

## **The True Meaning of Christian Freedom**

Galatians 5

80-11

This morning I want to just bring some things to your remembrance. I know this is a special time of the year in our country when we remember our freedom. We celebrate what it means to be independent, to be free, to enjoy liberty. And I suppose as Americans, if we were to isolate one thing that is sort of the hallmark of our nation it would be our love of freedom. America has become a term in the world that is somewhat synonymous with being free. That is our highest held and most praised of all blessings. And we do enjoy that. And we thank God for the freedom that we have.

But I suppose that all of us are very much aware of the fact that the freedom we enjoy is in the day in which we live being terribly abused. And I would say that we are in danger of losing the very freedom we celebrate because abuse of freedom can lead so rapidly to the death of freedom. We look at our nation and we see those things that demonstrate to us how we abuse our freedom, high crime, for example, drugs, alcohol consumption which is destroying us. And instead of closing in on those kinds of things, we continually want to make laws that have a greater latitude which allow the criminal more rights and more freedoms and which give more place to drugs and alcohol and things like that are ultimately destructive. The media through television and music and films and books and everything else literally drowning us in a cesspool of filth, all in the name of freedom, freedom of the press, freedom to believe, to think, to speak, to see and to entertain yourself in any way, shape or form you choose has polluted our nation beyond remedy. And then there is that freedom which we have all seen rising in women's movements which are born out of lesbianism and homosexuality leading to gay rights and gay pride week and gay parades and even gay kissing booths and all of these kinds of things, fornication and adultery, flaunting polluted relationships, dirty minds, destroying marriages. All of those things that mark our society are the abuses of our freedoms.

There are some societies like, for example, Iran, where things like that don't happen. Freedom does have its problems. There are some societies that have no freedom but at least you can walk the streets in the middle of the night in a big city and not fear that somebody is going to attack you. In the name of freedom in our own society today, women can now murder their unborn children, which is amazing since I read this week that there is a law in the United States imposing a \$4,000 fine on anyone who ships a pregnant lobster. In the name of freedom, in the name of freedom the press attacks our leaders, attacks the principles of our nation, building distrust and fomenting a revolution against all authority.

In the name of freedom an awful lot of things go on that are a terrifying abuse of freedom, and if continued will lead as they always have in history to the loss of freedom. It is characteristic of a man in a free society that he will abuse that freedom because he is so basically sinful. Man is not basically good. He is not basically going to control his freedom and that is the problem with freedom, it is abused. It is the nature of freedom that it can be abused to the point where it is lost. And what is true in the political and sociological world is also true in the spiritual world. And I'd like to have us focus

on that today, on Christian freedom and its potential abuse.

Open your Bible with me to Galatians chapter 5, Galatians chapter 5. We understand freedom in this nation because we live in it. We understand freedom in the spiritual sense to some extent because it's a biblical truth. But just as our political freedom can be abused, so our spiritual freedom can be abused. And the Word of God gives us some controlling factors to prevent such abuse. And I know these are things that many of us have understood, perhaps many of us have not, and all of need to be reminded of. I see in the church today the same kind of abuse of Christian freedom that I see in our nation. I look at a church across the land where there is very little concern for holiness of life, where Christian leaders are falling into gross immorality and it's a rather epidemic kind of thing. It goes on all the time.

I was asked, I think, no less than a half a dozen times in the last three weeks or so while I've been gone, why is it that so many Christian leaders are falling into moral sins and falling out of the ministry and abusing the privilege of leadership? I hear almost on a day-to-day basis about another person in spiritual leadership who has defaulted in his ministry, been discredited by sin. There are people who think because they're free in Christ, as one very popular Christian woman author, that you can leave your husband and go shack up with another man and everything is going to be fine. And that's a rather common thing today in the name of Christian freedom and because we're under the grace of God, they say, and not under law we ought to be fully restored.

I was asked more times than I can remember, what should we do with someone who is in the ministry in a place of prominence who has a terrible moral collapse in his life? Isn't it okay if we bring him right back and put him in the ministry? After all, God forgives, and so forth and so on. And what I can see in that is the fact that there is a diminishing sense of alarm and a diminishing — what should I say? — shock level in terms of our reaction to sin. We have been softened into such tolerance of this that we're now very anxious to hurry people back into prominence. One very large and prominent ministry in our nation, a man was morally really disobedient to the Word of God, sinned in a gross way and, of course, it was quietly tried to be controlled and they couldn't control it so the man stood up and admitted it and they put him right back into the place of prominence. And what this communicates to everybody is, don't worry about those kind of things, they're really not that significant. And God will forgive us and this is grace and we don't want to be too rigid and oh, on it goes.

