

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – June 26, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Galatians 5:1, 13-25 (NIV)

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.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ who have been called to be free:

This past week the citizens of Great Britain surprised the world by voting in favor of withdrawing from the European Union. Supporters of this decision have suggested that this action was a matter of preserving their freedoms. Opponents of the measure suggested that the cost of withdrawing from the union would be too high. That dialogue is a reminder that there is always a price to pay for freedom.

That is true also of the freedom that Paul speaks about in today's sermon text. **It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.** Christ Jesus paid the price to set us free. By offering up his holy innocent life, he secured our independence from sin, death and the devil. How we will use the liberty that is ours in Christ? Our text answers that question as it encourages

Theme: Stand Firm in Your Freedom

1. You have been freed from sin
2. You have been freed for service

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. Each of us was conceived and born in sin. We inherited a sinful nature from our parents. Prior to the civil war in our country, a child born to slave parents was also a slave. We were born as slaves to sin in the service of the devil, and doomed to death. The law with its command to love your neighbor as yourself is completely trampled by the sinful nature, which leads us to love ourselves and act unkindly toward others. As Paul reminds us, Christ has set us free from the control of our sinful nature. Christ Jesus championed our cause. He defeated sin and the devil with his perfect life. He took our sins upon himself, suffered and died in our place so that his righteousness could be ours. He defeated death with his resurrection so that now we can live for him rather than for our sinful self. The Apostle Peter reminds us: **"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness...**" (1 Peter 2:24 NIV)

That is why Paul can say, **"You ... were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love."** Unfortunately, we still don't always love our neighbor

as ourselves. At times, we are guilty of spreading gossip or making others look bad in an effort to “build ourselves up.” We say hurtful things and unkind things. We fight and we argue. These acts are an abuse of the freedom Christ won for us. Such acts indulge our sinful nature.

Some of the believers in the Galatian churches acted this way too. Paul had this to say about those kinds of actions. **15) If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.** This is a warning to stand firm in the freedom Christ purchased for us by setting aside sin since we have been called to be free.

Although we have been set free, it seems that there are times when we end up misusing our freedom by indulging our sinful natures. Sadly, we were all too willing to follow the desires of our sinful flesh that Paul describes for us in this way. **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 (persist in living) like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

A brief examination of this list will lead us to conclude that the list is by no means exhaustive. Paul could have included more than the 15 crass sins he listed. That is suggested by the phrase, “and the like.” But the bottom line is that even a shorter list would have been just as incriminating. His list includes sins against the Sixth Commandment (sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery.) Idolatry and witchcraft (efforts to delve into forbidden knowledge) go against the First and Second Commandments. Other sins in the list are sins that hurt or harm our neighbor (hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage etc.) which are in conflict with the Fifth Commandment. Drunkenness and orgies are evidence of a lack of control.

Christ died for all the sins on this list. As pagan unbelievers, many in the Galatian congregations were guilty of them all. Christ had set them free. Perhaps we too felt pangs of guilt as we heard this list. Christ has set us free. Having been set free from this corrupt and pagan life-style, Paul warns us not to look back and set our hearts on what made Christ’s death so necessary. God’s Son gave his life to rescue us – how could we carelessly continue in that lifestyle? That would not be faith expressing itself in love toward God and neighbor. With these words, Paul reminds us not to become enslaved to sin again. They remind us of our need to seek the Lord’s forgiveness when our sinful flesh gets the upper hand in our lives. These words also warn us to stand firm in the freedom Christ purchased for us by setting aside sin since we have been called to be free.

Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Stand firm in your freedom. One way to remain firm in our freedom is to no longer live in sin since we have been freed from sin – or as the Apostle Peter said: **Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves.** (1 Peter 2:16 NIV)

Another way to stand firm in our freedom then is to serve the Lord since we have been freed for service. As Paul has reminded us we have been called to be free. Not only have we been called to be free but we have also been empowered to live in freedom. The Holy Spirit has given us a new spirit that opposes our sinful nature. That is why Paul encourages: **walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.... if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.**

Our new man or spirit directs us to God’s law, not as something that must be done, as if we were still slaves to the Law – obligated to keep it all perfectly to avoid God’s wrath; but as something we delight to follow in response to the freedom which is ours in Christ. The new man delights in the Law because of the Savior’s love for us. When we walk by the spirit, we will be resisting the desires of our sinful nature or flesh. That is going to cause an inner conflict since our sinful nature is still clinging to us. **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.**

The Apostle Paul expands on this thought in his letter to the Romans. **I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.** (Romans 7:19-25 NIV)

What wretched people we are! We have been freed from sin and freed for service and yet we often allow ourselves to become enslaved to sin all over again and resist serving God and others. What a wonderful blessing it is that we can also join Paul in saying: **Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

This deliverance will motivate and encourage us to stand firm in our freedom and to display the fruits of the Spirit as we live lives of service. **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.**

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have been led by the Spirit to trust in Jesus' sacrificial death for them. Jesus reminded their connection to him would result in bearing fruit. **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."** (John 15:5) Paul is speaking about the fruit that Christians will bear in our text. Now not every vine or fruit tree produces the same quantity and quality of fruit – but every healthy vine or tree produces fruit of some kind. That's the way it is with Christians – they will naturally produce fruit – some more than others – but all will show evidence of the Spirit's presence in some way.

Love seems to be the main fruit, if you will – all the other fruits that Paul mentions flow from love which as Paul has already stated is the fulfillment of the whole law. The love of God fills our hearts with joy and peace. What a joy it is for us to know that our sins have been forgiven! What peace is ours because Christ has removed our guilt from us! With that joy and peace in our hearts we are able to lovingly forgive others when they sin against us. We will be patient with them. We will be kind to others as Christ has been kind to us. Goodness will be our "trademark" as we render our service to others – sharing the good things God has given to us. As we consider our various stations in life and our respective duties and the opportunities and obligations we have we will strive to serve faithfully in those roles. We will seek to be patient with others as we demonstrate an attitude of self-control in our dealings with them.

There is no law against these kinds of actions – in fact, these traits are highly desirable and will serve us well in our lives of service. These are the attitudes that God desires. They conform to his holy will. Paul continues. **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.** Those whom the Spirit has called to faith and united to Christ Jesus have repented of their sinful ways. They have turned their backs on them. They have put their sinful nature to death and a new spirit is living in them. Since we have this new spiritual nature living in us by faith, Paul urges us to keep in step with the Holy Spirit, who created and made this life possible.

As we know all too well the sinful spirit doesn't want to stay dead – it constantly seeks to gain control of our lives. Therefore, we will daily call to mind Christ's crucifixion as we seek to crucify our sinful natures by standing firm in our freedom from sin and standing firm in a life of service, which keeps in step with the Spirit.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. You have been freed from sin and freed for service. Stand firm in your freedom! Amen.