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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
July 21, 2019
6th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Kings 19:14-21, Luke 9:51-62
Hymns: 408; 410; 315:1-5; 409:1

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Galatians 5:1, 13-25

¹ Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. ...

¹³ For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴ And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Understanding Freedom

We live in a free country. We enjoy freedoms in the United States of America that most people in the world only dream about possessing. However we also understand how easily these freedoms can be and are often misused and abused. Freedom of assembly is used by extremists to plot harm and injury against people they see as being inferior or less desirable than they are. Freedom of the press is misused to spread gossip and sometimes flat out lies about others. Even freedom of religion is at times used to attempt to cover illicit drug use, and even promote hatred, and evil. Yes, and the right to bear arms is abused by some who plot murder and mayhem against their neighbor. Some might write all that off as being the dark side of human nature. That is not only an understatement but also a failure to understand that the abuse of freedom can easily lead to the loss of freedom.

As true as this is in the world's political realms it is even more true in the spiritual realms. This was Paul's concern for the Christians in the region of Galatia. He had addressed a portion of his concern already with the danger to spiritual freedom that was found in polluting the teaching of salvation by grace with ideas of adding righteousness for salvation by observing the ceremonial law. He also had the concern that is addressed in our text,

that the Galatian Christians were confusing forgiveness of sins with a license to sin. This is a continuing threat to Christian freedom to our own day. So let us receive the Spirit's instruction regarding our --

THEME: Living in the Freedom of Christ.

I. Living Free from Sin and Guilt

Galatians 5:1, 13-15 "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. ...

¹³For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"

We are all used to the term "Christian liberty." I am minimizing the use of the word liberty in connection with our thoughts here because we need to avoid that confusion, the very confusion that Paul was warning against. When we speak of Christian liberty we are talking about deciding things which are neither commanded nor forbidden by God. Christ secured freedom for us, freedom from sin's guilt and condemnation, as well as freedom from sin's power to control our hearts and lives. The old evil foe would plant the idea in our heads that Christ has given us the liberty to live anyway we like, that we are free to fulfill even sinful desires. After all, Jesus takes my sins away! Some think of this as Christian liberty. If we decide that we are going to live according to the desires of our sinful flesh then we are once again enslaving ourselves in a yoke of bondage! Sin will fasten itself around our necks quite firmly and burden us once again, not only controlling our lives, but burdening our conscience with guilt and shame, putting us back under the condemnation of the law. Then one has lost that freedom that Christ Jesus secured for us at the price of

His innocent sufferings and death. So Paul exhorts us, *“Do not use liberty, (or our spiritual freedom) as an opportunity for the flesh.”* We are to use the freedom which Jesus secured for us, which He has freely given us through His Spirit to love, to serve one another, **not** take advantage of one another.

The Galatian Christians, because of the resurgence of false teaching that brought ethnic division into their congregations were bickering and backbiting and tearing into one another, Paul uses the word “devour” for this spiteful, even hateful behavior. That wasn’t coming from the Spirit of Christ. That was coming from the sinful flesh. It is too easy to think, “I am so glad we never do anything like that!” Let us not be hasty to declare ourselves free from sin. We are all guilty of at least uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbor. The devil will not stop trying to bring tension and adversity into any Christian congregation. As long as we live in this world we must be on guard, vigilant against the inroads of sin in our personal lives as well as our congregational life.

Paul continues:

Galatians 5:16-18 “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

There is always going to be that conflict within us for as long as we live. Even though we know and believe that Jesus is our Lord and Savior and we firmly believe in Him, trusting Him for love and forgiveness, we will still struggle with sin and temptation every day. Each one of us has our own chinks in the armor of faith, our own particular struggles with sin, but we need to hate the sin in our lives, not embrace it. We need to possess the attitude of heart that Paul records as he opens his own heart concerning his own struggle against the flesh. He wrote to the Roman

Christians these words which should also reflect our attitude toward sin.

Romans 7:18-19 “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice.”

Paul freely confessed “*evil is present with me*” (Romans 7:21) And he found victory, freedom from that evil in Christ, declaring: “*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” ²⁵ *I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” (Romans 7:24-25)

Paul says in our text, “*If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.*” You will not be condemned in spite of this continuous conflict between our sinful flesh and the Holy Spirit. and that freedom from the curse of the law is to be the focus of our lives.

II. Living Free to Love and Serve our Neighbor.

We know all about the things that proceed from the flesh, but it serves us well to remember that this is where the evil comes from, and it is EVIL! Jesus said; “*For from within, out of the heart of men, **proceed evil** thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,*” (Mark 7: 21)

And so Paul wrote in our text:

Galatians 5:19-21 “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

That list is pretty clear and straightforward, don't you think? And yet the world in which we live doesn't agree.

The world doesn't necessarily think of these things as being evil. Perhaps outbursts of wrath when they are on the receiving end instead of the giving end. However, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, just being filthy in one's talk and life, that's all OK among consenting adults. This is what we see in the world all the time, even among those we consider to be nice people. That is the world we live in, and that world is constantly trying to invade *your* life, *your* way of thinking, *your* way of living.

The world would minimize the seriousness of sin, but Paul makes it clear that these are sins with dire consequences that neither he nor the Lord, or for that matter any of us, should wish upon anyone; ***“those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*** (v.21) Paul is here especially warning against the embracing of sin in one's life, and making it part of one's lifestyle. That is especially dangerous, for it reveals impenitence and unbelief. Paul didn't say that there was no possibility of forgiveness. On the contrary we read in Paul's epistle to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ **And such were some of you.** But you were **washed**, but you were **sanctified**, but you were **justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

Paul points out that there were members of that Corinthian congregation who formerly had been caught up in those sins that disqualify one from entering the kingdom of God, BUT they had been washed clean by the blood of Christ, called out of the world, and justified in the name of Jesus by the Spirit of God, **by the Spirit of God.**

That same grace has cleansed us from sin's guilt and condemnation. Now having been saved from such a horrible condemnation, from such a slavery to sin, let us live in love and serve God and our neighbor.

Let us live with joy the freedom we have in Christ! Let us live those fruits which the Spirit brings into our hearts and lives. He gives us ample opportunity to love and serve one another.

Galatians 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

Each of us would really like to think that these words describe me to a T. These are the things that **the Spirit** works in our hearts and lives. It has to start with the love of God in Christ Jesus. If we don't have that pure love, that selfless love, then it remains fruits of pride and vanity and self-service. So often we hear of charitable work be strongly recommended because it makes you feel so good about yourself. Indeed it is good to use our God-given gifts in service to others, and yes, that will result in a sense of satisfaction, but let it flow first from love.

What if the people that we serve aren't appreciative, what if they are plain and simple critical, and tell you get your nose out of their business. I know one Christian brother who went way out of his way to help a person in dire circumstance, even giving them a ride hundreds of miles out of his way, only to be sued later for not fulfilling their expectations. Then what? Do we acknowledge that "*No good deed will be left unpunished,*" and pull back and love less? Do we get mad, and bitter? Do we wonder, "*What's in it for me?*" Remember those closing words of our text: Those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its

passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (v.24-25)

When we start in on somebody because this time they just went too far, STOP. STOP! Crucify the flesh within you. Shut your old adam down. Don't listen to that voice within you. That is not the way of Christ. That is not what we have received from Him. Let us do all we can to continue to live in peace and love with our neighbor always reflecting that love of Christ. It will reveal Christ to the world for the salvation of souls. Jesus has freed us from sin that we might do this. Let us live in that freedom, celebrating that freedom we have in Christ.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.