We are living in a time when Christian freedom is being abused. And I think it's important for us to touch base as we think about liberty and freedom in a weekend like this, to touch base with what Paul says about the control factors on Christian liberty, the control factors on Christian freedom. It's a... It's an essential thing.

Now in Galatians he basically introduces this idea of freedom throughout the whole epistle because he's talking to a group of people that he has preached the gospel to. Galatia wasn't a city. Galatia was a region in which there were many cities. But in Galatia he had preached the gospel and the gospel was a gospel of freedom from the law, freedom from sin. It was a gospel of liberty, a gospel of liberation. And that's what he preached. And there were some Jews who were very threatened by that and so they came in behind Paul into Galatia and everywhere they went they told the people they had to keep the law, keep the ceremonies, keep the rituals, get circumcised, follow every tradition, hang onto all the legalistic conformity or else they would be displeasing to God, they could never come to know God unless they maintained their legalism. And so there was a real battle over

this matter of what is Christian freedom and Paul writes to that issue in Galatians.

He introduces the concept in chapter 2 verse 4 and he says in the middle of verse 4 that we have liberty in Christ Jesus. We are free in Christ Jesus. And we are not to be brought back into bondage. We are free. Over in chapter 4, after an analogy between Sarah, who was free, and Hagar, who was a bond slave, in verse 31 he says, "Brethren, we are not children of the bond woman," in an analogical sense, we are not analogous to Ishmael, we are not analogous to slavery "but rather we are children of the free," analogous to Sarah, who had the son in freedom, Isaac, who was the son of covenant." In other words, we are a people who are brought into freedom through salvation. And then in chapter 5 that very familiar verse, verse 1: "For freedom Christ has set us free. Therefore stand fast and do not become entangled again with the yoke of bondage." So, repeatedly then he has mentioned the fact that we in Christ are free.

We come to chapter 5 verse 13 and Paul sums it up beautifully when he says, "For, brethren, you have been called unto liberty." And that is a wonderful and affirming truth. We who are in Christ do enjoy freedom. We are free in Christ. Jesus said in John 8, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," verse 32. In verse 36 He said, "And if the Son shall make you free, you shall be truly free." So we are free and we are truly free. And Romans 6, 7 and 8 says we're free from sin, we're free from the law, we celebrate our freedom, our Christian freedom, freedom in Christ.

Now it's a wonderful thing to be free in Christ, just as it's a wonderful thing to be free in the nation in which we live. But the question that comes to mind which we have to deal with is just exactly what does our Christian freedom mean. And how do we enjoy our Christian freedom without abusing it? How do we contain our Christian freedom within acceptable limitations so that when we say we're free in Christ we don't run amok in terms of unrighteousness? How do we control that? Well that's what Paul wants to deal with here. He's very concerned that having announced through these first five chapters that we are free, that people understand what that freedom means and how that freedom is controlled. For freedom that is out of control is going to be lost, it's going to be forfeited.

So, beginning in verse 13 he introduces the summary statement that we've been called to liberty. We have been called to liberty. We are free in Christ, a wonderful, wonderful thought. And we understand that. And even people who would be under a bondage type government would understand by contrast what it would be like to really be free. Freedom is a wonderful thing. Its implications are far-reaching.

But what does it mean to be free? And how do we express that freedom in a way that is pleasing to God? I'm so concerned about this, people, because I see so much abuse of this. You know, it's amazing how much tolerance of sin there is in the church. It's amazing how people in high places in the church, prominent people, can fail dramatically and profoundly in great sin and yet be ushered right back into a place of prominence as if nothing ever happened. It's amazing what is being taught by people. One Bible teacher saying, you know, your sinful flesh is going to do its thing, so let it go, you can't do a thing about it anyway, so don't worry about it, don't worry about confessing your sin; certainly we should never have church discipline because why would we discipline something that is sinful and can't control itself? And so there's a pathway provided in which sin can walk and express itself. This kind of abuse of freedom is frightening. And I think it's taking a tremendous toll on the church.

