

True Freedom (Galatians 5)

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.— Galatians 5:1 (NIV)

Sermon/Research Notes

While Independence Day is Friday, we will celebrate freedom today. But this a different kind of freedom. Our freedom through our faith in Jesus.

Based on our texts today, Galatians 5, 2 Corinthians 3, and Isaiah 48:8-13, true freedom can be described as follows: "Freedom from the Bondage of the Law and the Power of Sin, Through Jesus and the Holy Spirit."

- The book of Galatians is presented as a strong warning against a corrupted view of the gospel.
 - The Letter to the Galatians is a strong warning against a corrupted view of the gospel.
 - Paul is writing to the churches of Galatia in order to defend his apostolic authority and argue that justification is by faith alone against some "preachers" who were corrupting the gospel.
 - These preachers were Judaizers, Jewish Christians who believed that certain Jewish rites were still necessary and should be enforced by the church. According to Judaizers, all Gentile Christians should be circumcised. Apparently, Judaizers were also questioning Paul's authority and convincing the Galatians that Paul had removed certain legal requirements in order to make the gospel more appealing to Gentiles
 - Paul adamantly defends his apostolic authority and stresses that justification is by faith alone and not by the works of the law.
- Galatians 5 and Freedom from Legalism:
 - Galatians 5:1 explicitly states, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage".
 - This "yoke of bondage" refers to legalism, the belief that adherence to the Mosaic Law, rituals, traditions, and "that's-how-we-have-done-it-before attitude" is necessary for justification with God.
 - Paul argues that justification comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, "not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).
 - Trying to be justified by these things leads back into slavery.
 - Freedom from this old way was accomplished by Christ, who was made a curse to (1) save us from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13) and (2) break the power of the law in terms of judgment and eternal death.
 - Christians are free from a strict adherence to the Old Testament ritual and purity laws. Adhering to the law in a rigid way is like "slavery".
 - Through Jesus, believers are free from a strict adherence to the Old Testament ritual and purity laws.
 - So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. —Gal. 3:26–28
 - Believers have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.
 - Many things bind us: self-interest, addictions, broken relationships, anger and bitterness, destructive pasts, and debts.
 - Sin captures our minds and hearts.
 - Only a miracle can break those bonds.
 - Jesus is that miracle who breaks these bonds and gives new life.
 - This new life brings freedom to serve God and become the people God wants us to be.
 - Being God's People
 - God's promises made to Abraham were fulfilled with Jesus.
 - Just as Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness (Gal. 3:6), by God's grace, our faith in Jesus is credited to us as righteousness. We are no longer slaves to rituals, laws, and observances.
 - Sometimes, adherence to rituals, laws, and doing good works as our sole purpose in order to attain salvation can be tempting.
 - Our good works are important, not because they earn us salvation, but because they show the work of

the Holy Spirit in our lives.

