

How The Spirit Makes You Feel

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Galatians 5 verse 13.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh, rather serve one another humbly in love.

For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command, love your neighbor as yourself. If you bite and devour each other, watch out, or you will be destroyed by each other.

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

[1 : 07] They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh are obvious.

Sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery, idolatry, and witchcraft. Hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy.

Drunkenness, orgy, 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, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

And against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, God. You may have a seat. And would you join me in praying the Spirit might be with us.

[2 : 26] Oh, Spirit in heaven, we have invoked your name. We have invited you to come and fill us, oh God. And so once again, we come to you like the persistent widow. Would you give us more of you?

Oh, Father, thank you that you're a God who speaks to us. Would you open our ears, open our hearts, that we may hear you and hear your word.

In Christ's name, amen. Amen. So as we consider freedom, if we consider freedom, I have three points for you. First, the call of freedom. The call of freedom.

The fight for freedom. And the life, or sorry, the spirit of freedom. So the call of freedom, the fight for freedom, and the spirit of freedom. Spirit of freedom.

So first, the call of freedom. Look at verse 13. You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. Called to be free.

[3 : 24] We miss this, right? Like our post-Christendom understanding of Christianity, our culture's understanding of Christianity, pigeonholes it as something different than freedom, right?

It pitches it as burdensome, legalistic, maybe litigious. What if that's off? Christianity was actually an astounding declaration of liberty against the backdrop of Judaism, a Greco-Roman culture.

And it's not insignificant to the ministry of Jesus. How does Jesus start his ministry? What is the Bible verse that he begins his ministry with?

Do you know what it was? He had a lot to pick from the Old Testament. He could have picked love the Lord your God, right? He could have picked the Shema, the Lord your God is one. He could have picked the Hobby Lobby favorite, right?

Jeremiah 29, 11. I know the plans I have for you. But what does he pick? He actually picks Isaiah 61, 1.

[4 : 32] The Spirit of the Lord is on me. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, to set the oppressed free.

Jesus, when he sums up everything that he is about to do, his ministry, he says this is about freedom, liberty. The Spirit is on him, not only to declare freedom, but to secure it.

And Paul says the same things in Galatians. Paul gets explicit about this earlier in chapter 5. He starts chapter 5 saying, It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. When Paul talks about what did Jesus do on the cross and in the resurrection, he set us free. He did this to give us freedom.

You hear the freedom. There's this call of freedom. And then in verse 13, he wants to ensure that the Galatians don't lose the plot until he says it again.

[5 : 42] You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. Now you might be asking, freedom from what? Right? What are we free from? The book of Galatians is actually about freedom from religion.

Freedom from religion. Which is surprising. Because Paul is very religious. Paul was the most religious, right? Religion, if we think about it, is a systematic attempt at being good.

At proving your worth or justifying yourself to God. And the problem with religion in Galatians that Paul lays out is not only that it's impossible, right?

God's law is not like the SAT. Every once in a while, someone scores the perfect score on the SAT. Seven out of 10,000 students. Well, I'm sure we have at least 50 of you right here.

UC Berkeley, you know? But God's law is not like the SAT because no one ever gets it. No one ever gets it. No one is ever perfect.

[6 : 51] So it's not only that we can't do it. But more to Paul's point, which is interesting. He says this is slavery. Religion is slavery.

That's his point. Religion is like a hamster wheel. You have this slavish obedience to a law. You're never good enough.

And by the way, this is not just religion. This is also secular life philosophies. Secular people, irreligious people, can be just as enslaved to the rat race to justify themselves.

Right? Berkeley. I don't know if you know this, but you're known as a capital for secular progressives. Right? Who are just as driven to be right. To save the world.

It may not be necessarily about being right with God. But rather to prove your rightness to others. Or to yourself. And so, people buy solar panels. And they drive electric.