You know, from knowing me, that I have a great burden for a holy church. In fact, if there's one

ringing theme that I try to communicate to these men that I've been ministering to, and women, over the last three or four weeks, it is this ringing theme that the church is never going to be the church it's supposed to be until it becomes spiritually committed to obedience to the Word of God. It isn't methods and tricks and gimmicks that make a church what it ought to be, it is a commitment to a life of integrity and a walk of purity and holiness. And it's got to start at the top and filter all the way down. And until the church leadership gets its act together in terms of purity of life, there's little hope for the rest. This is the burden. We've got to get an understanding of what our Christian freedom means, and that is exactly what is in the heart of Paul. And I'm not going to say anything to you that's particularly new or profound, I do want to refresh your mind about these things and I want to refresh our own position as a church so we know where we stand.

Now in order to make clear how this freedom is controlled, Paul gives us three things that freedom is not. And they act as the...as the confining principles to our freedom. They act as those things which prevent the abuse of freedom. First of all, he says, Christian freedom is not the freedom to indulge the flesh. It is not the freedom to indulge the flesh.

To say we are free in Christ doesn't mean we are free to give expression to our sinfulness. One man said to me on one occasion, "I believe that God is pleased when you sin." Now how in the world you could come to that point I'll never know. He used to come to this church but doesn't any longer. God is pleased when you sin. And I said to him, "Why?" He said, "Because it gives God the opportunity to express His grace."

I said, "You're just bringing up the very argument that Paul knocked down in Romans 6, 'Shall we sin that grace may abound? God forbid.'" Yes where grace...where sin abounded grace does much more abound, but that isn't license to more sin, that's to be thankful for what God has done with the sin that is there.

Now what is it then that confines our freedom? What are the limits to our liberty? First of all, Christian freedom is not freedom to indulge the flesh, verse 13, "Brethren, you have been called to liberty, only do not use liberty for an occasion to the flesh." That's very clear. You're not so free that you can allow your flesh to do whatever it wants. Paul said, "I beat my body to bring it in to subjection," 1 Corinthians 9, "lest in preaching to others I myself should be cast away." And what he is saying there is that when I preach to others, if I fall into sin myself, I will be a castaway. And the word means disqualified. People say, "Can you disqualify yourself in the ministry?" Sure you can if you stand up to preach to others but in preaching to others you fall into sin, you become disqualified, cast away.

Now what is the flesh? Well the flesh is not what your clothes are hanging on. I mean, that's your body, that's a part of it. Your flesh, mark this, is your fallen humanness, it is your unredeemed human identity. It is your earthy, mortal, physical body. It is your humanness twisted with self-centeredness and prone to sin. May I add this? It is the unredeemed part of you.

Now let me give you a little quick explanation. Romans 6, 7 and 8, those of you who were with us on Sunday night will remember this, when you were saved your inner man was recreated. When you came to Jesus Christ, old things are passed away and behold all things became what? New. You died, Romans 6 says, you died and... I mean, you were crucified and crucifixion results in death. The old you is dead. The old man is dead. And you have risen to walk in newness of life and the life of God dwells in your soul. And you possess the incorruptible, divine nature. The deepest truest part of you is a redeemed part, totally transformed and so linked to Jesus Christ that there's no way to tell

where you stop and He starts. And that's why in Galatians 2:20 it says, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me." What Paul is saying is the old I is dead, a new I lives but it isn't just a new I, it's also Christ, and I don't know where I end and He begins because I possess the divine nature. First Corinthians 6:17, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit."

The deepest, truest part of you is redeemed and fit for heaven. It is a holy self. It is a new creation in which dwells righteousness. The problem with you is that that new redeemed part of you, that transformed part of you which has been made like Christ, which is righteous, which loves the law of God and loves purity and loves holiness and seeks to do what is right is incarcerated in your flesh. It is imprisoned in your humanness. And your problem is going to exist because your new self, Romans 7, delights in the law of God after the inner man, longs to fulfill the law of God, wants to serve the law of God, but sin gets in the way. And Paul says it is not I but it is sin that dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. The real I longs to do what is right, but the sin that dwells in my flesh pulls me down. And he's absolutely consistent every time he talks about this; he always puts sin in the flesh. It's not in your new creation. You're already fit for heaven in the new creation. You've already been redeemed in the inner man. All you're waiting for, Romans 8 says, is the redemption of your what? Your body. And that's the full and complete part of your salvation for which we wait, and it is that to which Paul referred in Romans 13:14 when he said, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." And we have had that inner salvation and we need that outer salvation, that redemption of the body, where we get a body like His body. Philippians 3:20, where we get rid of these vile bodies and receive a glorious body like His body.

