

Called to be Free - Galatians 5:13-26

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[0 : 00] Verse 13. Let's hear God's word. You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free.

But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command.

Love your neighbour as yourself. If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out, or you will be destroyed by each other.

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.

They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

[1 : 09] The acts of sinful nature are obvious. Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Ralph, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Excuse me. Thank you, Johnny. Thanks for reading this morning from Galatians for us. Back in April, the science magazine called New Scientist asked this question.

[2 : 55] It was their lead article. It was on their front page. Who are you? They looked at all kinds of ideas about what makes you, you, what makes you uniquely you.

And the conclusion of the articles is it's not actually your temperament or your personality or your memories, all the things that you've experienced that make you truly you.

Actually, when it comes down to it, our perception of others that we see is that of the moral self as being the true self, which is kind of interesting.

So when we're asked of when someone has been true to themselves, it's when they're being true to their moral selves. And this is what the article was concluding. That's who we truly are, apart from all of the other things.

So what it's really saying is that moral behavior matters. The things we do and the things we say are like a window onto a person's real self.

[3 : 57] You see, in an age of social media, of self-promotion, of building your own identity and different identity issues that we struggle with, we still continue to value people who act in line with their moral sense.

Hypocrisy is frowned upon and freedom to be our true selves is cherished. And this recent scientific article that focused on the moral self as being that kind of a window onto the true self, it's actually coming from a much, much older source.

You see, the Bible, the Bible has always been the great book on the human condition. It's always told us all that we need to know about who we are. And it tells us the same thing, that the moral self is a window on the soul.

Look at these words from Jesus, from Luke chapter 6. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit.

People do not pick figs from thorn bushes or grapes from briars.

A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart. And an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

[5 : 17] And in some ways you can say, so far, so good. But for you and for I and for many attending churches this morning, there is a deep, deep conflict in our moral center.

On the one hand, we know the good that we should do and that we want to do. Yet there is a struggle, a struggle as a Christian, as a believer, as a follower of Jesus, when we do not obey Jesus and when we do not honor him.

Put very simply, Christians, this is not going to be a shock to anyone, Christians continue to sin. The core of the New Scientist magazine article focused in actually on this very conflict, very interesting, even as it relates to professing Christians, this struggle of identity of who the true self is. And this is a quote from the article. I've just clarified a few things towards the end and that's the bit in brackets. In the 1980s, evangelical Christian Mark Pierpont, he traveled the world preaching that homosexuality was a sin and promoting ways to resist gay urges.

For him, it was a deeply personal quest. He himself was wracked by the very yearnings he sought to excise from others. And it was a contradiction he openly acknowledged.

[6 : 38] So here's the question. Which of Pierpont's attitudes reflected his true self? Was his message about the sinfulness of homosexuality a betrayal of his essential gay self?

Or did that message reflect what he was deep down? That is, a Christian freed from distorting sinful urges. It's a good question, isn't it? Which one reflects the true self?

As we come to Galatians, Paul is writing to churches in the area of Galatia, local churches, in many ways just like the church here, and to Christians in those churches to free them to be their true self. And they need to be freed from two forms of slavery. Two forms of slavery. Slavery to sin and slavery to legalism. Look back at chapter 3 and verse 22.

Which will help to give some context as we dive into chapter 5. Chapter 3 and verse 22 and 23.

Page 1170. But the scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin.

[7 : 51] So that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, the promise of faith, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up, until faith should be revealed.

So the whole world is imprisoned by the law. Now the law was given to highlight sin, to keep society in order, and to keep sinful practice at bay.

But apart from faith in Jesus, both the law and sin are enslaving people, keeping them prisoners. And then we come to Galatians chapter 5 and verse 1 as Paul begins the section about freedom in Christ.

He writes right at the beginning of chapter 5, It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Echoing those words that Johnny read earlier from the Gospels, Jesus, the call of Jesus to be free.

Paul says, Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Paul is saying that Christ came to give us freedom.

[9 : 02] Stand in that freedom and do not be imprisoned all over again. It's a call to live truly free lives. And leads us up to our key verse this morning, which is verse 13.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature.

Rather, serve one another in love. In verse 13, I think there's three things that we see clearly and we want to look at each one of them this morning a little bit more from the Scriptures.

The first is a statement of freedom, the call to be our true selves. The second is a warning about sin. And finally, a call to serve others in love.

Statement of freedom, a warning about sin, a call to serve others in love. Firstly, the statement of freedom is a call and it's a call to liberating Christian freedom.

