

09.01.24

Galatians

Chapter 5 - Christ Sets Free

The Reason for Freedom (vs.13-15)

Galatians 5:13-15: 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.” But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Galatians is a freeing book, isn't it? The Spirit of God wants us to know that the whole reason that Christ came was to set us free. As Christ proclaims in John 8, His truth, the truth of Christ, the genuineness of Christ, the sincerity of Christ, the Spirit of truth that Christ has will set you free.

Galatians 5 starts off this way, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free.” It almost sounds redundant, doesn't it? Christ came to free you from so many things. When you consider in the context of Galatians, the regiment, the ritual, the religion of man that will so easily depress and oppress us; trying to win man's acceptance and the intimidating requirements that oftentimes man has and thrusts upon us. It's just so oppressive, isn't it? Jesus speaks to that in Matthew 23 as He talks to the Pharisees. He says, “You tie these heavy loads on people and not with one finger are you willing to help lift it off the backs.” There are people around us that have these expectations and there are people around us that are oppressive and there are people that around us that give us a sense of conditional acceptance. If in fact we will perform a certain way or we'll do certain things, they'll like us. If not, they don't like us anymore, but how wonderful the Gospel of Jesus Christ, “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) It's the Gospel of Christ; it's that unconditional love of His love for us. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Why would He do that for me? Why would He remove my sins as far as the

east is from the west, to remember them no more? I mean, literally a new beginning every day in Christ. If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive you and He'll cleanse you from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) Think about that. I mean, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things are passed away. Behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The love of God, that's freeing, and when you consider so many things that we are free from in the sense of guilt. I mean Romans 8:1, what does it say? There's therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus, right? And you think about regret? Well, if God can cause all things to work together for good, then even my mistakes He can turn into good. As Joseph will tell his brothers, you meant this for evil, but God has turned it into good. That God can literally transform even our past into being something good and all of our mistakes and all of our wrongdoings and God can turn something good out of that. Absolutely. I mean, if you consider that that Paul was, as he calls himself the "chief of sinners," we began to realize that he was very hostile towards the things of God,

very hostile towards other believers, and yet it was that hostility that God turned around and caused him to be, I think, more empathetic towards those that were hurting and made him more willing to suffer willingly in prison for them knowing that he had imprisoned so many people. God was going to use it in his ministry and was going to use it in such a way that would cause him to be a greater minister where he was. God will take those things in your life and transform them into that way. God will literally free us from anger and anxiety.

Have you ever read the book of James? One of the statements that's made in James 1 is that "the anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God." Well, as you go through the book of James, you begin to realize a lot of the things that make us angry is we feel like we're being mistreated. We feel like we're being treated wrongly. James goes, "Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials." Now, who is he talking to? Well, it starts off, "You who are dispersed abroad," which means that they've been pushed out of home and country, and they've had to suffer loss and so many

things. They're living in areas where people are treating them wrong. In fact, you get to James 5 and some of them are actually withholding pay. They've been working all week, and they've been withholding their pay. James says, "Don't complain. God's got you. Now the thing that is happening here is that God is strengthening your faith. Believe that. Watch Him take care of you." "So, God is actually doing something good in this miserable moment?" And God says, "Yes, rejoice." And our faith will be the victory in that setting. You're not just believing something that isn't true, you're believing something that is true and God will take care of you. The psalmist says, "I've been young and now I am old. I have yet to see the righteous begging for bread; going hungry. Put the Lord first, seek Him first, and all these things will be taken care of." Is that true? Try it. See what happens. What does He say in Malachi? "Test Me to see if I don't open the windows of heaven." The problem is that we don't step out in that faith. "I've never experienced that," some people say. Well, do it. Try it this week. I tell people, "Give it two weeks. See what happens but go wholeheartedly; do it with all your heart. See if God doesn't become real in

your life.” And He will. You realize that God can take away that anger. God will take away your anxiety. I mean, why in the world would God put a verse in like Philippians 4, that would say, “be anxious for nothing.” Why would He tell you to be anxious for nothing if you literally didn't have something to be anxious about? But no, you don't, do you? There's no reason to be anxious, for God is with you. Even if you were to go through the valley of the shadow of death, you don't have to be afraid. God is with you. I realize that God is working good in my life in those difficult times. I don't have to be anxious. I don't have to be fearful. In fact, as 1 John 4 will say, “Perfect love casts out fear.”