So, we're still waiting for the redemption of our body, the redemption of our flesh, the salvation of the outer man to go along with the salvation of the inner man. And that is why it is not yet manifest to the world who we are. We're not yet revealed. It is not yet manifest who we are. "Beloved, it does not yet appear what we shall be." That will happen at what Paul calls the glorious liberation of the children of God. That's the full liberation when we're saved not only in terms of the inner man but when we're saved in terms of the outer man and exchange our vile body for a glorified body like Christ's. But until that time we have this problem of the new man battling against this flesh. It is not reigning sin anymore, for the reigning of sin is broken, but it is residual sin, it is residing sin and it finds its place in our flesh. And so Paul says the tendency in Christian freedom is going to be to say I'm saved, I'm redeemed, I'm forgiven, I'm a new creature, I'm covered by grace and mercy, my sins are cared for and the flesh will play on that and want to exercise its freedom to sin on the basis of a promised forgiveness. And so the tendency is then for us to say we are free and since all our sins are covered, we allow our flesh to give its expression and trust in God's promise of forgiveness.

That's true. That's true. God will forgive you. But that is an abuse of your freedom. That is an abuse of your freedom. It is the kind of abused freedom of which the false prophets in 2 Peter 2 are guilty of preaching. It says in 2 Peter 2:18, "They speak great swelling words of vanity and they allure through the lusts of the flesh through much...much wantonness, those that are just escaping from them who live in error. They promise liberty but they themselves are the servants of corruption." They promise you freedom, do false teachers, that leads to corruption. Freedom should not lead to corruption. It is given by us...given to us by the Word of God here that our freedom is controlled by the fact that it does not allow us to indulge the flesh. It is not freedom to do what you want. It is not freedom to do your own thing. Christian freedom, listen to this, is freedom from sin, not freedom to sin. The supreme ambition of Christ was to please the Father, "Not My will but Thine be done." And in Romans 15:3 it says, Paul...Paul tells us that the essence of Christian freedom is to be concerned about others, as we shall see. And then he uses Christ as the example in Romans 15:3, "Christ," he

says, "did not please Himself."

The implication for us is simple. Christian freedom does not mean we do whatever we want to do. It does not mean that we exercise ourselves in any way we want. It's like the Christian soldier in 2 Timothy 2:4, it says he does what he does to please the one who called him to be a soldier. There's still an obligation to hold the flesh in check, not to please the flesh but to please the Lord. We are responsible to do that.

And that's basic. And I know you know that. It's just that we need so often to be reminded of that because it seems as though there's a new kind of surging sense of freedom that really is nothing more than license. It's what used to be called by theologians antinomianism, *anti, nomos* being the Greek word for "law." It's an attitude against the law. Well, I'm free from the law, it says in Romans 6, I'm not under the law anymore, I'm not under sin's dominion anymore and I'm free to do what I want to do. And therein lies the justification for a freedom to do evil. I'm appalled at how many people think they're free to do what is clearly forbidden in the Word of God, under the idea that they are indulging their flesh and God is going to be forgiving and God is going to be gracious and so forth.

So, the first essential parameter for controlling and confining our freedom to God-ordained limits is self-control, self-control, not the indulging of the flesh. If you think you can go out and do anything you want, you're abusing your freedom. You're misconstruing your freedom totally. It is freedom to do what is right. For the first time in your life when you became a Christian you had the capacity to do what was really right, what was really good, what was really true, what was really honest and just and righteous. It isn't that you're now free to do whatever you want.

And there's a second controlling factor here. Since we have been called to liberty, first of all, it does not mean that we are free to indulge the flesh and secondly, and this is so important, it does not mean that we are free to injure others. There is this idea also that our freedom means we can do anything we want no matter how it affects anybody. I mean, I see that in our society. Our society, first of all, feels that it's free to indulge its passions, wouldn't you say that? Our society thinks that freedom in America means freedom to be a pervert. And now our society is very concerned to give rights to perverts.