[7 : 53] And they speak inclusively. Now, all that can be good things. But Paul's message is that that will not justify you. And you can be just as enslaved to that rat race within religion as without.

He says, no. What Jesus brings is a declaration of freedom for religious and irreligious people alike. He says, you, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free.

Free. Free. Jesus speaks the declaration of liberty. The problem with religion, or however you define yourself, is that it's ultimately about what you can do for yourself.

And if your justification, your goodness, your meaning is up to you, you will never be free. But the gospel is, is that Christ comes and does it for you.

Right? Religion is, I perform and then I will be accepted. The gospel is that because Christ performed, I am accepted in him. For him.

[9 : 07] It's a call to freedom because the work has already been accomplished. I think that Christ, I think we have an illustration here in Juneteenth.

Right? We're just around the corner from Juneteenth. I'm a Texan, so I'm going to, this is what I know. Thank you. Juneteenth, another summer holiday about freedom.

The American Civil War technically concluded on April 9th, 1865, when the Confederates surrendered. General Lee surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox Courthouse.

But the end of fighting and slavery actually continued past that. Remember, there were no phones or emails. But also, some Confederate units just did not want to give up.

Battles were still being fought a month after Appomattox in Texas. Of course, Texas wouldn't give up. Union forces had to sweep the entire state.

[10 : 11] Now, by June, Confederate forces in Galveston, the largest city in Texas, surrendered. And then on June 19th, Major General Gordon Granger issued Galveston General Orders No. 3.

And part of those orders is, quote, The people of Texas are informed that in accordance with a proclamation from the executives of the United States, all slaves are free.

And that day, the loss of slavery in America was formerly, formally done away with. Logan Stroud had a very large plantation in East Texas.

He had 150 enslaved people. And on that day, on June 19th, he gathered them all around and read the order. You who were once slaves are now free.

Do you hear that declaration? That's what the gospel is. The gospel that Jesus brings us is a declaration that we are free. And you can imagine being a slave, hearing that call to freedom.

[11:21] It was premised not on their own works or labor. In fact, if they would have had an uprising, right, what would have happened to them? It had to be a work outside of themselves.

A victory that was not their own. That is like the call to freedom that Christ offers us. Maybe you're new to Christianity, or maybe you're curious.

Contrary to stereotypes, Christianity is not a species of the religion genus. Christ did not come to give you a bigger hamster wheel or a different treadmill.

Christ came to kick that hamster wheel down the hall. He came to free you. He came to free you. He came to declare liberty.

So are you free this morning? Are you free? Here's another way of asking it. Are you at peace with God? With yourself?

[12:19] Or do you have a psychological hamster wheel going on in your heart and mind? Friends, God invites you to an unimaginable freedom. It's not about what you have done, but about the victory that he has accomplished in Jesus Christ.

Christ. This is our first point. The call to freedom. Do you hear it for you? Do you hear God speaking your name?

Saying, will you be free? But how does this freedom really work out in real life, right? We need to ask the basic practical question about Christianity.

How is it lived out? And that leads to our second point. The fight for freedom. The second point. The fight for freedom. So how is it lived out? What actually has to be fought out.

Fought out. Fought for. Freedom requires a fight. So we need to fight the right enemy. Right? We Westerners are programmed to think that the real enemies of freedom are outside of us.

[13:25] King George III. Right? Anyone really angry at King George III? Right? Or the 20th century was the fascists or the communists.

Now it's the Democrats, the Republicans. Right? But Paul turned our attention inward here. Verses 13 through 21 fix on the flesh.

The flesh as the chief enemy of freedom. Look at verse 17. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit. And the spirit what is contrary to the flesh.

They are in conflict with each other so that you are not to do whatever you want. The flesh is in conflict with the spirit. Now Paul is not being a Platonist here.

He's not pitting the physical versus the spiritual. The flesh here means the sinful nature. Our nature apart from God. Or we might call it the self.

