

Freedom

Galatians 5:1-26

Key Verse: 5:1

“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.”

In the 1995 movie *Braveheart*, England is in control of the entire British Isle. Their rule is cruel as they are trying to breed out the Scots from Scotland. The Scots feel the pressure of the English rule and are forbidden to even have weapons. After his wife was killed, William Wallace, played by Mel Gibson, proceeds to lead a group of men in fighting the English. Because of everything being stirred up, the Scottish army is standing on a battlefield facing the vastly superior English. The intent was not to fight, but for the Scottish nobles to come to a compromise, where they would enlarge their estates and get more land. At least, that was the plan until Wallace and his men showed up. When Wallace arrives, he talks to the Scots gathered there, saying, “I AM William Wallace. And I see a whole army of my countrymen here in defiance of tyranny. You have come to fight as free men, and free men you are. What would you do with that freedom? Will you fight?” One soldier responds, “Fight? Against that? No, we will run; and we will live.” Wallace says in return, “Aye, fight and you may die. Run and you'll live -- at least a while. And dying in your beds many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that for one chance, just one chance to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they'll never take our freedom!” Wallace called the Scots standing on the battlefield “free men”, and he asked them what were they going to do with that freedom. That is an interesting question. If you were set free, what would you do with that freedom? Why were you set free? Last week, the last verse of the passage said, “Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.” (4:31) Jesus died so that we could be children of the free woman, children of the promise, children of God. Why were you set free and what will you do with your freedom?

The passage begins, “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.” (1) Well, then, that seems to answer the question. “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” The purpose that we were set free was that we could be free. Is it just me, or does it seem that that statement seems redundant and circular? It almost sounds like saying that the sky is blue because it is blue in color. It's very true, but not that helpful. Fortunately, verse 1 really isn't like that. At first glance, it looks very redundant, but the second sentence in verse 1 gives us some light, “Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” When you put the two sentences together, you get, “You were set free to be free, not to go back into slavery.” And that is important to know. When you get a taste of freedom, your response should not be running back into slavery.

In the book of Exodus, Moses led the Israelites to freedom from slavery to the Egyptians, but when times got tough, the Israelites longed for the days that they were slaves. They romanticized their lives in Egypt, forgetting how hard it was there. In the same way, we were slaves to the law and slaves to our sins. Jesus set us free from those things when he died on the cross, but how often do we long for the days when we were able to freely sin or felt the

comfort of control of the law? We think things like, “It was so much fun when I got drunk all the time. Those were the best days.” Or, “I was a much better man when I when I held my tongue. People liked me better when I was nice.” When we reminisce about our lives before Jesus, it is so easy for us to forget the pain that came along with those sins and we were set free from that pain, because we were set free from our sins.

Back in *Braveheart*, when William Wallace said, “What would you do with that freedom? Will you fight?”, one soldier said, “Fight? Against that? No, we will run; and we will live.” That soldier was afraid of the English army. There were a lot more English than Scots, and they were also better trained. It was easy for the Scots to take their freedom and run for their lives, but if they ran, they would have forfeited their freedom and returned to slavery under the English. Like the Scots, we have a choice of what to do with the freedom that Jesus has given us. Do we use our freedom to continue in freedom or do we use our freedom to return to slavery? The Bible says that we were set free so that we can choose to be free everyday and not choose to return to a life of slavery. In fact, if we go back to slavery, then Jesus’ death on the cross was worthless to us. Paul wrote, “Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” (2-4) If you remember, the Judaizers were trying to get the Gentile Christians to follow Jewish law as a Christian, particularly to become circumcised. However, Paul says that if anyone were to get circumcised then Christ is useless to them, because they are trying to follow the law. If they try to follow the law, then they have to keep the whole law. We’ve heard that before in chapter 3. By trying to follow the law, you are in effect saying that Jesus did not do enough for our salvation. It no longer becomes about what Jesus has done, but about what we have to do. If it is about what we have to do, then we have to keep that up all the time in every way. We are bound to do that and that makes us slaves to the law.