[10 : 07] That's not a term often associated with Christianity. Christianity is often seen by the world as a straitjacket, but it is full of this call to freedom and a freedom that is based foundationally on our identity, who we are, our true selves, our authentic selves.

Paul reminds the church in Galatia that their identity has been aligned with that of Jesus Christ, what he has done, who he is.

As they say, the clue is in the name. Christian, Christ's ones, those who are in Christ. That's what Christian means, a follower of Jesus, to be in Christ.

The basis for identity as a Christian, as a Christ follower is in Christ. And I think we see that quite clearly actually a few verses earlier in verse 6, chapter 5 and verse 6, for in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. You see the language there in verse 6, in Christ Jesus, identity language, identifying with Jesus.

[11:21] And we read then that to be in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts. And what circumcision, you can kind of think of circumcision as law keeping, as rule keeping, as keeping the regulations, keeping the rituals, keeping the traditions.

And then we can think of uncircumcision as casting aside the moral law, casting aside those regulations and living as if there was no law. What Paul is saying neither circumcision, law keeping on one hand, nor uncircumcision, which is licentiousness or living for self or ignoring the law, neither of those have any value.

No, the only thing that matters is faith, verse 6. And Jesus says that's a faith that expresses itself through love. A love for God and a love for others.

So to be in Christ, that great language in verse 6, and you see it all through the New Testament, is to be united to Him in faith and that, my brothers and sisters, has changed forever.

how we are to identify and how we are to live. You are a new you. You are a new you. The old has gone and the new has come.

[12:41] The authentic you has been wholly and radically changed. And this change has come about through Jesus' death which rescues us from sin.

Again, we're just going to go just one more time back to the beginning of Galatians chapter 1.

Galatians chapter 1 verses 3 to 5. I think these are great verses to show that this change has been brought about by Jesus' death.

Paul writing right at the beginning is setting the scene for the book and he says, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and this Jesus who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. We are rescued from this age rescued from sin we're rescued from lawlessness and we've been brought into the kingdom of God and that's because we've been united through faith by the Holy Spirit.

Our identity our true selves is now bound up in who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. That's our new identity.

[14:02] It's linked inextricably linked who we are with who Jesus is and a spirit changed identity is now the basis for our true identity.

Back to Galatians 5 and this is where we will spend the rest of our time this morning. Galatians chapter 5 and verse 25 Since we live by the Spirit let us keep in step with the Spirit since we've been made alive since we have this new birth since we live because of the Spirit that's the basis for our life keep in step with the Spirit and we see similar language in verse 16 right at the beginning so I say live by the Spirit and just glance down to verse 18 you are led by the Spirit Paul says that the true believer is led by the Spirit where the Spirit goes we go as we walk and keep in step with Him this is the Spirit led life our new identity so the call to liberating

Christian freedom is based on your identity your true self the authentic self which is a person who has been united to Christ by faith through the Holy Spirit and so we have this Spirit led life secondly from verse 13 there is there is a warning there is a warning do not use your freedom for sin our new identity in Christ means that we follow the Spirit and as a result we begin to know the desires of the Spirit we too keep in step with the Spirit and begin to know and desire the same things that the Spirit of God desires verse 17 for the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature they are in conflict with each other so that you do not do what you want we know the desire of the Spirit a desire which is contrary to desires of sin you see the desire of the Spirit is always away from sin it's always away from sin and towards obedience in Jesus the desire the desire of the Spirit is away from sin and towards

Jesus a Spirit filled life if you want to know what a Spirit filled life is it's this it's daily turning from our sin turning in repentance from our sin and turning towards Jesus in faith that's what a Spirit filled life we turn from the sin that we read about in verses 19 to 21 that long list and instead we begin to desire the fruit of the Spirit verses 22 to 23 the great contrast against that list of sins and we can be free we can be free to turn from our sin and turn to Christ because of verse 24 verse 24 says those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires you see we belong to Christ we now live by the Spirit verse 25 and because we belong to Christ and we live by the Spirit we can use this new found freedom from the law and from sin to walk with the Spirit but

we're not free we're not free

I want to stand as my authentic self under this banner of freedom but I don't always feel free some days I actually feel trapped in my life with its competing demands on one hand I wish to love Jesus but on the other hand I just want to focus on me and I want and I need others to look after me and my needs our freedom means that we can look out from ourselves that's what this freedom in Christ means we can look out from the true authentic self and we can look outwards but sin is still there taking my love and this is something that Martin Luther would say or Augustine they would say and put it this way it's taking that love and it's in a sense curving that love that we express back in on ourselves and that love that we want to express is just curving being bent back into ourselves as fundamentally a self love it's as if the true self which is identified now with the spirit of God is being misdirected as we want to live out as we want to live out our new identity in Christ that love is being misdirected and turned back in on itself which really is what sin is in many ways it's a turning of our love back into ourselves and so for all the talk of freedom in the