- By the grace of God, Jesus died so that all who believe in Him are saved.
 - To say that faith needs to be accompanied by strict adherence to the laws and rituals of old way is to return to the yoke of slavery from which Jesus freed us.
 - To suggest one is justified by anything other than faith in Jesus is corrupting the grace of God that is Jesus, His death, and His resurrection.
- Forgiveness:
 - To release, or let go of, seeking revenge against those who have hurt us.
 - Jesus forgave His torturers (Luke 23:34).
 - God commands us to forgive because He has forgiven us (Matthew 6:14–15; Ephesians 4:32).
 - God will take care of justice (Romans 12:19).
- Galatians 5 and Living by the Spirit and Love:
 - True freedom is not a license to indulge the "flesh" (sinful nature).
 - Instead, believers are called to use their liberty not as an opportunity to undertake sinful activities, but through love to serve one another.
 - The law is fulfilled in the command to "love your neighbor as yourself".
 - The "fruit of the Spirit" (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) is evidence of the Spirit-led life, and "against such things there is no law".
 - True Christian liberty involves thinking of others and acting to please them, which the law commands.
 - Triumph over wrong desires comes not by being under the law, but by allowing God's gracious Spirit to direct our lives.
 - Life in Christ depends on and flows from the Spirit.
 - The Spirit shapes the life of a Christian, and the fruit of the Spirit is good and beneficial.
 - The fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
 - These qualities are produced by "keeping in step with" the Holy Spirit.
 - These fruits of the Spirit are attitudes and behavior that are pleasing to God and other people.
 - When believers walk by the Holy Spirit, these traits become evident in their lives.
- Proverbs 10:9 says, "Whoever walks in integrity walks securely." What does it mean to have integrity?
 - One way to think of it is in terms of a building.
 - When a building is said to have structural integrity, it means that it can bear up under the load. It doesn't collapse from its own weight or the weight of what it is meant to carry.
 - Constructing a building with structural integrity takes careful planning, a good deal of time, hard work from many people, and, of course, lots of patience when some things don't go as planned.
 - Integrity in our lives takes these things too. Consider the fruits of the Spirit.
 - None of these qualities happen overnight, and certainly not through our own effort alone.
 - When we put our faith in Jesus as our Lord, His Holy Spirit resides within us to guide and empower us (see John 14).
 - In this sense, the Spirit grows — or builds — these fruits in our lives.
 - Like a structure being built with integrity, character comes through reliance on the Spirit in both painful times and joyous times; through failures and Plan B's; over stretches of time and with diligent work.
 - As Paul also says, "We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Rom. 5:3–4).
- As citizens of God's kingdom (Phil. 3:20), we are subject to the law of the King.
 - James reminds us that breaking even one part of the law, such as showing favoritism to those with wealth, makes us lawbreakers (see Matt. 5:19).
 - Obedience to the God's "royal law" is achieved with the power of the Spirit, which gives freedom.
- 2 Corinthians 3 and the Ministry of the Spirit:
 - 2 Corinthians contrasts the ministry of the law, which "condemns" (ultimately ending in death) with the ministry of the Spirit, which gives life and brings righteousness.
 - The letter (law) brings death, but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6).

- Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. There is freedom!
- Believers, with unveiled faces, reflect the glory of the Lord and are transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
 - This transformation is not a physical transfiguring.
 - We will absorb His kindness, faithfulness, love, tolerance, mercy, love, etc.
 - It is a transformation, nonetheless.
- This freedom is in contrast to the slavish bondage and the hampering veil of the old way.
- Helpful definitions, according to Paul:
 - Covenant: God has made a new agreement with us, declaring that we are His people. The old covenant was written on tablets of stone; the new one is written by the Spirit on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33, 34; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6-18).
 - Law: It shows us our sin, but can't save us (Romans 3:20, 27, 28; Galatians 3:1-14, 21, 22).
 - Lordship of Christ: Jesus is Lord of all (Romans 10:9-17; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 1:15-20).
 - Mercy: God doesn't give us the punishment we deserve (Romans 9:18).
 - Grace: God freely gives us the divine favor we don't deserve (Ephesians 2:1-10).
 - Holy Spirit: We are to live by the power of God's Spirit (Romans 8:1-17; Galatians 5:16-26; 2 Corinthians 5:5).
 - "In Christ": Paul's description of our relationship to Jesus. He uses it over 80 times.
 - Justification: God declares us righteous in His sight. We are justified by grace through faith (Romans 3:28-30; 5:1, 2).
 - Righteousness: We can't make ourselves good enough to be accepted by God; we must be given His righteousness (Romans 3:21-26; 8:3, 4; Philippians 3:9; Galatians 5:5, 6).
 - Sanctification: The Holy Spirit works within us to make us more like Christ (Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 3:13).
 - Sin: The universal human condition; no one can claim perfection (Romans 3:9-23).
 - Trinity: Paul refers to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Though the word Trinity isn't in the Bible, Paul's words helped confirm this Christian doctrine (2 Corinthians 13:14; Galatians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; Romans 8:9-11).
 - Messiah: Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies (Galatians 4:4, 5).
- The Power of the Word
 - Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. —James 1:21
 - Sin is pervasive and insidious; before we know it, we are slaves to our sin.
 - Sin becomes second nature.
 - BUT, the word of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, transforms us and frees us from the slavery of sin.
 - Like any "spring-cleaning project," the transformation is a process that can be challenging.
 - But the word of God can re-program our minds so we can be made new to "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:23-24).
 - Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him. —James 1:12
 - Wisdom It is often defined as "the ability to make godly choices."
 - In the Bible, wisdom is tightly connected to creation.
 - The way God created the universe has a direct effect on the way nature and society behave.
 - In an important sense, wisdom is the ability to see life and the world the way God sees them.
 - Wisdom is practical knowledge that allows people to live fully.
- The New Covenant and Transformation:
 - In 2 Corinthians 3, God has made a new agreement with believers, declaring that they are His people.
 - The old covenant was written on tablets of stone; the new one is written by the Spirit on our hearts.
 - If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation.
 - God challenges His people to be transformed into the image of His Son.

