

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” (RSV)

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” We live in the freest country in the world, right. Free enough to do as we please. Free enough not to pay income tax? Free enough not to file income tax? Free enough to walk into the White House, go into the Oval Office and say, “I help pay for this place now show me around!” Yeah right!

Could it be that true freedom is a little different than we think it is? Let me explain. We are blessed with so much freedom in this country that we are not even allowed to build as we see fit on property we own; without first receiving permission from the county. That’s right we are free to do what we want as long as we have permission.

In fact, in many ways, we are not free. On TV, they can show all the violence they want; they can talk about and show sex all they want; they can say any foul word which comes to mind, but are we free to talk about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? No! We are not truly free. We are slaves to living lifestyles we can’t afford, slaves to debt, slaves to drugs prescription

and/or illegal. We're slaves to eating more food than we need or that we can burn off. We are even slaves to our religious freedom; deciding when, if, and where we will worship.

Let me give you a story of our times. We are attempting to protect our children today; we have a safe sanctuary policy here in our church. Great thing to help keep our children safe! We have these same policies in our schools, we have legislation to protect our children, and we have attempted to educate our people to protect our children, right?

So why is it that when I go up town or to the mall, I see ten, eleven, and twelve year old teenage girls allowed to dress like 20 and 30 year olds putting it all out for the world to see? I see ten, eleven, twelve and teen boys wearing their hats sideways, and their pants falling off their bodies. Why? They call it freedom of expression. Young people are allowed to decide if they want tattoos, body piercings, and even abortions. In this state a girl as young as 17 does not need her parents' permission to have an abortion. Actually the age is the same in this state for a child to decide on their own if they want their ears pierced or an abortion.

We have seven year olds today making the decision of when and if a family is going to attend church. We have children today deciding whether they will attend worship services with the family or stay home and sleep. We have children and teenagers telling their parents and/or grandparents what they are going to do, when and how their going to do it; why, because they have rights and are free to do so. After all this is a free country and everyone is free to do as they please.

Church, it may be freedom of expression, but I call it slavery, and no one seems worried about what is taking place all around us. Reminds me of the story of two gentlemen sitting on the deck of the ship Titanic when it was sinking. All this flurry of activity around them, but there they sat on the deck in their chairs, enjoying reading the newspaper. So finally a ship's officer stops and yells to the two men, "Don't you two know the ship is sinking!" One of the gentleman puts his paper down, says to the officer, "It's not our ship who cares!"

We have the freedom to not be involved in anything, and we're free to not care about anyone but ourselves. As long as we are allowed to do what we want, and do it the way we want when we want without concern for

anyone around us, everything is fine. Seems we have taken our freedoms and become slaves to them, taking everything to the extreme. We use our freedoms to complain when the service is not how we want it, forget about glorifying God. We use our freedom to talk and disturb those around us during services because we are not interested in what's going on it's our right and we are free to do it. We are free to leave following services when a Fellowship meal is planned; remember we are free to do so. Some may have legitimate reasons for leaving but most are just exercising their freedom not to share a Fellowship meal with their neighbors. We exercise our freedoms to the point we have become slaves too exercising our freedom.

In the process of exercising our freedoms, we have created degrees of things, such as sin to justify what we do. We just read in Scripture about *“fornication, decadence, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing.”*

We believe we have the freedom to use this Scripture as a check list. Think about it; I'm probably guilty of three maybe four out of 14, but hey that's almost a score of 80, and at Clemson or SC, that's a strong C which is passing; so I'm good.

Let me put it another way for everyone so it's easier to understand; choosing not to get involved because it's inconvenient for you, abusing sex in any of a thousand ways, putting a high value on the wrong things, participating in games of chance, always looking for a fight when things are not to your liking, being hostile to those around you, jealousy, being angry with anyone, selfishness, adding fuel to or starting any conflict, not claiming responsibility for your actions, wanting what is not yours, being out of control with gossip and/or dissention, excusing of bad behavior. Now, how did you score this time? Not so good huh?

We do the same thing with the second list found at the end of this morning's Scripture; "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*" We pick and choose which ones we like and use our freedom to omit the rest, but take notice of what comes right before this list; "*But the fruit of the Spirit is.*" Notice it says "*the fruit of the Spirit is,*" its singular, which means it's just one fruit not many. It's just one fruit, so either you do or you don't; there's no scoring almost 80 and think you're passing. Either you pass or fail, that's what we're free to do. Pass or fail, it's one or the other! No in between.

My point is this we use the freedoms we have today as excuses to do, and/or not do, anything we want and consider it OK. This weekend we celebrated this country's freedom from England, for what ... to worship God. Men and woman from the 1700's till today fought and died, they gave their lives so we could have the freedoms we have.

With religious freedom comes a responsibility. A responsibility to God's church, not your church, not my church but God's church. A responsibility to everyone we come in contact with, a responsibility to God's ministry to all people. A responsibility to be in service to the world for Christ. How do you see yourself? I believe many see themselves as doing OK. But in reality how does how we see ourselves differ from how God see us?

Thomas Wheeler, Chief Executive Officer of the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company tells a good story on himself. He says that while he and his wife were out driving he noticed they were low on gas. So he pulled off at the first exit and came to this dumpy little gas station with one pump.

There was only one man working the place, so he asked the man to fill it up and Mr. Wheeler checked the oil. He added a quart of oil, closed the hood, and then he saw his wife talking and smiling at the gas station attendant. When they saw him looking at them, the station attendant walked away and pretended as if nothing had happened. Wheeler paid the man and he and his wife pulled out of that dirty little station. As they drove down the road, he asked his wife if she knew the attendant. She admitted she did know him. In fact, she had known him very well. For it seems that they not only knew each other in high school, but they dated seriously for about a year.

Well, Wheeler couldn't help bragging a little and said, "Boy were you lucky I came along, because if you'd married him you'd be the wife of a gas station attendant instead of the wife of a CEO." His wife replied, "My dear, if I had married him, he'd be the CEO and you'd be the gas station attendant."

My point is, it's not about how we see ourselves, it's not about how we think we score, it's not an issue of the law, it's an issue of how God sees us and where our heart is. "*Fornication, decadence, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy,*

drunkenness, carousing,” these are only symptoms of a heart that is filled with the wrong thing, definitely not filled with the Holy Spirit.

What is real freedom, “real freedom is radical obedience to God,” not just the law, but about God Himself. If real freedom comes not from the law, but from the heart, then, what does real freedom look like? Paul says the symptoms of real freedom are *love ... joy ... peace ... endurance ... gentleness ... goodness ... faith.*

For most of us it is not some drastic or dramatic change in our lives, it’s about a real relationship with God. With a real relationship comes an understanding of your real freedoms.

- Real freedom is not being the boss, but it’s knowing God as the true Boss.
- Real freedom is knowing that humility is not weakness - it is a strength.
- Real freedom is knowing that happiness can satisfy you for an hour, but joy lasts a lifetime.
- Real freedom is knowing that peace is not cowardice - it is courage.

Not everyone is free. Not everyone has the freedoms they think they have.

Are you free this morning or are you a slave to your freedoms?