[19:47] Christian life and I know if you've experienced this you hear people and they're they express that in some ways and they're overcoming sin and they're growing in their faith for all the talk of freedom in the Christian life I just feel that that tension and that that that that burden in my heart it doesn't always feel free it almost feels like because I'm a Christian it's it's more tense I almost feel more encased in at times verse 17 isn't it is a description of that heart prison for the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the spirit and the spirit what is contrary to sinful nature they're in conflict with each other so that you do not do what you want and so the spirit and the sinful nature are in conflict both desiring different things for Mark Pierpont his struggle was with his Christian identity and his deep desire to live a gay life now other struggles may be more subtle

I don't know what they are for you maybe it's you're an office worker who pours your soul into your job and you put all the emphasis in that and you want to do well in your job but it's becoming all consuming and begins to rule us and cause anxiety and stress yet our love for our own identity in that keeps turning our efforts and our energy and our time back into itself so that I can achieve my ambitions and my goals in my job so in our hearts we feel divided like there are two opposing forces battling for control at the very centre and so I think it's very difficult as a Christian it's something I've wrestled with a lot recently to understand what is it within us that continues to sin or to desire to sin because the Bible has such strong language about moving from you move from death to life you move out of this kingdom of darkness and you move into this kingdom of light it says it speaks of dying and being born again of our baptism our Christian baptism as a demonstration that we have died to the old life it's gone and buried and now we've been raised in the waters of baptism and raised with Christ into a new life seated with

Christ in the heavenly realms Paul writes that we are a new creation the old has gone and the new has come again writing in Galatians he says I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me if all of this is true truth how is sin still there and how is it that I can continue to sin why do I still feel that tension because the truth is I do continue to sin my desires are being misdirected and my love is being misdirected by my sinful nature so I continue to use my freedom to curve my love back to myself constantly as if I am a slave to sin and without freedom those opposing verses of those opposing forces of verse 17 are at war leading to the kind of acts that we read about in verses 19 to 21 the battle with sin to battle with it we need the light of God's word to lead the way to lead our thinking to lead our hearts the truth is still this it is still true verse 24 those who belong to

Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires we have died to sin we are set free from sin this is truth when you came to faith in Jesus you moved from the kingdom of sin to the kingdom of obedience and you made a decisive decisive break with sin you see we are no longer slaves to that sin to that way of living instead we are a son of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit sin is not yet fully done in our lives we know that it's dead sin is defeated but its lingering effects are still present you see repurposing a whole life repurposing a soul repurposing a person in a body for life and a spirit it's like trying to reuse a deep sea oil drilling platform and you're going what do you know if you ever see pictures you know in the north sea those big massive oil platforms well a deep sea oil platform it drills deep down into the sea to bring up oil stored within the seabed and in a sense our lives have drilled deep down into the depths of our heart into our true selves apart from Christ and in those depths it is hit layer upon layer upon layer of sin and it is from these sinful oil seams and deposits that are in our hearts that the sinful acts have spilled up and out acts as we

read about of sexual morality idolatry hatred selfish ambition envy and like but through faith in Jesus that poisonous and destructive well of sin has been capped and the drilling platform has been relocated we've been cut from those depths of sin and we have been replanted now we are tapped into a well of living water that now flows up through our lives by the spirit living water producing fruit fruit of love of joy of peace of patience of self control but here's the thing that drilling platform of our lives it's still coated in the oily residue and gunk as we walk with the spirit we sometimes falter and we begin drilling again into those seams and pockets of sin that still seem to linger but for the believer and this is crucial for the believer the drilling rig of our lives is being renewed day by day all the machinery all the working parts every corner of our lives is being reclaimed and washed out by living water it's a long process and it's a hard process and it's a process sometimes we feel like it'll never end but it will ultimately when the

[27 : 02] Lord returns or we go to be with him and that process is called sanctification that's the word we use to describe it becoming more like Jesus over time we see sanctification in verse 16 and this is the heart of it so I say live by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature that's what sanctification is living by the spirit not gratifying the desires of the sinful nature repenting from our sin turning in faith to Jesus there is a warning however there is a very stark warning in this passage for some that drilling platform has never been moved you are still continuing to drill down into a deep well of your own identity apart from Christ and into your own self love and you drill and you drill and your life is continually being re-coated by the practice and the enjoyment of sin so instead of there being clean up operations taking place in your life there are new layers of oily sin being pumped around your life each day that is why the warning at the end of verse 21 is so strong do you see it verse 21 just the second half of it