Strangely enough, we can actually go the other way too. We can think, “If circumcision is bad, then we are better off being uncircumcised.” But the problem with this is that this line of thought, too, puts the burden on us and not on Jesus and his grace. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” (6) Our actions are actually meaningless and what does matter is accepting what Jesus has done and continues to do in our lives. Then, the change that happens is faith expressing itself through love. It does not matter what we do, if what we do is not through a grace-changed heart filled with the love of Jesus. Anyone who says anything different is not speaking the truth. Anyone who adds to the simple gospel pulls you away from Jesus.

Paul tells the Galatians, “You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. ‘A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.’ I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty.” (7-10) The Galatians were set free by the gospel, but a small contingent was

trying to bind them to regulations. These regulations would lead them back to the law. They said that the Galatians needed to be circumcised in order to receive the full blessing from God. A little snip of the flesh, and you would be a better man. Honestly, if a little snip makes someone a better man, then a big snip must make you the best man possible. Paul echoes this thought, "As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" (12) Paul just wishes that the Judaizers would cut it all off. This is akin to saying to someone who believed that full immersion was the only way to be baptized, "If being dunked for a little bit is good, then why don't you just stay underwater forever, that should be the best." Or it is like someone who holds fasting in high regard to never eat because it must be better. Or to people who think becoming a better person happens through reading the Bible to cut off all ties to people and do nothing but read the Bible, don't even eat, just read the Bible, then you will be perfect. If we carry everything that we think that makes us a good person out to its fullest conclusion, then honestly we end up in a bad position, but if we carry out the gospel to its fullest conclusion, then we find perfection. The gospel leads to Jesus and if we follow the gospel fully, then we find Jesus fully and that just changes us more than any behavior modification.

We were set free to seek God and love each other. "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (13-14) We weren't set free to do whatever we want. Our American sense of freedom is we have the freedom to pursue our own desires, but honestly some of our desires don't lead to freedom. As I mentioned earlier, many of our desires would lead us back into slavery. We become slaves of something else. Everything we pursue has consequences, and many of those consequences just lead us into slavery. You can sleep around, but God created sex to help create a bond between husband and wife. Sleeping around takes what was supposed to be a beautiful bond and rips it out of our souls, leaving a husk. You can set up countless rules to follow, but you and no one else will be able to keep them and then, you'll get upset when others don't keep the rule and when you don't keep the rules. Then you will be miserable because no one likes you.

Two weeks ago, we heard that we had been given the right, the freedom to become children of God and inherit the Spirit of God. The desires of our flesh contradict the desires of God's Spirit. "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want." (17) They are in conflict with each other. You cannot serve God and serve yourself. If you continue on in the passage you can see why, "The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (19-23) Take a look at those two lists. The first list is what happens when we act as slaves of sin, seeking to satisfy our desires. It is a list of everything wrong with humanity, the worst of our characters. The second list is what happens

when we are free. It is a list of everything that we wish to have, what we desire to be like. When you seek your own ideas and desires, you will follow the first list. When you follow the path of grace and gospel, you will follow the second list. That is the consequence of our actions.

Now, I want to clarify that the second list is not a checklist of what we have to do. It is human tendency to look at the second list and see what we have and see what we need. I used to do this all the time, but if you do that, then you are just trying to seek righteousness on your own again. I looked at the list and thought, "I'm kind sometimes; I'm good and faithful, but I'm not so good in self-control. I need to work on that." I thought that I had to work on the things, but the Bible calls them the fruit of the Spirit. Think about that phrase "fruit of the Spirit". It is not fruit that you can produce. It is fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit of God produces it in you. If you try to produce it, you will end up on the first list. That is what the Judaizers were trying to do. They were trying to obtain the Spirit's fruit all by themselves. You see, a person can do the things that are referred to as fruit of the Spirit. We can be kind, we can be faithful, and we can be gentle and have self-control. We can even have all of them at once, but when we use our own efforts to perform, we can do them for a while, but after a while, the shell of our goodness cracks revealing the vile fruit below. Look at the most pious people you know. Most of the time, the most pious among us are also the most hateful and envious people around. Outwardly, they are pristine, but inwardly they are disgusting. Real patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and the rest are found through the Spirit because they are God's Spirit. They are the very attributes of God.

