

**Freedom From and Freedom For  
Galatians 5:1-6, 13-26**

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February 9, 2020**

With freedom comes pressure, responsibility, and sometimes confusion. The Galatians, who had received freedom from the law, were about to subject themselves once again to the bars of legalism. Before they closed the doors and threw away the keys, however, Paul called for them to stand firm in the freedom they discovered in Christ.

Some people just can't stand to be out of jail. Freedom is scary and fails to provide the rigid and predictable environment of prison. The awkward inmate stands on the steps of the jailhouse free from confinement. But where will he go? New found freedom can be as intimidating to a released felon as the Atlantic Ocean to a just released aquarium fish. Uncertain how to handle freedom, released prisoners often find themselves back in their orange—sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally.

When Maliu M. Mafua called 911 early in the morning of January 6 from a Los Altos pay phone the police did what they are trained to do—they responded immediately. Oops. Mafua was an escapee from the San Mateo County Sheriff's Department. He had just begun to flap his wings of freedom. 411—information—was the number he intended to dial when he pulled up to the pay phone in his El Camino Real. Los Altos Police Sgt. Tom Connelly responded to the 911 call and happened to notice that Mafua was actually still wearing clothing with the insignia "Property of San Mateo County Jail"! Mafua, the 27-year-old escapee, was taken back into custody without a battle.

Even more bizarre is the story of the lady who refused to enjoy her freedom. A woman who had been sentenced to one year for check swindling reported back to the jail only two days after being released. She could not tolerate the pressure of freedom! She had been granted a six-month reprieve with the provision that the final twenty-two days of her sentence would be dismissed if she kept herself out of trouble. She reported back to prison saying "she wouldn't be happy knowing she might still have twenty-two days to serve." The jail officials weren't even sure it was legal to hold her, and two days later they gave her credit for good behavior and released her once again.

The Galatians, who had received freedom from the law, were ready to submit once again to the bars of legalism. Knowing this, however, Paul called for them to stand firm in the freedom they had gained through Christ.

**Standing Firm (5:1-11)**

As he began to conclude his letter, Paul drew together all that had gone before. Christ had died in order that the Galatians could be free. They were free from the requirements of the law because

Christ, Himself, had fulfilled them. They were free from bondage to sin because of Christ's obedience. Likewise, they were free from the wrath of God because Christ became the curse (Galatians 3:13). Paul urged the Galatian Christians to resist any temptation to yield to the Judaizers, the Jewish Christians insisting on circumcision of Gentile believers. Like a stubborn beast who refuses to put on the yoke again, the Galatian Christians must resist placing themselves back under the law (v. 1).

Paul made clear that the law came as an entire unit (vv. 2-6). Either the Galatians obtained salvation by complete and absolute obedience to the law—which was impossible—or through the grace God provided in the gospel of Christ Jesus—which was available. Unlike patrons meandering through salads and soups at the local cafeteria, God's people cannot pick and choose the laws they desire to obey. If the Galatians put themselves once again under the authority of the law, then they must be obedient to the law in its entirety. To seek salvation by way of the law was to leave the path of salvation found in the grace of God through Christ. It was to reject the freedom that God had offered.

Paul's language of "falling from grace" (v. 4) was not used to teach any theological truth about the possibility or impossibility of "losing one's salvation." Rather, Paul was presenting two different paths one might travel in order to attempt to gain salvation. To accept the path of the law was to reject the path of God's grace. Thus, the one who resubmitted himself under the law had, indeed, rejected the path of grace which he began in Christ. In contrast to those who left the path of grace by following the way of the Judaizers, the persevering people of God would eagerly await "the hope of righteousness" (v. 5). Paul continued to assert that it is not the outward sign of the flesh, circumcision or uncircumcision, that benefits the people of God. What really mattered was that the Galatians had faith working through love (v. 6). Real faith does not lead to moral slackness but, rather, a servant's heart maintained by love.

In verses 7-12, Paul showed his bewilderment that the Galatians, who were maturing so well in the faith (v. 7), were now moving back toward the legalism of the Judaizers. Paul emphasized again that real faith produces real work (v. 13). Some of the Judaizers had apparently argued that Paul, himself, had preached circumcision. "On the contrary," Paul declared. If he, indeed, preached circumcision, then why would he be at odds with the Judaizers? Paul contended that he could not possibly have preached circumcision, for to do so would deny the power of the cross (v. 11).