[14:26] The self. This is what it's saying. Your natural self naturally wants things that are opposed to God and to his Holy Spirit. So what does the flesh do?

We have a list from Paul from verses 19 through 21. Let's just very quickly go through some of these. Right? The first three refer to sexual disorder.

Sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery. The next two, idolatry and witchcraft. A religious disorder. Religious disorder. Seeking to fake or manipulate God and his work.

The next eight, the longest list, hatred through envy, illustrates social sins. How the selfish ambitions of the flesh stoke social division and chaos.

And then he has the last two, drunkenness and orgies, which are just kind of boilerplate hedonism. Right? This is what the flesh does. Now, maybe, I worry that this language, this vice list, is a little bit too sanitized.

[15:31] Too abstract. Right? Like, I think debauchery. Anyone feeling convicted about debauchery right now? I think we, I hope some of us are.

But, let's listen. Let's listen. I like Eugene Peterson's paraphrase. Listen to this. It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time.

Repetitive, loveless, cheap sex. A stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage. Frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness.

Trinket gods. Magic show religion. Paranoid loneliness. Cutthroat competition. An all-consuming yet never satisfied wants.

A brutal temper. That's how he translates it. Fits of rage. An impotence to love or be loved. Divided homes and divided lives.

[16 : 31] Small-minded and lopsided pursuits. The vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival. Uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions.

Unlimited and ugly parodies of community. Do you hear that? Did that get a little bit more real? A little bit more 3D? So we can see what are the works of the flesh? What does the flesh do? And in that list you can see how these acts, how the flesh actually enslaves. Enslaves us. Take sexual immorality.

Think of the enslavement that lust and sexual addiction create. Men and women enslave their lust and pornography and Tinder, strip clubs.

Women actually enslaved by prostitution and sex trafficking. Or the enslavement of jealousy and envy, right? You saw her Facebook or Instagram.

[17 : 32] And all of a sudden you want what she has. And your life is terrible. Your joy, your gratitude for your life evaporated. Or what about the enslavement of hatred and anger?

Like you can't let it go. Do you hear that can't? That's the absence of freedom. That's slavery. Or the enslavement of factions.

Doesn't that describe our political moment right now? Dissensions, factions. People enslaved by their tribalism and their scapegoating. In other words, the problem that we have is actually ourselves. Or in the words of the great secular prophet Taylor Swift, It's me. Hi. I'm the problem. It's me. I should not be left to my own devices.

They come with prices and vices. Is it okay to quote Taylor Swift in Christchurch? Is that okay? Don't tell Jonathan. The price is freedom.

[18 : 45] Right? We become enslaved to our own selves. And that's why Paul says fight for your freedom. He says in verse 17, For the flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, And the spirit is contrary to the flesh.

They are in conflict with each other, So that you are not to do whatever you want. Don't do whatever you want. Fight it. Fight for your freedom. And listen, this is so countercultural.

This is so countercultural, right? That's the true irony of our moment. In Galatians, in Galatians, Paul is concerned that a different gospel is being preached.

And do you know what the most prominent gospel of our culture is? An alternative gospel, a false gospel? It's the gospel of the self. It's the gospel of the self.

Well, Alistair Roberts and Andrew Wilson, two theologians, they write, Our generation is confused as to the nature of true freedom. We think freedom is being true to ourselves.

[19 : 51] We're living the best version of ourselves. No matter how often we experience liberation from constraints, limitations, and oppression, we will still find ourselves falling into new forms of bondage.

You see, we think that salvation and fulfillment and joy comes from the freedom to be our most authentic self. Everything in our culture says that freedom is the exact opposite of what Christianity says.

Freedom is be your true self, who you are at your core, let loose. But Christ says, die to yourself. Paul says these are the works of the flesh.

When you let it go, you're actually enslaved. You're enslaved. So are you enslaved this morning? Or here's a better question. What are you being enslaved by?