- The Holy Spirit works within us to help us follow Jesus more completely — that's where freedom begins!
- Isaiah 48:8-13 and God's Sovereign Plan:
 - While this passage doesn't explicitly discuss freedom in the same way as Galatians and 2 Corinthians, it highlights God's sovereignty and His act of revealing His plans beforehand.
 - God states, "I have declared to you new things from this time, even hidden things, and you did not know them. They are created now and not from the beginning; and before today you have not heard them, lest you should say, 'Indeed I knew them'" (Isaiah 48:6-7, not read today).
 - This emphasizes that salvation and the way of true freedom through Christ are part of God's new work, not something humanity could have achieved or fully understood on their own.
 - This could imply that true freedom is also found in aligning oneself with God's sovereign will and purposes, as those who are called by God will come to Him, and His calling achieves His purpose.
 - God's grace has broken through human hopelessness, opening the door for new beginnings walking alongside God.
 - God's power and His purpose remain steadfast: "For My name's sake I will defer My anger, and for My praise I will restrain it from you, so that I do not cut you off".
 - This divine action of restraint and purpose ultimately makes the way for the freedom offered in Christ.

Synthesis of True Freedom:

- True freedom is not merely the absence of external constraints but a fundamental liberation brought about by Jesus and experienced through the Holy Spirit. It involves:
 - Being set free from the guilt and condemnation of sin and the law through justification by faith in Christ. This is a work of God's grace.
 - No longer being enslaved to legalistic systems of earning God's favor.
 - Being empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a new life characterized by love, service, and the fruit of the Spirit.
 - This is not a license for the flesh but a freedom to live righteously.
 - Having the glory of God revealed and being transformed into His image through the Spirit, resulting in increasing freedom.
 - Recognizing that this freedom is part of God's sovereign plan revealed in Christ.
 - True freedom comes through faith in Jesus and involves being liberated from the bondage of sin and the legalistic requirements of the old way.
 - This freedom is characterized by the indwelling Holy Spirit who empowers believers to live lives of righteousness, displaying the fruit of the Spirit and experiencing ongoing transformation into the spiritual image of Jesus, potentially within the context of God's sovereign plan.
 - We are saved (justified) by grace through faith alone. Doing good works or obedience to the law will not save us.
 - We are free in Jesus the Christ.
 - We are free from a strict adherence to the Old Testament ritual and purity laws. Adhering to the law in such a rigid way is the same as "slavery".
 - Good fruit flows from the Spirit. We do good things because God saved us by His grace; we don't do good things in order to achieve salvation.
- In essence, true freedom is a spiritual reality where believers are freed from the bondage of sin and the law to willingly and joyfully serve God and others in love, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit.
 - It's a freedom for something – for love and for God – not just a freedom from something.