We've come to the place where we have totally abused freedom in that sense. And secondly, our society feels now that I'm free to do whatever I want, I'm the little god, I'm the little tin god, I'm the little King Tut, I'm the little monarch of my little world and I'm going to do what I want to do and I really don't care how it affects you is another kind of reigning mentality. And that has found its way into the church, too, where people in the church are more concerned about self than they are about anybody else. And so they, in the name of freedom, think they can do anything they want to do and they really don't care how it affects anybody else, which is the antithesis of what Paul says. Look at the end of verse 13. "You have been called to liberty, only not to use your liberty as an occasion." By the way, the word "occasion" there means, actually it's a base of operations, it's a military term. Don't use your freedom in Christ as the base of operations from which your flesh is activated. "But," here's the second factor, "by love serve one another." And then verse 15, "If you bite and devour" — "bite" is a word used most often in the Bible of snake bites and "devour" means to gulp down totally — but if you bite people like a poisonous snake and devour one another, you better take heed that you're not consumed yourself, is what he's saying.

And here he points up this, that if you think you have your liberty just to devour other people, you're

wrong. Your liberty is to serve people. So we say, secondly, Christian freedom is not freedom to injure other people. It's not freedom that says, "Hey, I'm free in Christ, I'll do whatever I want, I really don't care how it affects you." That's not it at all. There are people who say, well, I can do anything I want, I can be involved in anything I want, I can take any particular attitude toward gray area things that I want, I don't care what anybody thinks, I'm free in Christ; a very egoistic, self-centered attitude.

You have never been given liberty for the purpose of hurting someone else, no matter how weak that person is. The word "love" there, by the way, is *agape*. It means "divine love," and its most characteristic element is self-sacrifice. If there's anything true about that word it is that it is self-sacrificial. You are to serve each other in self-sacrificing love. You're not to injure each other. You're to serve each other. And the word *douloō* is used there, it means a bond slave. So your freedom is a kind of slavery. We are free, but in a sense our freedom involves a slavery to the needs of others. And the essence of real Christian freedom is that paradox of freedom and slavery in which I am free to do what is right, I am free to serve the Lord, but my freedom is confined by the fact that I am not free to do anything that injures you. My freedom is controlled by that.

Look with me for a moment to a text we'll be looking at in detail very soon in our study of Romans, Romans 14. And here I think you can get an insight into what Paul means by this from another one of his writings. In Romans 14 Paul is dealing with a very common problem. What you've got here is the obvious situation in a church where you have some that are strong and really understand their freedom, and some that are weak and don't. Let me tell you what I mean. Let's say you're a Gentile and you're living in Rome and all your life you've been involved in paganism, all your life you've been involved in idolatry. You've gone to the pagan temples, you have offered your sacrifices to the idols, you've been involved in the drunken feasts and the orgies, you've bought the meat that was offered to idols, you've eaten the meat offered to idols. That's a part of your whole culture, the whole thing, the feasts, the festivals, the music, the idolatry, the orgies, the whole shot.

Alright, you come to faith in Christ. Your life is totally transformed. You don't want to touch that stuff. You don't want to go near that. Everything about it is repulsive to you. Someone invites you over to have dinner and they're a Christian and they say, "We're going to have roast."

Your first thought is, "Where did you get it?"

"Well, I bought it in the butcher shop in the marketplace."

"What butcher shop?"

"Well, you know, the butcher shop down at the end of the row, down toward the far."

"The butcher shop where they sell the meat that was offered to the idols in the temple, the meat they didn't eat, they take out and sell? That butcher shop? I'm not eating it. I'm not eating meat offered to idols."

And so you say to the guy, "What's an idol? An idol is nothing anyway. Enjoy, eat up, you're free." And you're right.

And he says, "I can't do it."

So, you sit down and have a feast and he is literally offended by that because he sees you as doing something connected to pagan idolatry. Now in time he'll grow to understand that as he matures, but at that particular point he can't handle it. It smacks of everything in the past to him which he hates and from which he has been redeemed.

On the other hand, let's say you have a Jew and this Jew has just come to Christ and you invite him over and say, "We're having ham." Now he's a new Christian and you tell him, "Look, all things are to be received with thanksgiving and there's no more unclean things." And you can read him even from the words of the Lord to Peter on Acts 10 about how that's all over with.

And he's going to say to you, "I'm sorry, I gag on it. I can't see that. I've been raised that way. I can't handle that."

But you go ahead and do it anyway and violate his conscience and force him to violate his conscience, you're going to set him back. He can't handle that. He's weak in terms of understanding his freedom.