I have found that when I'm focused on myself, I have a lot to be anxious about, but as I begin to think of others, it seems to dissipate. Fear goes away, and God says, “If you'll do what I tell you to do, I'll take care of you so that you can help others.” And that frees us up, but it also gives us a great confidence and a great peace because the Spirit of God now begins to work in us mightily, and

where the Spirit of the Lord is in our lives, according to Acts 4, there is great confidence; great boldness. All of these things are signs of great freedom. God is actually freeing us from anxiety and anger. God is freeing us from guilt and regret. He's freeing us, according to 1 Thessalonians, from hopelessness.

What is the statement there in 1 Thessalonians 4:13? We are not as those who have no hope. Peter will say, "You have a purpose." You know, it's very disconcerting to think, "What am I here for? Why am I here?" You open up the word of God and God goes, "I have something for you to do." And you go, "So, there's a reason why I'm here." And God goes, "Absolutely." In fact, Peter will actually word it this way, "For this purpose you've been called." You say, "Well, tell me, Pastor Gary." No, you just need to read 1 Peter. He begins to tell us all these wonderful things and give us something far greater than we could ever imagine above what we could ask or think. Above all the things that we're freed from, it is corruption. It is the corruptible things of this world. It is the hurt and the pain that comes to this world. It is the sin of my own life that

distorts and degrades my life, and God has freed us from that. Though the world will oftentimes try to drag us back in, and what's interesting is that it will oftentimes come from the pulpit. In certain churches, pastors are proclaiming this kind of falsehood; this thing of “you've got to feed your senses, and by virtue of doing this, you'll be happier.” And that's just a lie.

Let me show you a passage that deals with that. It's found in 2 Peter 2. There were false teachers that were coming into the realm of the church, and if you look in 2 Peter 2:3, you begin to realize that they're using greed to exploit people. That's how it reads, right? It says, “and in their greed they will exploit you with false words...”

What are they saying? How could they be exploiting you? Well, you drop on down to verse 10, “And especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority...”

He's fundamentally saying that in the world, they lie. People lie and they're telling you things that aren't true.

Now, how are they appealing to you? Well, they're appealing to you in the realm of it feels good, or it will make you feel better. So, they'll give you all these kinds of promises that aren't true. For instance, the world promises you a kind of healing through drugs. They're not true. They promise you a sense of freedom from depression. There are drugs out there. I think a lot of people are on them. Have you been driving lately? Ok. So, they have medication for depression. You don't have to take care of the problem of your depression. We've got medication to just knock it out. The only problem with the medication is the more you take it, the more depressed you get. It'll say it on the bottle. Just read the bottle.

“Could cause suicidal thoughts.” What is the world doing? It's lying to you. How? It's telling you that you don't have to get right, you just have to get drugs, and you're thinking, “Well, that appeals to my senses, because who wants to do the right thing? I can continue to do wrong and still continue to feel good.” And it's not true. It's the lie, basically. The world has this phrase that is so erroneously used. It's the phrase of “pro-choice.” Think about that phrase, “pro-choice.” Doesn't that sound so

ingratiating? Doesn't it sound so wonderful? The only problem with pro-choice is it doesn't give the unborn child a choice. It's the very opposite of choice. It gives that child no choice at all, but hey, you know it sounds good because they appeal to your senses because you can live in the debauchery of your life, continue to do the things that you do; if in fact there is an interruption in your desires, then you just kill it. You want to kill it because it's a thing, right, not a person. In their minds and in their hearts, they have these places called "care places." I won't go into all the details of the names, but they have these wonderful care places for older people. One, I don't think they really care about them, but two, they're fleecing them terribly, and they're taking advantage of them, but the world appeals through lies.

So, the passage talks about this freedom that the world proclaims, but it really is slavery to things that will hurt you more and it's very destructive.

(2 Peter 2:12) "But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling

where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed,

(2 Peter 2:13) suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong..."