Paul became a bit sarcastic in verse 12. If cutting off the foreskin was helpful, then mutilation must be all the more helpful (v. 12)! Paul was sarcastically referring to Deuteronomy 23:1 where such mutilation would cut a man off from the people of God. The Galatian Christians needed to realize that their freedom was not a freedom for sin. Indeed, in Christ they received freedom from sin. Paul's gospel was not soft on sin. The gospel of Christ does not present a God who is morally slack.

### **Freedom From and Freedom For (5:13-15)**

From Galatians 5:13-6:10 we have no less than fifteen commands from Paul to the Galatian Christians. Freedom does not include a license to sin. Rather, freedom must be exercised responsibly. Paul's statement, "For you were called to freedom," was a summary of the entire letter

up to this point. With this section, he began to demonstrate ways in which freedom can be used to build the community of Christ.

Paul presented the Galatians with two possibilities, two outcomes of the freedom they have found in Christ. First, they could use their freedom to further the desires of the flesh as they declared their freedom from the law. Second, they could use their freedom as an opportunity to serve the community of believers, the church. Paul bluntly declared the second alternative as the only way.

While following the desires of our flesh promises to yield freedom, our sin itself places us back into slavery. Christ has not died that we could be free to sin. Substance abusers are not free; they are enslaved. Men addicted to pornography on the internet are not liberated; they are entrapped. A young couple that must always buy new cars, clothes, and furniture to satisfy a lust for material wealth has no freedom. The couple becomes enslaved to exorbitant credit card debt, perhaps even having to take on a second job in order to satisfy their greed. Indeed, we are free from sin, not free for sin.

Elsewhere, Paul depicted Christianity not so much as liberation, but rather simply as a change of masters. In Romans 6:15-23, he said, “You who were once slaves to sin...have become slaves of righteousness.” Our freedom in Christ is not equivalent to independence from God or from His desires for our life. In the same fashion, as the people of God were going to be freed from the bondage of the Egyptians, Moses was told by God to declare to Pharaoh, “Let my people go, that they may serve Me” (Exodus 9:1).

If following Christ leads to freedom from the law, it also leads to freedom for demonstrating Christ-like love. If I love my neighbor (v. 14), I will do him or her no wrong. In Romans 13:8 Paul concurred, “He who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law” (cf. Leviticus 19:18). Love puts all of the law into perspective. Love meets the law’s demands, and the law has value as it is correctly fulfilled in the new life in the Spirit that comes through the gospel of Christ Jesus.

Paul’s admonition to fulfill the law in love was applied to a specific situation in the churches in the Galatian region. Bickering and backbiting existed among the Galatian Christians (v. 15). It is difficult to determine the exact situation surrounding the verbal assaults between the believers in Galatia. As we interpret verse 15 in light of verse 26, however, we realize that some had become prideful in their new walk with Christ, while others were taking the freedom that Christ afforded from the law as an opportunity for their own fleshly desires.

Jim Cymbala, pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Church, said something impromptu while receiving new members into the church family. He felt as if the words came from the prompting of the Holy Spirit. He said to the new members, “And now, I charge you, as pastor of this church, that if you ever hear another member speak an unkind word of criticism or slander against anyone—myself, another pastor, an usher, a choir member, or anyone else—you have authority to stop that person in midsentence and say, ‘Excuse me—who hurt you? Who ignored you? Who slighted you? Was it Pastor Cymbala? Let’s go to his office right now. He will get on his knees and apologize to you, and then we’ll pray together, so God can restore peace to this body. But we will not let you talk critically about people who are not present to defend themselves.’”

“New members, please understand that I am entirely serious about this. I want you to help resolve this kind of thing immediately. And meanwhile know this: If you are ever the one doing the loose talking, we will confront you.” Cymbala concluded that churches are destroyed more by gossip and slander than any other factor.

The Galatians were experiencing some loose tongues as they were bickering and backbiting. Loose tongues are still rampant in congregations today. Like the Brooklyn Tabernacle Church, all churches ought to take more seriously Paul’s concern about inappropriate speech.

### **How to Walk (5:16-26)**

The last section of chapter 5 can be outlined simply: (1) Galatians 5:16-18, the opposition of the Spirit and the flesh; (2) 5:19-21, the deeds of the flesh which have no place in the kingdom of God; (3) 5:22-24, the fruit of the Spirit which fulfills the law; and (4) 5:25-26, a command to walk by the Spirit.

