

The Fruit Of The Spirit Is True Freedom

Galatians 5:13

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Rev. Greg L. Price

Is there a more blessed word to those who are enslaved than the word “freedom”? For what do you suppose those three poor girls hungered and thirsted that were rescued in Cleveland last year after being held captive as sex slaves for years? Freedom! For what would you imagine Christians long who are tortured and held captive in prisons in Iran (like Pastor Abedini)? Freedom! For what did the children of Israel who suffered greatly under the oppression of the Egyptian Pharaoh cry out to God? Freedom! And to what does that miraculous deliverance from Egyptian slavery into glorious freedom point? Freedom from the guilt, condemnation, and power of sin, and freedom into the forgiveness, righteousness, and holiness of Jesus Christ! Dear ones, this freedom in Christ is infinitely more glorious than any freedom one might enjoy for a few brief years on this earth, because our freedom in Christ begins here and now and continues (without end) for all eternity. I submit that a Christian who does not praise God from the bottom of his/her heart daily for this freedom in Christ has forgotten the cruel bondage under which he/she once suffered (like Israel in the wilderness).

There is much talk about freedom in the world today (whether political freedom, religious freedom, sexual freedom etc.), and even much more misunderstanding as to what freedom truly is. Dear ones, true freedom is not the right to speak and act in whatever way one may choose, nor is it the right to practice whatever religion one may choose. By such false definitions, freedom would indeed consist in fulfilling the lusts of the flesh to the highest degree of immorality or in practicing the most explicit forms of idolatry and witchcraft. Such perversions of freedom, my brothers and sisters, only lead to bondage—bondage to guilt and

condemnation, bondage to sin and misery, and bondage to death and hell. It is only the God, who has created us and who redeems us through Jesus Christ, who can give us true freedom and cause us to walk in true freedom. Jesus declared, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). True freedom exists only in Christ, and outside of Christ there exists only bondage. But what does freedom have to do with our present series on The Fruit of the Spirit? Dear ones, the fruit of the Spirit **IS** the exercise of true freedom in the life of the Christian, whereas to indulge the sinful desires of the flesh is taking walking ourselves back to Egyptian bondage and back into the prison cell from which we were miraculously set free.

The context in Galatians 5, in which the Apostle Paul enumerates the fruit of the Spirit, is a context beautifully addressing our freedom and liberty in Jesus Christ. Thus, before we press forward in considering the fruit of the Spirit specified by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 (to which we will proceed in weeks to come, God willing), it is necessary to set the stage upon which the fruit of the Spirit is brought into the spotlight before our eyes. Thus, let us consider the following main points this Lord’s Day: (1) Our Freedom From The Bondage Of Legalism (Galatians 5:1-4); (2) Our Freedom From The Bondage Of The Works Of The Flesh (Galatians 5:13).

I. Our Freedom From The Bondage Of Legalism (Galatians 5:1-4).

A. The Book of Galatians is the Christian’s declaration of freedom in Jesus Christ, our Magna Charta. Martin Luther especially loved this inspired letter. He called Galatians his “Catherine” (the name of his wife) because, he said, “I am married to it.” Beloved, the Letter to the Galatians is an unfolding of our liberty in Jesus Christ, which declares us to be set free from the guilt and curse of the Law, and from the power of sin that proceeds from our corrupt nature inherited from Adam. In fact,

whatever consequences of God's curse for man's fall in Adam (whether the curse of death and hell, the power of sin, and or miseries of this life), Christ has already legally redeemed His beloved bride from them all by His death and resurrection, and shall deliver her from them all (Galatians 3:13; Galatians 1:4). Our deliverance, dear Christian, is not in question, it is an absolute certainty. Those for whom Christ died, He shall also deliver and set free from sin and all its deadly consequences. Dear ones, whatever your struggle and daily conflict with sin, you are overcomers through Jesus Christ. That is a firm hope that will never disappoint.

