

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not allow anyone to put the yoke of slavery on you again.

¹³After all, brothers, you were called to freedom. Only do not use your freedom as a starting point for your sinful flesh. Rather, serve one another through love. ¹⁴In fact, the whole law is summed up in this one statement: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵But if you keep on biting and devouring one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

¹⁶What I am saying is this: Walk by the spirit, and you will not carry out what the sinful flesh desires. ¹⁷For the sinful flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful flesh. In fact, these two continually oppose one another, so that you do not continue to do these things you want to do. ¹⁸But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the control of the law.

¹⁹Now the works of the sinful flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, complete lack of restraint, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hatred, discord, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, heresies, ²¹envy, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things similar to these. I warn you, just as I also warned you before, that those who continue to do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the spirit, let us also walk in step with it.

Called to Freedom

I.

“When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

Hopefully you recognize these words. They begin the Declaration of Independence of the United States, signed 243 years ago. The Thirteen colonies were declaring freedom. Freedom from a king far off in England who was taxing the people without representation. Freedom to worship as they chose. Freedom to live in the way people wanted to live. Freedom to form a government they thought would most likely “effect their safety and happiness,” as they put it.

“After all, brothers, you were called to freedom. Only do not use your freedom as a starting point for your sinful flesh” (Galatians 5:13, EHV). Unfortunately, there have always been those who abuse freedom. In order to form a Union that would be strong enough to withstand England and her king, the 13 colonies had to compromise. Slavery was permitted

to continue, even though it deprived human beings of their freedom. The colonists believed they had no choice if they wanted to fight off the king. They would deal with slavery later. Was this a “starting point for [their] sinful flesh”?

Abuse of freedom continues unabated. News in the last few years has broken of many rich and powerful and influential people using their status to abuse women. R. Kelly is one of those; he is back in the news for child sex-related crimes. Even bigger news is Jeffery Epstein, who has been arrested again for new developments related to child sex crimes. So many well-known people seemed to join Epstein for his journeys to various far-flung locations for sexual orgies with underage girls, which makes his arrest an even bigger story.

“Now the works of the sinful flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, complete lack of restraint” (Galatians 5:19, EHV). Paul’s list of the obvious works of the sinful flesh start off with sexual sins for good reason. From Sodom and Gomorrah to Jeffery Epstein, sexual sins have held prominent positions in every society.

It isn’t just sexual sins that should be seen as obvious works of the sinful flesh, however. Paul has several more categories of obvious sins.

“Idolatry, sorcery” (Galatians 5:20, EHV). Jesus broke down the entire Moral Law of the 10 Commandments into two overarching categories: Love God, and Love your neighbor. Idolatry and sorcery are sins that violate the First Table of the Law—they show a lack of love for God.

“Hatred, discord, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, heresies, ²¹envy” (Galatians 5:20-21, EHV). This batch of sins destroys fellowship among believers.

“Murders, drunkenness, orgies” (Galatians 5:21, EHV). This is a group of sins that are public spectacles.

“And things similar to these” (Galatians 5:21, EHV). Any and every other sin our human nature can dream up falls into this category.

II.

“Do not use your freedom as a starting point for your sinful flesh” (Galatians 5:13, EHV). Freedom has always been abused. It isn’t just colonists who tolerated slavery who abuse freedom. It isn’t just the rich and powerful who use their influence to take advantage of their employees and underpay them, or to continue to perpetrate the horrors of sexual predation or any of a thousand abuses.

“Now the works of the sinful flesh are obvious” (Galatians 5:19, EHV). How did *your* sinful flesh stack up in that list? Did you see your list of sins featured prominently?

“The sinful flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful flesh. In fact, these two continually oppose one another, so that you do not continue to do these things you want to do” (Galatians 5:17, EHV).

It isn’t just the Jeffery Epsteins and other egregious sexual predators of the world who are the sexual sinners. Sexual sins include lust in the heart, as Jesus once said. Idolatry doesn’t just include putting a statue in your house and worshiping it, but putting someone or something above God in your heart. All the sins Paul listed like anger and hatred and envy should be easy for each of us to see in our hearts. *Your* sinful human nature can come up with all kinds of other things that might apply to you personally.

“After all, brothers, you were called to freedom. Only do not use your freedom as a starting point for your sinful flesh... ²¹ I warn you, just as I also warned you before, that those who continue to do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:13, 21, EHV). The problem with freedom is using it incorrectly. Being called to freedom in Christ does not give you an excuse to roll around in the pigpen of sin. The sinful flesh will continually urge you to do just that: roll around in the pigpen of sin.

Paul says: “Those who continue to do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” To deliberately turn your back on the freedom Christ has given and wallow in sin is to reject the gift of salvation Christ has given you.

III.

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not allow anyone to put the yoke of slavery on you again” (Galatians 5:1, EHV).

Slavery is a horrible concept—the idea that one human being would own another human being is repugnant. As horrible as the concept of slavery is, slavery to sin is worse. Slavery to sin cannot be overcome by an emancipation proclamation, or by Juneteenth Day, or by a Civil Rights Movement. Slavery to sin is a problem with eternal repercussions.

Christ Jesus set us free from that ultimate slavery. Jesus placed himself under the law that enslaved us, as Paul talked about last week. He met the perfect demands of the law. Jesus could honestly say that not *one* of the works of the sinful flesh that Paul finds so obvious *ever* crossed his lips or entered his mind or came out in his actions. His perfect obedience to the law was obedience he willingly performed for you and me.

“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28, EHV). The freedom Jesus gives is the freedom he obtained for us by paying the ransom price to buy our freedom with his death on the cross. The victory over death he demonstrated by rising on Easter morning is a victory he gives to you and me. He calls you to real freedom.

IV.

“What I am saying is this: Walk by the spirit, and you will not carry out what the sinful flesh desires...¹⁸ But if you are led by the spirit, you are not under the control of the law” (Galatians 5:16, 18, EHV).

The devil’s idea of freedom is to go around and indulge the sinful nature—to wallow in the pigpen of sin. Real freedom is to walk by the spirit.

The inclination of the New Self—the Spiritual Self—is to live for Jesus. Living for Jesus means using freedom to love and serve our neighbor.

Paul said: “In fact, the whole law is summed up in this one statement: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Galatians 5:14, EHV). Jesus identified “Love God with all your heart” as the First and Greatest Commandment. The second was just like it, he said. That was what Paul says here: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Paul said the whole law could be summed up with this one statement.

Use that concept of “Love your neighbor as yourself” to understand the fruit of the spirit: “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22, EHV). The list of nine items begins with love. Love is the one under which all the other 8 fall. Love is the fruit of the spirit that demonstrates itself in all these ways.

“The sinful flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the sinful flesh. In fact, these two continually oppose one another” (Galatians 5:17, EHV). Practicing these “fruits of the spirit” every day will keep the sinful flesh at bay.

You were called to freedom. There is nothing else like it. The freedom of a nation, no matter how proud and steeped in history it is, simply cannot compare to freedom from the consequences of sin. *That* is a freedom to be proud of. That is a freedom to revel in, for no powerful force and no individual can ever take it away from you. Live in that freedom, displaying the fruit of the spirit. Amen.