

**Walking by the Spirit
Galatians 5:13-26
September 26, 2012**

The basic premise of our text for this evening is that we have been called unto liberty.

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty . . .
Galatians 5:13

And by this, Paul means that the Gentile Galatians are free from the Mosaic Law. Paul has proven this premise in the first few chapters of Galatians. He has shown that the Law was temporary, that the Law was inadequate to save and that the Law was a form of bondage.

And Jesus came as the fulfillment of the Law. He came as the substance behind all the types. And He came specifically to take the Jews out from under the Law.

God sent forth his Son . . . to redeem them that were under the law.

Galatians 4:4, 5

The Law was given as a temporary measure until the seed should come. (Galatians 3:19) And when the seed (Jesus) came, the Law was abolished. In other places, Paul specifically says that the Law is done away.

For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

II Corinthians 3:11

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances . . .

Ephesians 2:15

And so in the new administration under Jesus there is freedom from that old administration. And that forms the premise upon which our message is based this morning. We are not under that old Mosaic economy. We are free from it.

So what are the effects of being out from under that old way? How should we conduct ourselves now that the Mosaic Law is not the rule of life? Now that we are under Christ and not under Moses, what should we do? And we answer that question first by establishing that,

We are not to use our liberty for an occasion to the flesh.

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh . . .

Galatians 5:13

Apparently Paul anticipated the natural objection to his doctrine of liberty. He knew some would say, "Well then, if we are out from under the Law, then we can indulge the flesh with impunity."

It seems to me that this would not be the reaction of a true Christian but it would be the reaction of an unrepentant sinner. "Oh, boy," he says. I am out from under the Law. Where is the nearest bar? Where is the brothel? Show me the way to the sin house because I am free."

And I say, "Who has told you that you are free, you unrepentant wretch? You who still love your sin, why do you think that Christ has redeemed *you* from the Law? You who would prefer a whorehouse to a church, what makes you think that *you* are out from under the curse?"

How offensive is this, unrepentant sinners trying to claim the privileges of God's saints. It is an offense to the cross. It is offensive to Jesus and it is offensive to the saints of God.

Let me say unequivocally, "Unrepentant sinners have no freedom." They are in bondage to every requirement of God. They are not free from it. They are bound by it. God has imposed His Law and they will be judged out of the books of His Law according to their works.

The unrepentant sinner is not out from under the curse of the Law. He is thoroughly cursed. And the Law of God will be read at his final hearing and he will be judged according to his

works and he will be sentenced to eternal death.

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever is not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:12-15

So please don't think that you are free from the Law, those of you who are yet in your sins. Freedom is not for you. Yes, if you were given freedom you would use it as an occasion to indulge the flesh. If God suspended the Law for you, then you would sin all the more.

But freedom is for the people of God and the people of God only. It is not for the world in general, but it is for God's people only. Freedom is not for the hogs wallowing in the mire. It is not for the followers of Satan. It is not for those who love sin and hate righteousness. Freedom is not for those who despise Christ, for they would surely turn freedom into licentiousness. But freedom is the wonderful gift for the people of God.

Freedom is for those for whom Christ died. Freedom is for those who Christ has redeemed from the Law. Freedom is only for the regenerate. Freedom is for those who have a new nature. Freedom is for those who have been given the Spirit of God. Those are the only ones who have freedom from the Law.

Freedom from the Law is for a very narrow group of people. It was not for the Judaizers, but it was for the Galatians.

I would they were even cut off which trouble you, for, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty.

Galatians 5:12, 13

Paul wishes that the Jewish teachers would have a slip of the knife and castrate themselves. They have not been called unto liberty. But as to his Galatian converts, *they* have been called unto liberty.

But the principle is - liberty is not for the sake of

indulging the flesh.

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh.

Galatians 5:13

The same is true of God's grace. It is not designed so that we might sin the more.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.

Romans 6:1

It is an absurdity to think that God has given us freedom for the purpose of allowing us to freely indulge the flesh. His intention is just the opposite. He has set us free to allow us to serve Him without the compulsion of the Law.

Example: When I first started playing golf I bought a special glove that had a metal plate imbedded in the top of the glove to prevent me from cupping my left wrist. Your wrist should be relatively straight and not cupped during the swing. Now this special glove was a training glove. It trained you not to cup your wrist. It was kind of like a law. It was a restraining device. It forced you to do right. But one day, I decided to take that glove off. And I was set free from that old training device. Now, I wasn't set free so that I might go right back to the same mistake. I was set free so that I might swing correctly on my own without restraint.

And this is why God sets us free from the Law. He sets us free so that we might serve Him freely, without compulsion.

There is a different constraining force for a Christian

For the criminal, the law constrains him. He doesn't steal your car because he is afraid of the law. For the unregenerate, the law of God written in his conscience is his only restraint. But God has set the Christian free from the law. God has forgiven the Christian. Furthermore, God has forgiven the Christian for all time and forever. God will not impute sin to the Christian's account. (Romans 4:8) God has told the Christian on the front

end that the books of the law will not be read against him.

So, it is not fear of the law that constrains the Christian. He has been set free from the penalty of the law. So what is it that constrains him? Why, it is love.

. . . only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Galatians 5:13, 14

Freedom works, because the heart of the Christian has been melted in love toward God. God can freely forgive us and turn us loose from the penalties of the law, and we will not use that freedom to sin against Him.

It is love not law that is the constraining force. It is his love in loving us that constrains us. And then we love Him.

We love Him, because He first loved us.