So that's what happens in the church. So as Paul writes this epistle to the Romans he wants them to be able to handle that. So in verse 1 he says, "The one that is weak in the faith, receive and don't get into some kind of disputation with him over doubtful things." In other words, things that aren't necessarily moral issues like whether you eat this or don't eat that, or whether you eat something bought out of the market that was connected to the temple, or wasn't, or whether you worship on this day or don't worship on that day, or whether you go through some Jewish festival or don't. Don't get into all that stuff; just receive him in the faith. And the implied word "received" is to take him as he is and not offend him. "One believes that he can eat anything and another one is eating only vegetables." Why? Because he's afraid to eat meat because it might be meat that was once somewhere offered to an idol so he just becomes vegetarian to avoid that. Well don't make it hard on him. "Let not the one that eats despise the one that doesn't eat. And don't judge him." God's received him into the kingdom; give him some space to grow. Don't judge him. The Lord will make him stand, verse 4 says.

Then he goes in to the illustration of the Sabbath. Some people want to hold the Sabbath, some don't. Don't make an issue out of that. I ran into that all the time on the East Coast, when I was growing up as a little kid; they held the Sunday to be a sacred day. In fact, I remember here in Southern California, I remember the week at Grace Church when stores announced they would be open on Sunday. It hasn't been that long ago that you couldn't even shop on a Sunday in this area, apart from a market or a drug store. Because people traditionally held that Sunday was a special day. In Canada they still do that. All stores are closed on Sunday, all shopping malls, everything is closed. That's a part of their tradition, part of their religious heritage, the sacredness of the day.

And I remember as a little kid I had to sit, you know, at home in my little Lord Fauntleroy suit all day Sunday. Couldn't read the paper, couldn't go out the door, couldn't throw a ball, couldn't do a thing, take a walk, nothing, sit there all day because it was the Lord's Day, couldn't read the funnies, absolutely couldn't do anything.

Well, what we wound up doing was just sort of pigging out all day at the table because the one thing



you could do was eat. And that's in the days when we had these huge feasts. We'd come home from church and, I mean, it was like Thanksgiving every Sunday in those days because we couldn't do anything but eat all day. And there were a lot of people who didn't do anything they shouldn't do on the Sabbath, but were about fifty pounds overweight which is another problem, obviously. Maybe that wasn't a necessary corollary but it did turn out to be that way frequently.

But there are some people who still hold onto that. And there are some people who don't. Well, if you're in an environment of people who do, then don't flaunt your liberty to the point where you offend those people. Learn to set your liberty aside for the sake of their growth and for the sake of demonstrating love to them.

He goes on to talk about this. Verse 13, he says, "Don't put a stumbling block or occasion to fall in a brother's way." Some people are going to see things as unclean and if he sees it as unclean, and he's grieved with your food, verse 15, then stop eating that food, set it aside. Don't destroy him for your food's sake for whom Christ died, and then let your good, which is your freedom, be evil spoken of because it's abused. And people say, "Well, you know, what about drinking wine?" And my answer to that just comes in verse 21, "It's good neither to eat meat or drink wine or anything by which your brother stumbles, is offended, or made weak." There are people that would be offended by that, obviously.

So, there are places where our liberty stops. Our liberty is a controlled and confined liberty. It is not freedom to indulge the flesh and it is not freedom to injure others. In verse 15 he says, "Rather the ones that are strong, the ones that really have their freedom and understand it fully ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves, but everyone of us please his neighbor for his good to edification, for even Christ pleased not Himself."

So the point is this, you could talk about that politically. If our...if the people in America really understood that freedom will be maintained when freedom is confined as a freedom that does not injure others but a freedom that loves others and seeks the good of others, now you've got a freedom that's really going to be a freedom enjoyed. A freedom that is self-indulgent and self-centered and selfish, a freedom that says I'm going to do what I'm going to do no matter what you think is a...is an abused freedom. It is an abused freedom. And it is so in the church and, I think, to the detriment and tragedy of the church.

So he says back in chapter 8 and verse...chapter 5, I mean, in Galatians verse 5 that such...I'm sorry, chapter 5 verse 13, that the issue here is by love to serve one another — I was thinking of Romans 8 — by love to serve one another and then in verse 15 he kind of gives the other side of it. If you do bite and devour one another you better beware because you're going to get devoured yourself. In other words, freedom that is abused, that turns in to injuring others is just going to bring injury to itself. You destroy others and you yourself are going to be destroyed in the process.