I warn you as I did before that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God you see these verses 19 to 21 are characterizing the life of an unbeliever those who haven't been born again and haven't been united to Christ in faith this is one whose life is marked out by an unrepentant practice of sin the warning is for those whose heart has never truly changed those who from the depths of that heart bring forth a life that is just marked by unrepentant sin they will not the scriptures say inherit the kingdom of God for their kingdom is still a kingdom of sin final part of verse 13 you are free that's how it begins stay away from sin and finally serve one another serve one another the good news through all of this is that the believer is indeed free and in all that talk of sin don't lose sight of this you are free you're free to have that battle with sin others are not they are slaves to sin and slaves to the law but we are free from sin and we're free to serve we can now read through some of these verses again and see how they shift our focus away from ourselves into serving one another verse 13 do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature do not wallow in that oily mess but rather continue to clean it up in your life by serving one another that inward bend that inward bend that's curving in on yourself should each and every day just become a little less as you grow in your relationship with

Jesus it should start to curve less and less inward you do not need to give in to sin you're free so you're free you're free this Thursday to forget about that me time that you're planning because you just want to focus on yourself you're free instead to call over and spend that time with your sister in the Lord who needs your encouragement you're free to serve it doesn't all have to be about you the blessedness of the Christian life is that our freedom means that we are free to serve others rather than being a slave to our own selfish sin verse 14 we are no longer turned inwards by the force of legalism for the whole list of regulations and rules and rituals come back to this single command you see in verse 14 love your neighbor as yourself love one another in verse 15 Paul's concern is deeply practical at this point if you keep drilling down into hearts that bring up oily sin watch out watch out you who complain and you demand respect and honor from others how is that going to work for you if everyone else is doing the same complaining and the same demanding and wanting the same respect all at the same time if everyone else is insisting that they're the most important I tell you watch out Paul is saying watch out the measure that you use will be the measure that destroys you you who are gossiping about others parenting imagine if everyone else is talking about your parenting choices and condemning you in similar ways don't bite and don't devour one another watch out or we'll all be consumed you're free but be wise put to death the old ways be ruthless with the sin in your life instead verse 16 live by the spirit and you won't live like that you see if you live by the spirit you won't be doing that the polluted areas of the flesh are going to want things that are contrary to the new heart and the new heart is going to want things that are contrary

to the flesh but the new heart is going to clean up those polluted areas of your life that's what the new heart will want to do and there's a conflict going on but verse 18 thankfully if you are walking by the spirit you're not under the old law because the new law has been written on your hearts down to verse 22 the good news is this because you have made the decisive break through faith in Jesus your life is now marked by the fruit of the spirit and there's a long long list of ways here in verses 22 and 23 as to how you can serve others how you are free now to serve others no longer just serving yourself in sinful acts that bend inwards but rather generous kind loving peaceful faithful self controlled ways that serve others and actually make you truly free so free in fact that you know there's no law to regulate such good living there's no law there's no limit there's no cap on this kind of limit there's no restrictions on doing the right thing and that is true freedom isn't it to be free without limits to do the right thing not enslaved to our sin the new scientist article

[34 : 22] I read on the nature of the true self it was an interesting article it could only scratch the surface of the truth that we've seen explained here this morning in Galatians because the moral self how we live is indeed an indication it is that window on our true identity isn't it it is our true selves so as we reflect on our authentic selves the question is this as each one of us asks that question is my heart being directed back to itself is that what characterizes my love or has it been freed to flow outwards in love to God and service to others is my heart being directed back to itself always or has it been free to begin over time to more and more flow outwards to love God and to love others the article finished up with an epilogue on the story of

Mark Pierpont the man torn between his Christian identity and his gay desires and this is what the article said whether you believe that Mark Pierpont's gay self was his true self or not might depend on your own existing moral perspective but ultimately Pierpont made up his own mind he renounced his life of proselytizing against homosexuality and decided that he was gay after all you see Mark sought to end his double life by becoming what he believed was his true identity now I do not know the man's heart I do not know anyone's heart but the call to freedom in verse 13 still stands turn in repentance from your sin and know the spirit given power to be free in Jesus avoid sin and draw from that well of living water to serve one another let's pray our father we we thank you and bless you for the wisdom contained in the pages of scripture