"You can do the wrong thing and have no consequences." That's not true. I don't care what you take for it. I don't care what you do to try to numb it. I don't care what entertainment you try to feed yourself with to make yourself feel better. You're not going to get rid of it. You will suffer wrong and suffer harm for wages of doing wrong. You can't sow something and think you're going to reap something different. I mean, you put a grain of corn in the ground, you can't expect tomatoes. It's just not going to happen. It's just corn.

The same thing is true in verse 13,

"Suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you,

(2 Peter 2:14) having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children;

(2 Peter 2:15) forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam...”

Who was basically a prophet for hire. You actually know that there are people out there that are getting paid to lie to you. That’s why they're doing it.

“... the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.”

A dumb donkey was smarter than him, according to verse 16.

(2 Peter 2:17) “These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm...”

(2 Peter 2:18) “For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires...”

(2 Peter 2:19) “promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption...”

When Christ came, He said, “I came to set you free.” He came to set us free from these corrupt desires that we

have that are destroying our lives. I mean, I've never found a sin that benefits me. I can list some sins that make me feel good for a moment because Scripture says sin has a passing pleasure, but I've never found a sin that benefits me; that actually brings good into my life and will ultimately lead to better. I've done some experimenting. I'm sure all of you have, but if you just look at the reality of it, there's nothing good. So, that's what Paul says in Romans 6, "By which of these sins have you benefited from?" It's a good question; a legitimate question.

So, we come to Galatians 5, we begin to read within this passage that you and I were called to freedom. Freedom ought always to have a warning label. I remember my uncle had this big pool, and he would he gather us together. He goes, "Ok. You guys are free to have all the fun you want. You just can't dive in the shallow end, and you can't hit each other and push each other off in this area or whatever." In other words, he had rules. His point was, you can be free to enjoy yourself, but there are certain things that you can't do. There should be warning labels in all freedom.

Ecclesiastes puts it this way,

(Ecclesiastes 11:9) “Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.”

So, are you free? Yeah, but you there's a warning label. There are stipulations, there's a clause, there's a condition in everything that declares freedom in our lives, that with freedom, comes the responsibility. When Scripture says that we have freedom, we have the freedom to set other people free, but we don't have the freedom to enslave people. We have the freedom to actually build up, but we don't have the freedom to tear down. God has called us to proclaim the truth, and we have the freedom to proclaim the truth, but we don't have the freedom to lie to people. God is telling us that freedom has a responsibility. In this particular passage, He's actually going to give us a clause; that is to say, a condition. “You

can be free, but here's the clause.” And you begin to realize the necessity of that.

My grandfather, when I was 10 years old, says, “OK. Take the double barrel 12-gauge shotgun.” He says, “Have fun. Go up in the hills and get something, but you can't shoot people.” Then, he went through a list of certain things I could do.

So, the point is that we have freedom, but all these things have stipulations. We come into this passage, and if you pick up with me in verse 13, “you were called to freedom.” That's a great calling, isn't it?

“... brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

That's the clause. Now, it's important to understand specifically what he's saying within the passage, because he begins to deal with that sense of stipulation. There's one thing you can't do. Now the question is, what exactly is he saying? The answer is, well, really in the word “opportunity.” So, if you all have the NAS, that word “opportunity” is really the keyword. It is actually a military

term, strangely enough, because it is dealing with “*aphormē*,” the Greek word that is being used. It's actually dealing with a starting point or the base unit for attack. So, it's a place where you start, and you set up base and now you're getting ready to attack. So, they have specific ground rules or a base or foundation in which you jump off of. His point is, you have freedom, but here's the base camp; the base camp is that you can't do anything in the flesh. That's the base camp.

If you look at the passage, it reads this way,

“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.”

Now, love is really the Spirit of Christ. So, he's saying you're free to do anything you want to in the Spirit of Christ or, as it's often been said in Ephesians, be filled with the Spirit and do anything you want to do but be filled with the Spirit. It's the Spirit of God that needs to be directing you, not your flesh. You go, “Well, why can't I have my flesh?” Because your flesh doesn't want good stuff.

(Galatians 5:19) Now the deeds of the flesh are evident...

Ok. What are they?