So, Christian freedom is not freedom to indulge the flesh, and it's not freedom to injure others. Thirdly, and the final one that Paul brings up is that Christian freedom is not freedom to ignore the law of God. And this also is misunderstood. Some people think that when it says in the Bible we are free from the law in Romans 6, and you can read it right there, and Romans 7 it says it in verse 6 also, some people think that being free from the law means that we're no longer responsible to obey the moral commandments of God. Nothing could be further from the truth. It has absolutely nothing to do with that. You say, "Well what does it mean to be free from the law?" It means to be free from

trying to earn salvation through keeping the law. It means to be free from trying to maintain God's standard of holiness without divine enablement.

You see, if you don't know Christ and you don't possess the Spirit of God, you're trying to earn your own salvation by keeping the law, you're trying to be holy and righteous by human effort and that is an impossible thing. That struggle is a bondage that damns the soul. When you come to Christ you are free from having to earn your salvation through law-keeping and you are free from trying to live up to God's standard by yourself. You understand? That's the freedom, not freedom to do wrong. Being free from the law doesn't mean I'm free to do whatever I want whenever I want. That isn't it at all. In fact, in the context of Romans 6 it says that he that is dead is freed, he that is dead is freed. And then he says you're not under the law. What do you mean by that? What he means is that we were under the bondage of the law, trying to keep the law and the law wanted us dead — the wages of sin being death — and when we died in Christ we paid the penalty of sin, we rose to walk in newness of life, we are now free from the law in the sense that we're free from the penalty. We're free from the penalty of the law. We're free from trying to keep the law unsuccessfully and therefore being killed by the law eternally. We die in Christ to rise and walk in newness of life.

That's what freedom is. It's not freedom from doing right, freedom from obeying God's moral commandment. It is freedom from the penalty of the law for an inability to keep its commandments, that penalty being paid in Christ. And when you put your faith in Christ, you die in Christ, you rise in Christ, therefore you've paid the penalty, you're free from the penalty. You're free from that endless struggle of human achievement to try to please God in the flesh. You're free from that. The morals haven't changed, the ethics haven't changed, but you're free from the penalty of failing to keep them and you're free from having to try to keep them in your own human strength. It is not freedom to ignore the law. And verse 14 points that out. "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." We fulfill the law.

In Romans 8 it says that the law could not, in that it was weak through the flesh, give us life. It couldn't do it. The law couldn't do it. But God sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin condemned sin in the flesh and then we were set free. And it says the righteousness of the law now is fulfilled in us. The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us. Now for the first time we do what is right, we obey the Word of God. And the righteousness of the law which we couldn't keep before Christ we can now keep after Christ has changed our life. The law is fulfilled. And its summation is in the one truth that comes originally from Leviticus 19:18, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Love is the fulfilling of the whole law. In Romans 13 Paul says that, Romans 13:8 to 10, love is the fulfilling of the whole law. In other words, if I love God I won't make any graven images, if I love God I won't take His name in vain, if I love God I'll remember that day of worship to glorify Him. And then if I love my neighbor as myself, I'm not going to murder my neighbor, I'm not going to steal from my neighbor, I'm not going to lie to my neighbor, I'm not going to covet my neighbor's possessions.

The point is, if I have true love toward God and true love toward everyone else, self-sacrificial true love, the love of God in the soul of man, then I'm going to fulfill the whole law. The law is simply a list of things which will all be fulfilled by a truly loving heart. So what God is calling us to then is a freedom that is not a freedom from doing right but a freedom to keep the law of God.

You say, "But how can that be done? Where is the energy for that?" Verse 16, "This I say then, walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." On the other hand, you will fulfill the law. And that's right back to Romans 8:4 again, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who

walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.

Now listen, when you become a Christian, instead of having an external set of rules to keep, which over defines everything, you have an internal personal presence which leads you into righteousness. Before you were a Christian the laws were all there but you had no ability to keep them. Now that you're a Christian the law is still there but the Spirit of God in you enables you to fulfill the law. So Christian freedom is not freedom to ignore the law, it is freedom to obey the law. Before, you had no ability to do that. You were a slave to sin, a slave to unrighteousness. Now you're free to fulfill the law of God in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to walk in the Spirit? Walk is the idea of daily conduct, daily conduct, routine life pattern. And how do you walk in the Spirit? Very simply, where does the Spirit reveal His will? Where does the Spirit give us His direction? In the Word of God, right? I don't think walking in the Spirit is mystical or ethereal, I don't think it's some kind of heavenly thing, I don't think it's some kind of ecstatic emotional experience. Walking in the Spirit is very simple, it is walking in obedience to the mind and will of the Spirit of God. And that means to be saturated with the Word of God so that the Word of Christ dwells in you richly and that then, that word then becomes the control factor used by the Spirit of God to lead you into obedience. It isn't enough to become a Christian and then stand around in a vacuum of knowledge without any information out of the Word of God and hope everything turns out right. We have to be saturated in the Word of God on a day-by-day basis so that the Word of God implanted in the mind and the heart becomes the control vehicle by which the Spirit of God leads us as we live day by day. And when we're filled with the Word of God, controlled by the Spirit of God, walk in obedience to that revealed will of God, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh, but we will fulfill the law by loving each other.