B. In the first four chapters of Galatians, the Apostle Paul has laid out the doctrine of justification by faith alone in the righteousness of Christ alone as being the only true gospel (Galatians 2:16). Any other "gospel" preached (whether by man or even by an angel) is declared by Paul to be a false gospel and no gospel at all (Galatians 1:6-9). The false teachers in the churches of Galatia had been much more subtle than simply declaring, "You are justified by your works (or by works alone)." These false teachers had preached a "gospel" that included faith in Christ, but they had added to faith in Christ the necessity of being circumcised in order to be declared righteous by God (Galatians 5:4). Thus, the "gospel" of the false teachers was not faith alone in Christ alone, but was rather faith in Christ + circumcision = justification. This was a fundamental departure from the true and saving gospel of Jesus Christ. In such a "gospel", there is no "good news", for "Christ shall profit you nothing" (Galatians 5:2). Because if one is going to add circumcision as necessary to his/her acceptance before God, then it is not just circumcision that must be added, but the keeping of the whole Law as necessary to one's justification (Galatians 5:3). Beloved, such a "gospel" can save no one. Such a "gospel" leaves a person yet trusting in something that he/she can do to make oneself righteous before God (even if it is an ordinance of God [baptism], or a work of obedience [love thy neighbor]). Dear ones,

we must be absolutely clear on this point: faith alone in Christ and His obedience alone is that which justifies a sinner in the sight of God. Paul declares to the Galatians (and to us as well) that when anything is added to the work of Christ for our acceptance in the sight of God, it is a bondage and not a liberty (Galatians 5:1).

1. Dear ones, it was circumcision that these false teachers were adding to faith in Christ and His righteousness, which made Christ of none effect to them. But by way of application, we need to understand that there is no lack of other works (besides circumcision) that false teachers and corrupt churches continue to add to the foundation of faith alone in Christ alone (whether it be baptism, or love, or prayer, or keeping the Sabbath, or works of obedience to all of God's commands). All these a Christian will do by way of loving obedience to Christ, but they do not secure forgiveness of sin and the imputed righteousness of Christ. To the contrary, all such works to be righteous and acceptable before God render the finished work of Christ as insufficient for our salvation. Did not Christ sound forth our liberty now and for all eternity when He declared from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30—*tetelestai*—paid in full). When we think we are adding by something we do to our perfect justification and acceptance before God, we are in effect declaring that Christ's finished work was not enough.

2. But let me add to that application, another one. If we start down that path, thinking we must make the work of Christ complete by our obedience, than we will be continually riddled with the question, "When is enough, enough?" How can I be sure that I have finally done enough or evidenced enough love in the works I have performed in order for God to be satisfied? If our justification before God depends upon us, then only absolute perfection will be enough. The Church of Rome (and other corrupt churches that walk in Rome's footsteps) even go as far as to teach that God does not promise His children an assurance, nor is it even safe to have assurance (for it will lead to a false sense of security).

and falling away). However, I submit, dear ones, that a firm assurance in the promise of a God who cannot lie is of great benefit to the Christian and is a gracious blessing in our lives (1 John 5:13). Not only in Scripture is such an assurance held out to those who believe in Christ alone, but even nature teaches us the benefits of such an assurance. Is the child who questions from hour to hour and from day to day that he is a member of his/her parent's family and not cast out from the family, is that child in a better position to grow in love, joy, and obedience, or the child who is firmly assured that he/she is in the family and not cast out? One who is continually going back to rebuild the foundation (because one believes his/her works of obedience or his/her sins have destroyed the foundation of one's justification) is one who will not be building upon the foundation a truly transformational life of godliness and bearing fruit to the glory of God.

C. Paul's emphasis in Galatians 5:1-12 is upon the liberty we have in Christ from all condemnation and works of righteousness for our righteous standing before God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Through faith alone in Christ and His righteousness alone we have legally before God passed from the sentence of death and hell and into the sentence of righteousness and life forevermore (John 5:24). Dear ones, that is the liberty in which we, as Christians, are to "stand fast" (in Galatians 5:1)—to be not moved even an inch from what Christ has secured for us in His perfect and completed work of obedience and sacrifice for us. Dear ones, be not moved from that liberty (of no condemnation and of complete justification) in Christ. Remember that is a liberty in Christ that is **foundational** to our daily transformation into the image of Christ.