“... immorality, impurity, sensuality,

(Galatians 5:20) idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions.”

Are we having fun yet? I mean, are you seeing anything in there,

(Galatians 5:21) “envying, drunkenness, carousing...”

Fun, really? Is that the way the world has fun? Because I can't see any real enjoyment in that. I mean immorality, ok, I get it, but the fact that you don't have any relationship with anybody, how horrible is that? How terrible that is. Idolatry, worshipping something that never can do anything for you? Praying to something that never can help you? How sad that is. How disappointing it is, everything that you do. I mean, it's no wonder people are depressed because they're feeding the flesh. His point is that anything that you do according to the flesh, you're

never going to be free because it's just going to put you in bondage and corruption. You're just going to corrupt more. Is that freedom? I mean, "I'm free to jump in the shallow end of the pool." That's not freedom. That's you breaking your neck. That's all that is. That's the same thing with men going into the flesh. You know, "I'm free to do whatever I want to." What, should you sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. This isn't freedom at all. Freedom is listening to the Spirit of God and doing everything the Spirit of God tells you to do, and you're free to do that to its very end.

There's a passage in 2 Corinthians 10, since we're talking about military terms, you figure that we're in a battle out there. We're in a warfare. In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul begins to describe this warfare, and we're not supposed to be fighting the same way that the world fights because, quite frankly, we're not going to win if we do that. If somebody's angry with you and you fight back with anger, what's going to happen? You're both going to be angry. Who wins? If you're fearful and you come to somebody

else and he gets you fearful, everybody gets afraid, who wins? There's no freedom in fear and anger and guilt and regret. There's no freedom in that.

(2 Corinthians 10:3) “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.”

So, that's just basically taking the flesh out of the picture. In other words, I can't go after the things that I desire.

Basically, what are those desires? “Lust of the eyes.”

“Boy, I really need that.” Why? “Because it just looks really good.” “Lust of the flesh,” the things that appeal to your senses, and it could be anything from immoral relationships to wrong food; hurtful things that may appeal to you. Whether it's drinking too much or whatever, but it's the flesh going, “I've got to have that.”

And if you're going to let that flesh rule you, the only thing your flesh is going to do is constantly put you in prison. So, it's not going to set you free. It's actually antithetical to freedom. “Lust of the eyes,” “lust of the flesh,” Oh, what's that other one? “Boastful pride of life,” right? “If I make myself great, if I proclaim how wonderful I am, I'm going to be very, very happy.” No, I think the big

problem is once you begin to set yourself up, now everybody's expecting you to be that guy. Wow, that's a terrible life to have to live because nobody's that good.

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh,

(2 Corinthians 10:4) for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.”

In other words, we're freeing people; the flesh is not.

(2 Corinthians 10:5) “We are destroying speculations...”

That's human reason and logic. You know how man has all these wonderful ideas about what's going to make you happy? We're destroying those. Are you coming to God? Are you surrendering your life to God? Are you doing what He tells you to do? Because none of those things are going to bring you happiness. We're destroying the reasoning of man, the logic of man. “*Logismos*” is actually where we get the word logic.

“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up...”

Every wall that's put up, every sense of prosperity and dignity that man elevates, we're tearing down because man is trusting in the wrong thing. If you knew that somebody you love was trusting in something that was going to destroy their life, wouldn't you do everything you could to destroy that?

“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”

This is what frees. Jesus says, “If My word will abide in you, the truth of My word will set you free. I'll set you free from these things.” I mean, it fundamentally is the gospel.

If you look with me in Luke 4, you can see that as well, which is really a quotation from Isaiah 61, but Jesus goes into His own hometown, and He begins to proclaim this passage that's out of Isaiah.

(Luke 4:16) “And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.

(Luke 4:17) And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

(Luke 4:18) “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR.

HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES,

AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,

(Luke 4:19) TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.””

That's the gospel. It's Christ setting us free.

One of the greatest things that we can do in our war against evil and the deception, the lies of the world is to proclaim the good news. Remember, according to Romans 12, we fight evil by doing good. You can't do more good than proclaiming the good news. It is the very thing that begins to change the hearts of men. If people will surrender their life to Christ, an amazing thing happens; the Spirit of God's son comes within them.