That's looking at the Spirit part, but look again. The passage says "fruit of the Spirit". It is a list of a variety of virtues that the Spirit produces in us, but the Bible calls it fruit, not fruits. It is a singular word. When the Spirit produces these virtues in us, they come together as one entity, fruit. You might argue that fruit is plural, but how do we use it? If we are referring to one apple, we call it a piece of fruit and two apples we call two pieces of fruit. We don't say two fruits. Fruit is singular and in this passage says, "the fruit of the Spirit is...". It uses a singular verb when referring to fruit. In that case, the list of virtues that the Spirit produces in us is one conglomeration that cannot be broken apart. We get it as a whole piece. When we start to grow in Christ, God's Spirit works in us to produce in us this list: love, joy, peace, forbearance (or patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. It is when we start to see all these things in our lives that we can see God working in our lives, because it is fruit. It just like knowing that an apple tree is healthy when you see apples all over the tree and they are ripening. If there is only one or two pieces of fruit, the tree is not healthy, but when it has all the fruit, then you know the tree is healthy. Also diseased fruit with holes and that is shriveled doesn't make for a healthy tree. For us to be healthy, we must be producing all the fruit of the Spirit, not just one or two. For us to be healthy we must seek God and his Spirit, and then we will get the fruit that shows us to be healthy.

Thank God that we have the freedom to seek him and his Spirit. Christ died so that we could have a relationship with God. Christ died so that we could inherit his Spirit. Through

Jesus' death and resurrection the law no longer binds us, but we are freed by his grace. The last part of verse 23 says, "Against such things there is no law." When we live by the Spirit, we gain the fruit of the Spirit, and when we gain the fruit of the Spirit, we fulfill the law, because we don't go against the law. "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (14) Look at the two lists. The first list contains every sort of selfish act that have. When we are more concerned about ourselves, it will lead to broken relationships with others. People will bite and devour one another. When we come to God in his Spirit and by his grace, what is produced in us is not something that destroys others and ourselves, but rather builds up others and ourselves. We become free to not destroy lives.

All of this freedom comes entirely from grace. It was by God's grace that we were saved. It is by grace that he continues to work in our lives. It is by grace that we are able to come to God. It is by grace that we can love others. It is by grace that we are free. If we try to obtain anything by our own effort, we nullify God's grace in our lives. We tell him that his grace is not enough, and we will end up on the first list, but when our heart's desire is to seek God, we cannot pervert that in our sins. If we seek the fruit of the Spirit, we can pervert that noble cause by obtaining that fruit through our sins. But when we seek God, we can't pervert it. We can't sinfully seek God as a person. It is the only path that leads to freedom because, when we come to Jesus and accept what he has done and is doing, then our desires are crucified, and the things that are trying to bind us are killed.

I was a momma's boy. I was very kind and courteous and quiet. I never spoke up and rarely got out of line. Some people called me the perfect boy, but think those people were just mothers. I was very virtuous, but it was all through external behavior modification. Inside I was very proud, but I could never see it. I was bound to my behavior and I hated it. As I got older, I felt like I was never allowed to get angry or excited. Other people were allowed to, but I was not. It wasn't that there was a rule that was enforced on me, but because I was the nice boy, I wasn't allowed. It tore me up, and every so often I would explode in a rage, screaming at the top of my lungs. Even when I first came to Christ, I had this façade. My faithfulness was not real faithfulness. My self-control was not real self-control. It could all be shattered in an instant. But when I finally experienced Jesus' grace, the façade dropped entirely and I was actually set free. The fake virtues that I had were finally shown to be what they are. I'm not the nice little boy anymore; in fact, I am very coarse and rude much of the time. I am free to know that I am saved by grace and not my effort. I am free because I can see God working in me. I am free to repent and free to build others up. It's a slow growing process sometimes, but it is very liberating.

By grace, Christ has set you free. What will you do with your freedom? Will you seek to fulfill your own desires, whether they are disgusting or pious? Will you tear people down in order to build yourself up? Or will you use your freedom to come to God everyday and crucify your desires, so that the Spirit would come on you? Will you love others and build them up? That's the freedom that God has given us. We are not slaves to our sins anymore. They do not bind us anymore. We are free from their tyranny. It can be a slow process at times and look

like nothing is ever happening, but we were promised God's Spirit so that we could be like God in his kingdom. What will you do?