Paul opened this section by declaring that the flesh and the Spirit are at war (5:16-18), in opposition to one another. The desires of the flesh are determined to thwart the desires of the Spirit. Likewise, the desires of the Spirit are bent on halting the desires of the flesh. Our old nature (our Adam nature) still tries to hinder our ability to walk in the Spirit of God. Our freedom is constantly challenged by the flesh. Our struggle against sin is, in fact, evidence of the presence of God’s Spirit in our lives. We are not comfortable living in our old nature, but rather we seek and strive to live in the Spirit. Spiritual life until the return of Christ will always be a struggle. As we walk in our new freedom, as we walk in the Spirit, we are not under the law (5:18). Walking by the Spirit has fulfilled the law. (See Romans 8:4 and Galatians 5:14.)

The deeds of the flesh are evident to all, Paul declared (5:19-21). As we examine this list of destructive behaviors, we can place them into four main categories: (1) sins of sexual immorality (5:19b), the first three; (2) sins of false worship (5:20a), four and five; (3) sins of broken personal relationships (5:20b-21a), numbers six through 13; and (4) sins of intemperance (5:21b), the last two. Paul was simply giving examples and not an exhaustive list; he adds “and things like these” (5:12).

The Galatian Christians had the difficult challenge of opposing sexual immorality that was rampant in their pagan society. Christians were to oppose idolatry and sorcery because they substitute worship of the Creator God with worship of creation. The sins that cause broken personal relationships have their root in self-promotion and pride. Sins of intemperance demonstrate enslavement to the desires of the flesh. Paul wrote that those who continually practice the fleshly deeds demonstrate the lack of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Therefore, they are not partakers in the kingdom of God (5:21).

Paul described the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23). While the gifts of the Spirit in Paul’s teachings (1 Corinthians 12:28-31) are abilities given for spiritual service to the church, the fruit of the Spirit includes the characteristics in our lives that result from the presence and dominance of the Spirit. The law will not condemn us as we live by the Spirit, because the fruit of the Spirit fulfills the law. The lives of the people of God should be characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

As Paul closed the letter, he reminded the Christians that when Christ died, those who professed His Lordship died with Him. Even now, given the fact that the Spirit is in our lives, we must walk in such a way as to make evident the presence of God within us (vv. 24-25).

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, the Tri-State Fair parade in Amarillo started at 11th and Polk Streets, continued north to Third Street, then turned east and continued to Grand Street where the parade finally ended. Dean Gilliam owned an auto repair shop at Third and Pierce Streets. One year he walked out to the sidewalk in front of his shop to relax and enjoy the parade. As the Tascosa High School band marched past the corner on which Gilliam was standing, he was utterly shocked to find his son, David Gilliam, marching in the band with a huge, golden horn wrapped around his neck. His son was standing in the back row, marching in military step with the rest of the crackerjack band. His cheeks were inflated like Dean remembered them to be when his son blew up balloons as a toddler. His blowing and bellowing cheeks alternated from inflated to deflated, like Dizzy Gillespie chasing a jazz tune. In just a matter of moments, the band passed by Mr. Gilliam, and David and his huge horn were out of sight.

Later at home that night, Dean inquired, “David, I didn’t know you knew how to play the horn?” He replied, “Dad, I don’t. The fellow who was supposed to play the tuba didn’t show up so they asked me to fill in the spot and pretend to be playing it.” Gilliam said he was reminded that things are not always what they appear to be. His son was only pretending.

When it comes to our pilgrimage with Christ, we simply must not pretend. We must be genuinely trying to live a life characterized by the fruit of the spirit—by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Freedom from and freedom for....

Consider the fruit of the Spirit:

1. *Love*. This word describes the essence of God more than any other. In the Old Testament, love depicted God’s relationship to his people (eg. Deuteronomy 7:7-8; 10:15).
2. *Joy*. Joy results in the life of a Christian despite his circumstances. It focuses not on happiness, but on what God has done for us in Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:16; Romans 14:17; 15:13).
3. *Peace*. God is the God of peace, the God of shalom. For Paul, peace related to the harmony among believers, harmony in the church (Ephesians 2:14-17; Romans 14:19; Colossians 3:12-4:6).
4. *Patience*. Paul described forbearance toward others, especially those who wrong us (Romans 2:4; Colossians 3:12).
5. *Kindness*. If patience is the passive side of love, then the active side of love is kindness (Ephesians 2:7).
6. *Goodness*. Believers are to be “full of” goodness (Romans 15:14). Goodness always results in action toward others.
7. *Faithfulness*. Paul referred to our living out our trust in God over the long haul.
8. *Gentleness*. Jesus was gentle (Matthew 11:25-30; 2 Corinthians 10:1). The idea of gentleness carries with it a sense of humility and consideration toward others (Philippians 2:3).

9. *Self-control*. This fruit deals with the “works of the flesh” that lead to sexual indulgence and intemperance.