II. Our Freedom From The Bondage Of The Works Of The Flesh (Galatians 5:13-26).

A. The Church of Rome and those who follow in her footsteps claim that such a freedom from all condemnation in Christ once and for all will inevitably lead to a bondage to sin and lawlessness—a carelessness as to walking in holiness and in obedience to God's commandments. It is argued by Rome (and by our own sinful love to seek our justification from something we do) that if we are once and for all set free from all of God's condemnation now and for all eternity through faith alone in Christ alone, what is there to keep us from straying away into our own lusts of the flesh, or into a complete disregard for God's commandments? It is claimed that the fear of losing one's salvation is that which keeps one walking in the straight and narrow (rather than the grace and power of Christ). However, I submit that there is no power to keep God's commandments in mere obedience apart from the grace of God that justifies and sanctifies the Christian. Legalism is simply living under the Covenant of Works which is powerless (the Covenant of Works declares the righteousness of God's Law, but provides no power to keep it). Those who follow legalism are like the Pharisees in offering their own obedience in keeping the rituals of the Church as that which will secure God's acceptance. But, dear ones, legalism cannot justify, but neither can it sanctify. Only the grace of God (in the Covenant of Grace, which Christ fulfilled perfectly for those who trust in Him), which grants us faith to trust Christ, and love to obey Christ will truly liberate us from the condemnation of the Law and from the power of sin. That is the only key to unlock the door to the prison of sin and condemnation in which man suffers and languishes (like Peter who was miraculously delivered so must we be delivered by the grace and power of Christ).

B. Whereas **justification** has to do with a **foundational** liberty in removing us from a state of cursing, condemnation, and death to a state of blessing, righteousness, and life, **sanctification** has to do with a **transformational** liberty of not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh by walking

in the works of the flesh, but rather of walking in the Spirit and bearing the fruit of the Spirit each day as we grow in ever greater conformity to the moral likeness of Jesus Christ. For you see, dear ones, the end and goal of God in justifying us (and declaring us righteous in His sight) is not simply to change our sentence from condemnation to righteousness, but the goal is to change our moral likeness from one who is self-centered to one who is Christ-centered, from one who follows the lusts of the flesh to one who follows the Holy Spirit and the commandments of Christ, from one who devours people through the works of the flesh to one who loves people through the fruit of the Spirit.

C. Paul now demonstrates that our true liberty in Christ is not a lawless liberty, a careless liberty, a self-serving liberty to serve our own corrupt desires, but is rather a glorious liberty to serve Christ and our neighbor by means of love in fulfilling the commandments of God. Dear ones, rather than leading to producing the works of the flesh (in Galatians 5:19-21), true liberty in Christ leads to producing the fruit of the Spirit (in Galatians 5:22-23), which is the very life and DNA of Jesus Christ.

D. Paul emphasizes that being set free from the condemnation of God's Law in justification, does not leave one in a lawless state wherein one is free to live as he/she pleases (which some falsely call, "living in the Spirit"). How many false teachers have misled professing Christians by teaching that in coming by faith to Christ, we no longer have obligations to walk in obedience to God's commandments? "Since Christians are no longer under the condemnation of the Law, then we can sin in order that grace may abound (Romans 6:1). That is not freedom from the power of sin. That is bondage to the power of sin from which Christ has set us free.

1. When a train rolls along the track, it is in a very good sense free to speed along to its destination. However, when a train leaves the track, it speeds in reckless bondage to destruction. So likewise is our

loving obedience to God's good Law our freedom in leading us to the likeness of Christ. What does Christ look like? He looks like (as to His moral nature) the Ten Commandments and like the Fruit of the Spirit. However, when loving obedience to God's good commandments and the fruit of the Spirit are cast away and our sinful desires are made the tracks of our life, it is only a bondage that leads to destruction ("Whosoever committeth sin [i.e. lives in unrepentant sin] is the servant of sin [i.e. he is in bondage to sin]" John 8:34).