What are you being enslaved by? Are you fighting? Fighting. Don't do whatever you want. Are you fighting? How does the fight for freedom?

[20 : 56] Finally, our last point, the spirit of freedom. I want you to contrast those acts of the flesh with the fruit of the spirit. Now, I know that some of you who were raised in church, you're like, the fruit of the spirit, I got that.

Right? You know the song. You memorized it. It feels a little bit childish, a little bit cheesy. But I want you to think about them from the vantage point of freedom. Right?

Look at the first three. Love, joy, peace. Isn't that true freedom? Like the freedom to be able to love selflessly?

The freedom to have joy regardless of circumstances? Isn't that what we crave? Isn't that what our culture wants? It's peace. Do you hear how they're liberating?

These are virtues. And not only this, but do you see how these are also emotions? These are emotions that you are meant to feel. The irony is, is that when you make the emphasis the emotion, when you make them focus on, I want to feel happy, you will never feel happy.

[22 : 05] But if you make the emphasis on God, on the spirit, this is how you begin to feel. You begin to feel joy and peace.

You hear how different it is from those works of the flesh, the acts of the flesh. Here is something altogether more beautiful and more freeing. We don't have to, we can't go through all of them. Let me just pick one that I think very many people need to hear about. Forbearance. Patience. Patience. You have time.

We, my wife and I, I moved her away from California to the south. And she came to me after an episode in a department store.

And she had a whole bunch of things she was buying. And the person in front of her looked at her in the checkout line and said, do you want to go in front of me? And Jessica was like, what?

[23 : 05] Like, do you want to go in front of me? I have time. And she was like, what is this place that you brought me to? What's wrong with you?

You have time? Patience. Patience. What if you were off the treadmill and you had time to love your kid to say, hey, how's your, how's your day to connect with a friend who's hurting?

Patience. This is how we're meant to live. This is freedom. Freedom. He names all sorts of other things, right?

The kindness, faithfulness, steadfastness, self-control is most clearly the virtue of freedom, right?

You will not be ruled by your whims, by your appetites.

The man who controls himself is truly free. Do you see the freedom in this way of life? The acts of the flesh, enslaving. The fruit of the Spirit, freedom.

[24 : 15] So how do we get this fruit? How do we get this, this way of life, this freedom? Well, we get the key and look at verse 24. He says, those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

You have to belong to Jesus. You have to belong to Jesus. The Velveteen Rabbit is a short story, I'm sure some of you have read it, by British author Marjorie Williams, and it tells the story of a stuffed animal's desire to become real.

A boy for Christmas is given a new stuffed rabbit a Velveteen. And the Velveteen Rabbit is overlooked for a while because of the newer, cooler toys.

But he meets Skin Horse, and Skin Horse is a veteran, the wisest toy in the nursery. And Skin Horse tells the rabbit that toys can actually become real.

He says, real isn't how you are made, it's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become real.

[25 : 35] And the story of the Velveteen Rabbit is this rabbit actually becoming real, being loved by this little boy so that it actually becomes a real rabbit. And I think to be real is actually, we could say the same about freedom, couldn't we?

I think that many of us think that freedom is a possession, something that we hold, something that's ours.

But what if freedom is actually about being possessed, about belonging to someone, and not just someone, belonging to God?

You see, our notions, our Western notions of freedom have almost nothing often to do with God. Freedom is my ability to do what I want.

That's how most of us define liberty or freedom. We define it in libertarian kinds of ways. But biblically, that is not freedom. What does Paul say in 2 Corinthians 4?

[26 : 40] He says, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Right? That freedom is not when you have an absence of constraints.

Freedom is actually when you have God. You have God. To be, to be free is actually to be possessed, to belong to Jesus Christ.

We skid over it, but we skid over verse 13. The last part of it where Paul says, do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh. Rather, serve one another humbly in love.

For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command. Love your neighbor as yourself. Friends, freedom is actually love. Freedom is about giving yourself away.