I wish... I wish that our nation understood these limits of liberty. I wish that our...that our nation understood that freedom doesn't mean freedom to indulge your flesh to any perversion you want. I wish they knew it doesn't mean freedom to be egotistical and self-centered no matter what it does to anybody else. I wish they knew that it wasn't a freedom that means that everybody can live and believe and do whatever they want to do and there are no rules. I wish they believed that. They don't. But even worse, I'm afraid the church to some extent may have fallen prey to the same mentality and we need to be reminded that we are free, but freedom is not the freedom to indulge the flesh and it is not freedom to injure other people and it is not freedom to disobey the law of God.

In fact, if we could sum up our...our freedom, I would suggest to you that our liberty is controlled by three things. It is controlled by purity of life, loving others, and obeying God's Word. And those are the things that cause us to walk in the Spirit. Those are the things that cause us to enjoy to the fullest the freedom we have in Christ. Walk in the Spirit, walk according to the Word of God revealed. And when you study every day and when you hear the Word of God every Lord's Day and you must, my friends, you must. If you don't expose yourself to that it grows cold in your heart. When you come and you hear the Word and you study the Scripture and you grow and you're digging and you're involved, the Word of God is on the surface in your heart and you begin to control your behavior by the Word of God. And that's what it is to walk in the Spirit, for the Spirit knows nothing in terms of self-revelation except what is revealed in the Word. And He takes the Word and moves and shapes and channels your life.

You know, there are some people who think you can just control your freedom by putting down arbitrary laws, you know, your hair has to be this short, and you can't wear this kind...women can't

wear pants, I've heard that a whole lot in the last few weeks, and you've got to go to church this time and this time and this time and this time and you've got to do this and you've got to do that and you've got to sign here and you've got to give ten percent and da-dit-da-dit-da-dit, and that will make you holy.

Listen, I'm a full believer in rules, especially for young people. I think rules and I think discipline imposed on young people is the greatest thing they will ever experience because it readies them for a disciplined life. And the only people in the whole wide world that make a difference are disciplined people. The rest are baggage. That's true. So when you can teach your children discipline, that's great. But don't ever confuse that with spirituality. There are some people who are arbitrarily establishing discipline standards as if they were spirituality, and people therefore are trying to be spiritual by legalism and legalism has absolutely no ability to restrain the flesh. The only thing that can restrain the flesh is the Spirit of God. And so we must challenge people that their liberty is controlled not by arbitrary rules, but it is controlled when they do not seek to indulge their flesh, when they do not seek to injure others but to love others and when they long to obey the Word of God. And all that comes into focus when they walk in the Spirit because they're so saturated by the Word of God that the control factor is there for the Spirit of God to direct them. Therein lies the essence of true spirituality. Legalism cannot restrain the flesh. Only true spirituality can do that. And that's the work of the Spirit. Legalism without holiness is impotent hypocrisy. The Spirit of God is the issue, walking in the Spirit. That means to be controlled by the Word of God.

Well, let us enjoy our liberty but let us understand its limits and rejoice in the blessedness that comes when we obey them.

Our Father, we come at this hour closing our wonderful time together this morning with thankful hearts. We bless Your name for the privilege of worship. I thank You for this precious congregation, this beloved church, this mighty work that You have called to this time and this place in history. And I thank You, Lord, for what You've given to us, to lead us and guide us from Your Word and Your Spirit. Lord, we desire to enjoy our freedom, to live the fullness of our liberty and yet to know that our liberty has its limits if it is to be enjoyed and maintained and if Your work is to be done. Help us, Father, to understand those limits and to seek to fulfill our liberty to its fullest by walking in the Spirit, controlled by the Word of God, with the Word of Christ dwelling in us richly, fulfilling Your holy purpose for every life, we thank You for Christ's sake. Amen.

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