2. And dear ones, there is no tyrant so vile and so cruel as our corrupt nature. Just because the Christian is delivered from the curse of sin and is judicially forgiven all his/her sins, and is declared righteous through faith alone in Christ alone, is not an excuse to sin all the more, but is the very cause and reason for the Christian to be filled with love for Christ and thankful obedience to His commandments.

3. Dear ones, Paul makes it ever so clear that this freedom in Christ is not without law, but that this liberty in Christ is a glorious freedom to walk in an obedience to God's Law and in producing the fruit of the Spirit that is fulfilled and made complete in love (love for God and love for our neighbor, Galatians 5:13-14; Matthew 22:36-40). Dear ones, love for God and our neighbor does not replace God's Law. Love fulfills God's Law (i.e. love completes God's Law). If love completes and makes full God's Law, then God's Law cannot be said to be annulled, replaced, or cast away in the New Covenant (Romans 13:8-10 and 1 Timothy 1:5). In fact, the Apostle John declares (in 1 John 5:3), "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." Why are God's good commandments not grievous to the Christian? Because God's love turns God's commandments into our greatest delight to keep as an expression of our thankful heart.

4. Thus, true Christian liberty does not lead us to satisfy our own selfish desires, but rather leads us to lay down our lives for one another in love for one another. Love is expressed in sacrificial giving of

ourselves to serve God and one another (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:25). Husbands, you are called to lead your wives by laying down your lives for them and by winning their hearts to follow you as you follow Christ. Love is denying ourselves (not indulging ourselves), taking up our cross and nailing our sinful self and desires to that cross. And where the fruit of love through sacrificial giving to our neighbor is not being grown and shown, we will rather be devouring and consuming one another like wild beasts. Without the fruit of love, we will become cannibals , feeding upon one another with anger, resentment, estrangement, jealousy, unforgiveness, hatred, envy, and a frozen heart (Galatians 5:15).

E. Paul then contrasts bondage (which he identifies as “the works of the flesh”) with freedom (which he identifies as “the fruit of the Spirit”). In the life of every Christian, there is a war in progress in which the flesh and its works battle against the Spirit and His fruit (Galatians 5:17; Romans 7:22-23). The “flesh” is the corrupt nature that we have inherited from Adam that revels in indulging our own sinful desires in our thoughts, word, and deeds. But though this battle rages in the life of a Christian, our liberty in Christ is the precious, blood-bought declaration that the flesh (or corrupt nature) will not and cannot be victorious in the life of the Christian. For though God allows the flesh to war against the Spirit, the Spirit is almighty to save. And therefore, the fruit of the Spirit will be victorious over the works of the flesh (in subduing them as we commune with Christ as branches drawing life from the vine, and as we in sacrificial love serve God and our neighbor). But why does God allow such a struggle to continue in the life of the Christian?

1. To remind us of the prison and bondage from which we have been delivered, so that we grow in our hatred for it.

2. To reveal to us the weakness of our own mere determination and resolve to overcome the flesh (the Covenant of Works).

3. To draw us to Christ (the power of His death and resurrections alone) as our only hope to overcome the works of the flesh.

F. Note Paul's summary list of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. These works of the flesh might be placed in four separate categories: (1) Sins of sexual immorality ("adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness"); (2) Sins of false religion ("idolatry, witchcraft"); (3) Sins of contention in destroying peace among brethren ("hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders"); and (4) Sins of immoderate excess ("drunkenness, revellings"). As we consider in greater detail the fruit of the Spirit, we will be coming back to show the contrast that exists between the fruit of the Spirit (which is true freedom) and the works of the flesh (which is a bondage to the flesh).

Dear ones, as we turn our attention to the baptism of one of our dear covenant children, let us rejoice in the fact that baptism is a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace and our freedom from all condemnation of the Law and freedom from the power of sin. Baptism signifies and seals the work of Christ in His death and resurrection in delivering His people from the curse of the Law and in setting them free to stand before Him in the righteousness of Christ and in setting them free to walk by the Spirit in loving obedience to God's commandments and to produce the fruit, the life, the DNA of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-4). Your baptism is your badge of freedom in Christ. It is your badge of victory in Christ.

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