And this is exactly what Jesus did for us on the cross. Right? He says, those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with his passions and desires.

[27 : 46] Christ was the most free in his loving sacrifice to free us from our flesh. And by the way, that's why our religion doesn't work. All the law, all the religion doesn't work on the flesh because it can't free you.

It can just further enslave you. But death and resurrection, death and resurrection, that's the ultimate freedom, right? Christianity is not a religion of rules.

It's a funeral service of ultimate joy. Those addictions, those passions, they die on the cross with Jesus. Friends, are you possessed by God?

Are you possessed? And this is not just God giving you, not just God giving you Jesus. God gives two-thirds of the Trinity for you.

Do you see how much this passage is saturated with the Holy Spirit? Look at verse 16. He says, walk by the Spirit. Verse 18, we are to be led by the Spirit.

[28 : 47] It's the fruit of the Spirit. And then in verse 25, he says, since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. I worry that we don't understand the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit becomes an abstraction. But here's what the Holy Spirit is. It's God who gives Himself to you. His presence given to you as a gift that you might be free.

And as God possesses you, that's what the Spirit does. He possesses you. You actually become more like Him. In fact, when we read the fruit of the Spirit in verses 22, this is actually the emotional core of God's life.

Who is God? His whole, He is love. We see this in Jesus, right? God is joy. There is no one, no one more joyful than our God.

There is no one who has more peace. There is no one who is more patient and forbearing. There is no one who is more kind and good. Do you see that?

[30 : 04] No one more gentle. This is who your God is. And through the Spirit of God, He is making you like Him. And that is freedom.

This is how much God has committed to your freedom. He gives not only His Son's life, but He gives you His Spirit. I want to end on two very quick reflections.

First, on freedom, and second, on fruit. First, slavery is tricky. Slavery is tricky. Antoinette Harrell is a historian of southern sharecropping.

And as she was researching Louisiana, the history of Louisiana, Harrell discovered that a plantation that operated slaves operated well into the 1960s.

1960s. Even though slavery was technically abolished, the plantation owner was manipulative and ensured that his workers became indebted to him, not allowed to ever leave the property.

[31 : 09] And every time they would settle up, he would make sure they never made it into the block. They always owed. And they lived their lives. She found 20, just in one plantation, slaves into the 1950s and 60s.

My point is, slavery is tricky. And some of us, friends, have been enslaved again. Even though we are in Jesus, technically we are free, we have gone back, we've been tricked by the flesh back into slavery.

Think about how much you scroll on your phones. There's an attention economy that's seeking to enslave you. Are you aware? Are you awake?

Are you living by the Spirit? Friends, we have to fight for our freedom. Are you fighting for your freedom or have you given back into slavery? My last point on fruitfulness.

How do you do this? Do you want more fruit of the Spirit in your life? What does that look like? Paul essentially says, he says, walk by the Spirit.

[32 : 17] In other words, follow the Spirit. Wherever the Spirit is going, you go there as well. What does that look like? Here's what it looks like.

It's listening to the Holy Spirit and the way we find the Holy Spirit is in God's Word. The more that we dedicate daily, walking in, meditating God's Word, getting it into our heart and our minds, the more we will actually walk by the Spirit.

And what's so beautiful is that daily watering of the Word and prayer actually forms a beautiful fruit tree. Beautiful fruit tree.

Friends, God wants you to be free and He gives you His Spirit to do so. Would you pray with me?
Oh, Father in Heaven, we are prone to running into slavery, our own flesh.
Oh, Lord, would you free us? Oh, God, free us. May we not run into slavery, but may we instead be saturated by your Holy Spirit. Oh, God, you're so generous to give us your Spirit, your very Spirit, that we may live and walk with you.
[33 : 32] Oh, God, make us like you. make Christ's church like you, that it may be full of love and joy and peace, patience, forbearance, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
Oh, Lord, we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.