

Pentecost 6
June 26, 2016

"The Pure Gospel Gives Us Freedom"

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.

Please, whatever you do, don't tell me I must add something to what Jesus has done for me to be sure my sins are forgiven and I have peace with God. Don't tell me that I am 99% pure through Christ but it is up to me to do my part even if it is only 1 %. That will lead me to despair, because I know in my heart of hearts that I will fail to do my part in the future just as I have failed to do my part in the past even if it is only 1 %. If just 1 % depends on me, then I will not be able to escape the judgment to come.

The dear Christians in Galatia were being told by false teachers that it was not good enough to have Christ alone to be a child of God. They were being told they had to still keep Old Testament laws such as circumcision and worshiping on the seventh day to be true believers and true children of God. That was not what the Apostle Paul had taught them when he wrote, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." Jesus did everything necessary to redeem us from the curse of the law, the condemnation we deserve. This pure message of the gospel gives us freedom, the ultimate freedom to escape from the punishment for sin and to escape from the power of sin in our lives.

Freed from the punishment of sin

Listen again to these words just read to you. "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." We love the word "freedom." We celebrate Fourth of July by talking about freedom and shooting off fireworks. We sing our national anthem with the words, "the land of the brave

and the home of the free." People have given their lives and shed their blood so we can have a country where there is freedom. Even more important than the freedom we enjoy in this country is the freedom we have in Christ from punishment we deserve because of our sin.

Our freedom from the condemnation for sin is not in ourselves but in Christ alone. 700 years before Jesus was born into this world he spoke through the prophet Isaiah about bringing us freedom with this words, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from the darkness for the prisoners." Jesus whole purpose for becoming fully human was to offer his blood on the cross as the redemption price for our sin to give us freedom that we cannot earn by ourselves. Listen to how Peter describes this freedom we have in Christ. "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

What a shame it would be if we were to begin teaching that it is not enough to have Christ. What a shame it would be if we taught that we could follow certain laws to add to what Christ had done. That would be going back to a what Paul calls "the yoke of the law." In ancient times people carried heavy burdens with a yoke across their back. A Vietnam veteran who served in the Army Rangers said they had to carry 160 pound packs into the steaming hot jungle. Add just one law to what Christ has done, even one small command or requirement, and you have just broken someone's back. You have just destroyed the freedom they have in Christ.

Sin always drags you down and condemns you. You have no way of reversing what it has done to you in your life. It is like the law of gravity. If I drop this tennis ball, it will fall to the ground. It will always happen. It is totally predictable. So it is totally predictable on the basis of what God tells us here in his word that we must die for our sin. Simply stated, "The wages of sin is death." Only Jesus can reverse this condemnation from the law. I cannot do this on my own. He has done it perfectly. As we will sing in our Star Bible Camp again this week, "Living, loving, dying, rising Jesus did it all for me."

Let me share a story of freedom that will illustrate this point more. Years ago an elderly man was walking down a street. He came upon a boy about 12 years old sitting on a park bench with a rusty bird cage. Inside was a sparrow that he was torturing by poking it with a stick. The man asked the boy what he was planning to do with the sparrow. With an evil grin on his face he said, "I am going to poke it with this stick and then I am going to take it home and feed it to my cat." The man asked, "How much do you want for the cage and sparrow?" The boy said with a greedy smile on his face, "Ten dollars, not a penny less." The man pulled out the ten dollars, gave it to the boy and walked into the park. Then he let the bird go free, put the cage down and crushed it with his foot. We have freedom in Christ. Why would we ever want to go back to legalism, the slavery under the law, where Satan can daily torment us with the evil grin that we are never good enough to be loved by God?

Freed from the power of sin

With this freedom in Christ comes a whole new life and a whole new person in the Spirit that wants to avoid sin rather than embrace it. Listen to Paul again. "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 don't use this freedom we have in Christ to indulge our sinful nature. That means we don't say to ourselves, "Because I am free from the punishment of the law, I can engage in sinful actions because I am not going to be punished for what I do wrong." Even though you are a Christian and are forgiven in Christ, you still have sinful nature or sinful flesh that wants to take over your life and pull you back down into a life of sin. Did your sinful nature ever suggest to you this past week to have evil thoughts towards another person or to even hurt that person who may have hurt you?

It is so easy to think more about yourself than other people. People take pictures of themselves and then post them on the internet or send them to their friends on Face Book. With these new tools we can easily begin to think to ourselves, "How can I show other people how wonderful I am?" instead of being more concerned about how they are doing. Because of the freedom you have in Christ you want to be free from selfish thinking. You want to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. You don't want to bite and devour each other as cats or dogs might do in a fight. To be free in Christ means we always look to Jesus as an example of how we are to live our lives especially when it comes to loving people.

Because you are free in Christ from the punishment of sin you will struggle each day to say yes to what Jesus wants and no to what your sinful flesh wants. That war that is constantly going on inside of you and it is not something bad. It is something beautiful as Paul says, "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 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. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." On a scale of 1 to 10 how much do you like dealing with conflict? Most of us would say that is one of our least favorite things to deal with in life. However, to struggle to live for Jesus because he has freed us from our sin is a tremendous joy in life. We are not alone in that conflict as Paul said earlier in Galatians. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave his life for me."

With this freedom in Christ comes the power to free ourselves from the acts of the sinful nature that we see around us and even in ourselves. 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."

Keep yourselves away from sexual sins. That includes what comes into your life through the internet or the movies, or looking twice at a woman or man in lustful way. Stay away from idolatry and witchcraft. That includes loving your blessings more than loving the One

who has blessed you. Watch out for being nasty to other people with "hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy." Do you want to join the drunks in town? Stay away from these things! If you continue in them, you will not inherit the kingdom of God. The life of a Christian who is free in Christ is one of daily repentance.

Because you are free in Christ, attached to him like a branch to a vine, the Holy Spirit will lead you to bear fruit out of love for Jesus. Here are the fruits the Holy Spirit is producing in your life. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control." Which of these is your favorite? It is hard to pick is it not? And rightly so. We love them all. What a blessing it is to know that all of these fruits are coming forth in your life and mine because of the freedom we have in Christ. We see these fruits in our lives because we are branches connected to Christ the Vine. Each one of the fruits mentioned here brings us great joy personally. As they are being produced in our lives they bring joy to other people.

Fourth of July is a time to celebrate the freedom we have in this country. Every day your life on this earth is an opportunity to celebrate the freedom you have in Jesus yours. This freedom is yours because of the pure gospel that has come into your life. Amen.