1 John 4:19

We no longer trudge reluctantly to the temple under the burden of the Law. But we run happily to serve Him from day to day because we love Him. We no longer grit our teeth under the tedious requirements of the Law, but our heart races to serve Him under the constraint of love.

Example: Would you rather have a child who obeys you because he fears a spanking, or a child who obeys you because he loves you?

And so, Jesus would rather be served out of love. And the only way that Jesus can truly be served out of love is if he sets you free from the law. The law compels you to act in such and such a way. But Jesus sets you free to follow your heart.

So, we have seen that we are not to use our liberty for an occasion to the flesh and that Christians are constrained not by bondage to the law but by love. And now we see that,

Liberated Christians are empowered for obedience by the Holy Spirit of God.

This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

Galatians 5:16

Now when you come to this passage of Scripture you are holding your breath, because it seems like Paul is about to give you the key to the Christian life, doesn't it?

Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

Here we go. Finally, someone is going to tell me how to overcome the flesh. Finally, after all these years, I will find the secret to the Christian life. From now on, I will have it! I will press the button and have victory! Aha, it is walking in the Spirit that is the victory! Now let's read a little further and see how to walk in the Spirit.

But as you read a little further you are quite disappointed because Paul never tells you how to do it! If he would only tell you how to walk in the Spirit, you could live victoriously. But Paul never tells you how.

If you get on the internet and listen to sermons on this passage you will find that most preachers present this passage in just this way, as though they are about to tell you the secret. And at the end of the sermon you are so empty and disappointed, because the secret never quite made its way out of the vagueness of this phrase, "Walk in the Spirit."

Now I want to tell you right up front that you are not going to have a "How To" manual on the Christian life by listening to my sermon on this passage. If there was a magic potion or a set of 12 easy steps for serving Christ and crucifying the flesh, then it would have been published long ago. I am confident that there is no magic wand that you can wave to make the old sin nature leave you alone. There is no mechanism that you can turn on in order to operate by the Spirit and to shut out the flesh. But let me offer my viewpoint on what Paul means when he says, "Walk by the Spirit and ye shall not fulfill the lusts

of the flesh.”

Even though this is written in the form of a command, “Walk in the Spirit,” we are nowhere told how to do that. I don’t know about you, but when I read that as a command, I am frustrated because I would love to walk in the Spirit, but I don’t know exactly how to do it. And so, it seems to me that this statement by Paul is intended more in the nature of a promise than a command. Paul is promising the Galatians, and us, that the Holy Spirit of God is a powerful force in us. It is a divine force within each Christian that has the effect of overcoming the flesh.

Even though I cannot tell you exactly how to walk in the Spirit, I think I can assure you that if you are a Christian, you have a dynamic that resides in you that is powerful and fully capable of overcoming the flesh. We are not left in our own helplessness to control our fleshly nature but we are given the Holy Spirit of God. That’s why Paul can say,

Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

This implies that the Spirit is a power within you that is absolutely more powerful than your own sin nature.

If there is a magic potion, it is the Holy Spirit within us. The magic potion will never be anything that we can do. That would be rather legalistic, wouldn’t it? What if Paul said, “Here is how to walk by the Spirit, Pray at 10, 2 and 4 like a Dr. Pepper Christian every day, witness to three people every day, then go home and read three chapters of the Bible every night. That is how to walk in the Spirit.” That is just too outward and rote, isn’t it? You can do those things without loving God at all.

So, I think the winning dynamic is the very presence of the Holy Spirit within you. It is not so much you as it is Him. Let me ask you this question. Does your walk activate the Holy Spirit, or does the Holy Spirit activate your walk. It seems to me that the promise is that you have the very power of God within you and that power within you will cause you to walk in a way that is pleasing to God. In other words, He will lead you. His power will prevail in you.

Now I know that is not terribly satisfying. But I think at least in part, that is the message of this verse – that you have been given the very power of God in you and that power, His power, is the dynamic that will ultimately prevail in your life.

This passage in Galatians is contrasting two ways of trying to please God. One way is Moses' way and the other is Christ's way. And clearly, Paul is advocating that the Galatians stand fast in Christ's way and not return to Moses' way.

Let's contrast the way of Moses against the way of Christ. Moses' way was a law kind of way. Moses said, "Here is the Law of God. Now, obey it. Obey all of it. Obey it perfectly and you will be blessed. But if you fail in one point, then you will be cursed. But Christ said, "Here is my way. I will do it for you. And I will give it to you freely.

Moses' way was a works (merit) kind of way. You have to earn your way to heaven. And when you live your life perfectly with no sin, then you march into heaven and tell God that you deserve to be there. But Christ's way is a grace kind of way. You admit that you are helpless. You admit that you have nothing to commend you. You admit your works are faulty. And you accept the free gift of salvation. And you walk into heaven and thank God for admitting such an undeserving one as you.

Moses' way was powered by the flesh. Moses' says, "Here is the spiritual mountain. See if you can climb it. And you start climbing. And there is no one to help you. It is all you. All you have is your own natural abilities. And your natural abilities include a wicked heart, blind eyes, deaf ears and in general a sinful nature that does not allow you to climb that mountain.

Christ's way is powered by the Holy Spirit. Christ says, "I know your flesh is weak. In fact your flesh is your biggest problem. I will give you my Spirit. I will put my Spirit in you and my Spirit will power you up the mountain."

I am confident that when Paul says, *Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh*, he is describing the effective Holy Spirit that resides in us and who gives us a dynamic force that we would not have under the law.