

How Will You Use Your Freedom?

Galatians 5:1, 13-25 (NIV)

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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. ¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ 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. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Tomorrow is the 4th of July, the day we celebrate our independence from Great Britain, the day we have marked for our nation coming in to its own. What do you think of when I say the word, "Freedom?" Does freedom to you mean, "I can do whatever I want whenever I want." Or do you have different thoughts about freedom? When you think of freedom is the first picture to pop into your mind about the sacrifices our forefathers made in establishing this country? Do you think of the memorial sites, the 21 gun salute, taps, bloodshed? When you think of freedom, do you think first of the cost of freedom? When you hear the word "freedom," is your first thought one of respecting and honoring those who paid for you to have it?

Of course, there are more freedoms to celebrate this 4th of July weekend other than the freedoms we enjoy as citizens of this nation. Not a government mandated right, but a God-given right is Christian freedom. Paul wrote in our Second Lesson, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." (verse 1) Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, did something that we could never do. He lived perfectly for us, and he gave up his life as a sacrifice on the cross, not to display a selfless act that we have to follow, but the actual sacrifice of his innocent blood shed so that our sins were paid for. When he accomplished everything that had been foretold about him, the payment to release us from the clutches of sin, the slavery of sin, was paid for in full. We are no longer yoked to the slavery of sin. It does not control us.

We died to sin. We died to sin when we heard this message of what God did for us. It changed us. We died to sin when we were baptized, our old sinful nature being drown in those waters and we arose a new being, a follower of Christ. By Christ's bloodshed, his life payment, we are free to serve God. You are a Christian. Your status is confirmed. Now, knowing that you have been set free from the slavery of sin by Christ, how will you use your freedom?

At the Youth Rally this past week, one of our evening devotions asked some true or false questions. Here's one that we discussed and worked through: True or False – As God's child of grace, I can do whatever I want and God still forgives me.

This is one of those tricky true or false questions. There's some truth here, but there's also some falseness to the statement. We want to say, "True. God will always forgive me no matter what." We jump to that statement because we know that Christ's payment for our sins is an established fact. It really happened. God came down, lived for me, died for me, and therefore rescued me from the slavery of sin. No matter how horrible my sin is. No matter how many times that I have slipped and fallen, Christ has paid for that specific sin. We jump to say the statement is true because we don't want anyone to have the impression that God won't forgive you or that his payment for sins has deficiency. We don't want to put an asterisk on forgiveness, that God will only forgive you if you are really good or if you give so much money or time or only if you are truly good and sorry. The fact is that Christ has set you free from your slavery to sin. This payment is certain whether you believe it or not. God has paid the price for your freedom.

So, what's false here? "As God's child of grace, I can do whatever I want." Is God's grace, his undeserved love to us which led him to sacrifice himself for our sins, a license to do whatever the hell I want to do? Is freedom about me doing whatever I want? No. In our freedom, we remember the sacrifice made to give it to us. Paul's says that we use that freedom to honor the one who gave us that freedom.

Paul says that if you choose to use this freedom in Christ to go right back to indulging your sinful nature, to keep indulging the flesh, then you have taken the yoke of slavery and put it right back around your neck. You are a slave again and no longer free. He warns us that if we go back to what we were, if we use our freedom to indulge in the sinful nature, then “those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (verse 21) Woah. God is telling me that I can fall away. I can jump back into the slavery of sin by doing these things and they will drag me down to hell with everlasting chains to that eternal prison void from God’s love and compassion, void of all freedom.

Not only is your soul at stake when it comes to how you use your Christian freedom, but if you truly do whatever you want and indulge in the acts of the flesh, this may very well destroy the fellowship you have within a Christian congregation. You may bite and devour each other and destroy the congregation by indulging in a self-serving freedom that forgets who gave you this freedom and what you are to do with it. By indulging in the acts of the flesh, by purposely bringing people down, we can kill our church.

As God’s child of grace, no, you cannot just do whatever you want to do and expect God’s forgiveness. If you do whatever you want to do and indulge in the acts of the flesh, you will yoke yourselves to the slavery of sin and be dragged down with it. “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.” (verse 17)

“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.” (verse 13) “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” (verse 16) Because Christ has set you free from the slavery of sin, you now use your freedom to serve one another humbly in love. You look to how you can build up the other people, specifically the people around you, the people worshipping with you today. How can I show my brothers and sisters in Christ service? How can I show them kindness, patience, faithfulness? How can I use my Christian freedom for the people here today to build them up instead of tearing them down? The opportunities to use your freedom are all around you. Because we walk by the Spirit, we will produce the fruits of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (verses 22-23) With our freedom we do things for the betterment of the congregation, not the betterment of only ourselves and the pursuit of our interests to the detriment of others.

One more Youth Rally question: “True or False – Since I have God’s grace, I have the power to overcome my sinful habits and desires.” This time the answer is unequivocally true. It’s true not because the power resides in you as if it comes from your own efforts, but the fact remains that Christ has set you free from the slavery of sin. Empowered by the Holy Spirit you are actually free to live this way, to produce those fruits of the Spirit, to resist temptation, to fight against sinful habits, and to overcome.

So many times, we just roll over and give up to temptation. “It’s too hard,” we say to ourselves. “It’s difficult.” “God will forgive me anyway.” You have been set free from the slavery of sin by the spilled blood of Jesus Christ. He purchased your freedom with it. He lives in you. He builds you up. You fall back on him, rely on him. He has freed you to fight temptation, to overcome sin because he has already overcome it for you. As the Youth Rally slogan says, “Our God reigns!” This means he is in control. He is more powerful than our temptations. He has set us free to not just to put up resistance to sin, but to overcome the temptation to indulge in the acts of the flesh. In our Christ bought freedom, we can now deny the desires of the sinful flesh.

Christ has set you free from the slavery of sin and has made you free. You walk and live by the Spirit. We pay homage to the greatest freedom fighter of all time: to our God, to our Lord, to Jesus Christ. He shed his blood which paid for our freedom. We use that freedom not to indulge in sin, but to resist it, to overcome it, to produce those fruits of the Spirit that God has produced in us. “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (verse 25) Amen.