

7/7/2019

“God’s Promise of Freedom: Freedom in Christ”

Scripture: Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Series: Standing on God Promises

Theme: We are set free from the Law of sin and death and called to live by the Holy Spirit.

Let me begin by asking you to think about the first time in your life that you thought about what it would be like to “be free” to live the way you wanted to. What did “freedom” mean to you? Free from what? Free to do what?

Galatians 5:1 (NIV) says . . . *“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.”*

Today we continue with a series of messages about Standing on God’s Promises, focusing on but several of the wonderful promises God has made to His chosen people and to all of humanity.

As we started with “God’s Promise of Freedom” last week, in part because of the celebration of our nation’s freedom this past Thursday, so I just want to follow up with that. Last week I primarily used the gospel reading for the day. So now let’s take a look at the scripture reading from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Galatians.

According to The Wesley Study Bible notes for this passage (Abingdon Press, 2009), “True freedom involves two important precepts for Christians. . .” Let’s take a brief look at them.

† **Love your neighbor as yourself.**

Paul says (Galatians 5:13-15 NRSV) . . .

*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 slaves to one another (serve one another humbly in love - NIV). For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**” If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.*

When writing to the early believers in Galatia, he was primarily writing to those gentiles who had accepted Jesus as their savior. Now there were also some Jewish believers, who insisted that all converts seek justification by keeping the whole Law, including that of male circumcision. Paul, however, who had been raised in and strictly kept such practices, believed that by Jesus' death and resurrection, Christ fulfilled that Law, so that all who believed in Him could be justified by faith, even as Abraham was considered righteous by God through his faith.

Rather than trying to learn, remember and observe all the written laws given through Moses and further exposition of it, true freedom from the law of sin and death comes by faith in Christ and by loving one's neighbor as oneself. Loving one's neighbor as oneself was also commanded by the LORD through Moses to God's people (Leviticus 19:18). And, as you may remember, it was considered by Jesus as the second of the greatest commandments, only after loving the LORD our God "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." (Mark 12:28-31 NRSV)

So, doing to others what you would have them do to you expresses the spirit and intention of "the Law and the Prophets," as Jesus said. (Matthew 7:12)

When it comes to learning what we need to do or not do, how we truly need to live and how we can have the strength to follow Jesus Christ, remember his words of invitation ... (Matthew 11:29) ***"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."***

And as the Wesley Study Bible further says, "love your neighbor as yourself . . . sums up the entire law and is virtually synonymous with 'fulfilling the law of Christ' which Paul refers to later in his letter (6:2).

† Live by the Spirit

Paul goes on to say (16-25). . .

¹⁶ *Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh (sinful nature – NIV).* ¹⁷ *For what the sinful nature desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the sinful nature; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.* ¹⁸ *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.*

¹⁹ *Now the works of the sinful nature are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness,* ²⁰ *idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions,* ²¹ *envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

²² *By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.* ²⁴ *And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh (sinful nature) with its passions and desires.* ²⁵ ***If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.***

So live, go on living, being guided by the Holy Spirit. For “Living by the promptings and power of the Spirit is the key to conquering sinful desires.” (NIV Study Bible, 1985) “To ‘Live by the Spirit,’ the Wesley Study Bible says, “is the opposite of fulfilling the desires of the ‘flesh’ (sinful nature) characterized by the old self committing vices that prevent one from inheriting God’s kingdom.”

So, how do we know if we are living by the Spirit, by the Holy Spirit’s guidance? As Jesus said and you’ve likely heard me say before, it is by its fruit that a tree is known. And so, it is by our “fruit”, our thoughts and actions that we and others know how and by whom we are led. If we live in God’s Spirit, we will bear the fruit of the Spirit as named by Paul. And it is in living by the Spirit of God that we will live by the law of God’s loving grace.

As I was using some time this past Friday to be in prayer and support for some of the ministries I support beyond the church, I read the June newsletter of the American Bible Society. One article focused on their ministry to U.S. military veterans. In part it read, “They paid a price for your freedoms! Your support honors them with a Bible and hope.” Many have come back with physical and emotional injuries that threaten their very lives. “Veterans can face extreme stress upon their return to civilian life and remain at high risk of suicide and post-traumatic stress disorder. Many have lost limbs or been left bedridden. Others were ravaged by fear of death, guilt, grief, loss of hope, and doubt. Others came home to families torn apart. God’s Word can give them hope and healing.”

Friends, we know this is so true. And yet, there is hope! There is hope in God’s Word. There is hope in the ultimate freedom of all – the freedom God has given us in and through Jesus Christ! And these blessings are for all who struggle or wrestle with thoughts, feelings and actions which would harm themselves or others.

Perhaps it was just a coincidence, but the newsletter and donation request came with a bookmark (not the coincidence ☺), but which quoted a verse from this passage. From the Good News Translation, it reads, “*As for you, my friends, you were called to be free. But do not let this freedom become an excuse . . . Instead, let love make you serve one another.*” (Galatians 5:13)

Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us join together in loving and serving one another by the Spirit and love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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Questions for Reflection (adpt. from Serendipity Bible, 1983):

When you first moved away from home, what did “freedom” mean to you? Free to do what? Free from what?

How have you seen Christian freedom abused? How is your faith expressed through love? (vs. 6, 13)

What motivated you to live a good life? If we are made alive by the Spirit, why do we still struggle with sin? How do you seek to live or be guided by the Spirit?

What is the biggest change that being a Christian has made in your life? How do you sense God calling you to make further changes to your lifestyle (thoughts and actions)? Which fruit of the Spirit do you already produce? Which do you desire to have or have more?