

June 30, 2013
Pentecost 6

“Our Freedom in Christ”

GALATIANS 5:1, 13-25

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, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. ¹⁴ The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. ¹⁶ So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ¹⁷ For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. ¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature 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, patience, 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 sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Last week I had to make a trip to Home Depot to pick up some extra little tiles for the project we were doing in Bible Camp. It was about 7:00 PM, the sun was still shining bright in the western sky, and the wind was blowing in gently from the ocean. As I went around in the round about on Bradley Road, I was privileged to see the large new US flag flying proudly at the Honda car dealership. With the sun shining brightly and the breeze blowing gently it was one of the most spectacular displays of our flag that I have ever seen. We are proud of our flag and the freedom that it represents. On the 4th of July we will celebrate our freedom or independence with picnics, fireworks, flags and good times with family and friends.

As much as we love the freedom our country offers us, we cherish even more the freedom we have in Jesus our Savior. In Jesus we have the ultimate freedom that comes with knowing every sin of our past life was completely paid for and forgiven at the cross. Instead of the fear of eternal death and punishment that we deserve for our sin, we have the freedom that comes with knowing our God loves us in this life and for all eternity.

For the past several weeks we have been bringing you messages from Paul’s letter to the Galatians. In this letter he pleads with his dear Christians to not lose the freedom they have in Jesus our Savior. This freedom can be lost if we try to add something to what Christ has done for us. That is why we sing, “Living, loving, dying, rising, Jesus did it all for me.” This freedom can also be lost if we fall into the trap of thinking that this freedom we have in Christ allows us to open ourselves up to sin.

Stand firm in your freedom

God’s Word tells us here in Galatians that we should stand firm in the freedom we have in Christ.

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened by a yoke of slavery." We are born into this world chained or yoked to the false and foolish thinking that we can save ourselves by trying to keep the law.

In our Bible Camp we took a pretend road trip to the Grand Canyon. How foolish it would be to think you could jump across the Grand Canyon (show slide of Grand Canyon) God's Word tells us that it is even more foolish to think that we can get back to God by trying to keep the commandments. We learned about a rich ruler who came to Jesus and asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus had to show him how this was totally impossible. He did this by asking him to give up some of his riches and help the poor. He could not even keep the first commandment because he loved his money more than God.

The Bible tells us that if we were to keep all of God's laws perfectly but then just miss one part we are guilty of breaking all of God's laws. James 2:10 says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." We illustrated this by blowing up a balloon and then pricking the balloon with a pin. We even made the foolish suggestion that we could repair the broken balloon with some masking tape. When we break God's laws, or the Ten Commandments, there is nothing we can do to repair the situation. God must rescue us from the slavery of sin. He does this through Jesus.

Here is another example of being a slave to sin and foolish thinking. I was born enslaved to the idea that if I am better than others, then God will be nice to me and reward me with heaven. Here is a picture of a boy being very mean (slide of mean boy). At first we may be tempted to think, I am better than that boy, but then when we think back to our childhood, there were days when we were just as mean and selfish as this child was. Horror of horrors, this meanness continues down even into our adult years and even when we get old and gray. Sin deserves eternal death and punishment. Only Jesus can rescue us.

We used the illustration of a sponge to show how Jesus took all our sin on himself when he went to the cross for us. We poured some water into a bucket and then used a sponge to absorb the water. Jesus absorbed the sin of the world on himself when he went to the cross. He suffered terribly for the sin and paid the price so we could be free. We think of the brave soldiers who died to bring freedom to our country. Galatians 3 says of Jesus, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." Jesus paid it all at the cross so we can be free (slide of Jesus paying it all).

One morning one of our children told how a humming bird hit the humming bird feeder in their backyard and broke its wing. It fell to the ground and died because it could no longer fly. Our wings are broken. We can no longer fly. We sin and fall short of the glory of God. Only Jesus can rescue us. How foolish it would be to think we can be free by rescuing ourselves. Show picture of Jesus rescuing the lost sheep.

Stay away from sin

Jesus has rescued you from the punishment of sin. He also wants to rescue you from the power of sin. He gives you strength to live a new life for him and not give into sin. Paul writes, "You my brothers were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command; 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."

We have a mean tomcat in our neighborhood who likes to go around picking fights with other cats. Children need to be taught that real freedom in Jesus means not going around picking fights with other children or being mean to brothers and sisters or even to parents. Parents need to show love to each other in the home, not just as a good example for their children, but out of love for Jesus and the freedom we have in him. God's ways are always the best ways. If people keep on biting and devouring each other, they ultimately will destroy themselves and the freedom they have in Jesus.

The children loved this picture of dog and kitten sleeping together. (Show slide) This is more than just a cute picture. Some day in heaven, we will all live in perfect peace and harmony with one another, instead of biting and devouring each other. Always there is this hope that with Jesus we will have a better day tomorrow as we live new lives that say, "I want to be like Jesus in the way I love people and put them first in my life."

We teach our children and our adults not to fight with each other. But there is one place in your life and mine where it is good to fight. With the forgiveness we have in Jesus we want to fight against sin where ever it pops up in our lives. "So I say, live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of your sinful nature. For the sinful nature is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under law."

To illustrate how it is good to have this fight inside of you that wants to live a new life for Jesus, let me tell you the story of a man named Bill. Bill was a big man. His wife and daughter came to church, but he did not. One day Bill surprised his wife and daughter by coming to church with them. He even signed up to take class about the Christian faith and eventually was baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. After several classes, Bill asked if he could talk to me. He wanted to know why he was so troubled by some bad words that came out of his mouth. He was building a corral for a friend and hit his finger with hammer and said some bad words. He wanted to know why it never bothered him before to say bad words, but now he could hardly sleep. How would you answer Bill? You see when you are free in Christ, you want to live the life Jesus wants you to live and that means fighting with all the strength Jesus gives to live a new life for him.

What should we avoid? Paul says they are obvious and well known to all of us: "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." When we go back to these sins, we risk losing our wonderful freedom in Christ.

We tried to teach our children that no one loves them more than Jesus. Show slide. Jesus even gives us the Holy Spirit to produce fruit in our lives so that we can enjoy the freedom we have in him. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control." With the freedom you have in Christ you are producing beautiful fruits such as love, joy, goodness, gentleness and self control. You enjoy sharing this fruit with others and you enjoy it when they share these fruits with you. As you wave your flag on Fourth of July, give a prayer of thanks for the freedom we have in this country. Also give thanks for the freedom you have in Jesus your Savior. Amen.