Now, go back here to Galatians. Let me show you something, because one of the things that Paul's concerned about is that people are trying to do good stuff in their own strength. I mean, that fundamentally is what religion is and what man thinks he can do. You can't do it. So, in a very simple way, let me just say this, stop trying to be good in your own power. You can't do it because your flesh is prone to feeding itself. So, in your own power, that's in your flesh, right? That's you. So, you're going to try to do something good, and then as you start to do something good for somebody, you're going to look around, going, "So, who's patting me on the back?" And you're going to get frustrated. You're going to get mad. Somebody's not going to thank you. They're not going to appreciate you for what you did. They're not going to recognize what a wonderful person you know you are and as they begin to just ignore you, you're just going to start fuming. It's fundamentally the Mary and Martha story, "Tell my sister she needs to help me do nice things for You because You know I'm far more wonderful than my

sister.” Well, did you feel the flesh just coming out of it? Yeah, and that's you doing good. That's you at your peak, and that's why we're so miserable so much of the time, because we're trying to do it in our own power.

(Galatians 5:4) “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

Now, I just want to reemphasize what we already talked about in this. When he's saying that you've been severed from Christ, what he literally is saying is you've been deprived of the force and the power of Christ. What is the force and the power of Christ? It's the love of God. It will actually state it in the passage as he begins to describe what we are empowered by.

(Galatians 5:6) “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.”

The love of Christ that cries out, “Abba! Father!” If the love of Christ is moving in me, energizing me, the power

of Christ in me is moving, I'm doing everything I do because I love God. I'm not doing anything to be seen of men. I don't care if they notice me or not. I'm doing it for Him. It doesn't matter to me. If they never recognize, if I never get thanked, if I never get the recognition, that I perhaps in the flesh might think that I need, it doesn't matter. I'm doing it because I love Him. When you do what you do because you love somebody, you don't need the thanks. Your love for them moves you, constrains you. He's saying within the passage that you've fallen from the favor of God, because anything that you've done, anything that you do that is, "Ok, I've got to do this for God." Come on, really? God's happy about that? God's happy about you being upset about doing something for Him? God's happy about you being lethargic and apathetic about the things that you do? Absolutely not, but God sees that you love Him with the love of His Son? He is well pleased with that, and you will never suffer loss. God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Here again, I just can't overemphasize this. You have got to try this out. I mean, test to see if it's true.

I remember in my college days, you know, you're cramming and you're studying things and a lot of it just becomes blurred and you're studying late at night. I had two kids, so I was walking the kids and studying at the same time and going to three jobs, but you don't get a lot of sleep during those times. As I was struggling, I remember one day I sat by the soccer field at Biola University. It's a great place to sit and there was a tree off to the side and I sat under the tree, and I just had one of those talk moments with God. I began to ask God, "Why am I doing this? What am I here for?" I didn't even know what I was doing, and I came to that moment of realizing why I was there. I have often shared this with you, but it was that Galatians 1:10 that I was reading that day under the tree. It was through that verse that God said, "So, who are you trying to please?" Do I please men or do I please God? If I pleased men, I would not be a bond servant of Christ. I began to realize that my frustration was coming from jumping through hoops for the wrong reasons, for the wrong people, and my power was limited

because it was my flesh that was doing this. But when I just said, “You know what, I'm just going to do everything for You,” the wonderful thing about that is you don't have to be perfect in what you do, you do have to be sincere. I can be sincere. I can't be perfect, but I can be sincere, and God is looking for that love.

Closing Prayer: Father, we come before You today and we ask You to free us of all the things that so easily beset us, but most of all, from the corrupt desires of our flesh and the corrupt way of thinking of our flesh; free from perceiving that in our flesh we could do good. Free us from that because, God, the fact of the matter is, the harder I try, the worse I get. Now, Lord, we just ask for Your freedom of Your Spirit that breathes within us the heart of God; that we would begin to function in the realm of our love for You, for one another; that we would no longer do anything in the flesh, but all in the Spirit of Your love.

Your heads bowed and your eyes closed, give your life to Christ. Do it for Him. Get free.

