. Make up your mind now so I can get back to the Bill of Rights.

Ironically, our citizenship in the Kingdom of God guarantees none of the freedoms or rights which James Madison enumerated in the Bill of Rights. And when, as citizens of God's Kingdom, those freedoms or rights are denied us, it's called *persecution*. And Jesus promised us that in the world we would face persecution.

Yet Galatians 5:1 tells us to "Stand fast therefore in the freedom wherewith Christ hath made us free."

What freedom?

As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we are guaranteed freedom from the wages of sin which is death—specifically eternal death. And it's a guarantee which begins not in the next life, but in this life.

We are also guaranteed freedom from adding anything to the grace of God which cheapens the grace of God, rendering it null and void. In other words, we are free from legalism.

It's important that we not confuse our political freedom with our spiritual freedom lest we come to assume we are free when we are not. In other words, we might have the freedom of religion without having any religion, that is, without having faith in God.

The disciples were constantly looking to Christ to bring them political freedom from Roman rule. But Christ offered a far greater freedom.

Just as a person can be in bondage on the outside yet know that he or she is free on the inside (as was the case with many of our black slaves), so may we assume that we are free, yet still be in sin. Our perception of freedom may not match our reality.

Make no mistake about it: just because you are an American, that does not guarantee that you are truly free. You may still be in bondage to sin and death.

Knowing our freedom as American is great. But knowing our freedom as followers of Jesus Christ is even greater.