

# Set Free to Serve

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well evening, brothers and sisters, a joy to carry on the public worship of God. We can do so from Psalm 51, our singing, our worship is Scottish Psalter this evening.

Psalm 51, verses 1 down to verse 6. Psalm 51, verses 1 down to verse 6. Psalm 51.

After thy loving kindness, Lord, have mercy upon me. For thy compassion's great blot out on mine iniquity may cleanse from sin and freely wash from mine iniquity.

For my transgressions I confess my sin I ever see. Psalm 51, verses 1 to 6. To God's praise. After thy loving kindness, Lord, have mercy upon me.

For thy compassion's great blot out on mine iniquity.

[ 1 : 2 5 ] The strength of sin I truly wash from my eloquity.

For my conscience, Lord, have mercy upon me. For my conscience, Lord, have mercy upon me. For my conscience, Lord, have mercy upon me. My sin I ever see.

It's here, O my God, have mercy upon me.

It's here, O my God. Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 3 : 1 2 ] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Let's join together in a word of prayer. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Lord God, we ask once more as we draw together this evening, you prepare us to have a right heart and a right spirit before you.

Help us to understand what it is we are doing. We come just now before a God who sees us, a God who knows us. And however we may be presenting ourselves just now publicly and to those around us, you know our hearts.

There is nothing hidden from you, good nor bad. Lord, help us, Lord, then we ask to come this evening with that right spirit, humbling ourselves and seeking that you be exalted.

[ 4 : 3 3 ] We come this evening understanding that there is so much of our lives we would rather no one else see or know. There are parts of our story and indeed parts of our lives now we'd want no one else to see or no one else to know.

We come to a holy God, an all-powerful God, and you see all that we are and you see all that we do. There is not one part of our existence, our actions, our thoughts that is not seen and known to you.

Help us, Lord, then come with that right heart this evening, knowing there is nothing hidden from you. And because we come before a God who is just, and because we come before a God who is holy in and of ourselves by our own efforts, there is nothing we can do but to cry out that we are unclean, unworthy, helpless and hopeless.

But we come this evening not looking to ourselves. We come this evening pleading the shed blood of, not our own blood, but the shed blood of our Saviour. His finished work, not our own perfection, but His perfection, which covers and enclothes all His people.

We come this evening then, those of us who know and who love them as our Saviour. We come confessing His finished work. We come relying on all that He has done and all that He promises to us.

[ 6 : 03 ] We come this evening to this time of worship, looking to Him, resting on Him, knowing that as He goes ahead of us, we walk behind Him in His shadow, covered by His beauty, covered by His perfection, leading the way to glory.

Help us, Lord, then, we ask this week to serve you well for all the days of this upcoming week, Lord. We know that the week gone by, it is too late now to change any part of it.

Help us, Lord, then, to serve you well this coming week, this new week. Help us in our conduct with those around us, both Christians and non-Christians, to be clear and bold witnesses of you.

Help our words to be careful and to be kind, to be honest and to be gentle. Help our thoughts be thoughts which build up rather than thoughts which destroy or tear down.

Help us to support one another as brothers and sisters. We pray this evening, looking forward to the reading and the breaking down of your Word, we pray especially that you would remove from us any secret sin, any hidden sin, any pet sins, as it were, any sin that we return to, any sin that we are keeping for ourselves, or we would remove these things and take these things to the cross.

[ 7 : 35 ] We understand that we ourselves are weak. We ourselves are so prone to falling away, so prone to weakness. We come to a God, we come to a Saviour who is not weak.

We come to a Saviour who faced every single temptation. A Saviour who went through this world, who suffered in every possible way, who was tempted in every single way, and he did not sin.

He did not fall. He did not give in. We give in and we give up so quickly. He did not. We will never understand the depths of temptation and the depths of pressure and the full weight of misery that was laid against him.

And yet he served you perfectly. It's to him we come this evening, to a blameless, sinless, glorious Saviour, the spotless Lamb of God.

It's in his finished work that we find all our hope and all our peace. We ask just now for any here this evening, whether publicly but also perhaps more dangerously, privately, who are falling away or who have fallen away.

[ 8 : 55 ] Lord, you'd restore us back to yourself. It is not the opinions of man that concerns us. It's not the looks or the thoughts of our neighbours and friends that worry us.

It is our place of standing before you. Help us, Lord, then, to be reminded both of the calling and the high calling of serving and following a Saviour, but also the welcome of a prodigal son.

He returns home and he was welcomed with open arms. That those who are sinners find help and find peace in the one who is a friend of sinners.

And every one of us this evening, we acknowledge that we are sinners. We have gone in our thoughts and words and actions against a holy God. Help us, then, to have a holy view, a correct view, a proper view of who you are, never minimising your beauty, never minimising your power, but always looking up and always understanding we have in you a God that is holy, holy, holy.

Thank you, Lord, for our time of worship today. We thank you for earlier on this day. We thank you for the gathering we had, that family service, that time to come together as friends, as brothers and sisters.

[ 10 : 14 ] We thank you, Lord, especially for the boys and the girls, the children who join with us. We thank you for their diligence this past year. Lord, we give you praise as we saw evidence so clearly as we compare last year to this year.

In your power and to your glory, we see not just half a bench full, but almost a bench and a half needing to be full. Lord, we thank you for that. We ask you to receive all the glory for that.

Lord, we thank you for the growth we are seeing and hearing about from our young friends. That as week by week they eagerly engage with the lessons and with your word, we ask you to continue to grow that desire in their hearts.

We do pray, Lord, for next year, next session, if there's any young people who are perhaps wanting to join, you'd give them that desire.

And pray, Lord, for parents and for guardians and for those who love these children. Lord, give them the... Give them that desire to send their children out.

[ 11 : 16 ] We know there are a few families who are inquiring. Lord, you'd ask me to confirm to them and leave them a direction to send their children so they'd hear the word. Give you praise that you're able to work in the lives of your people, whether young or old, whether young, young beyond our understanding.

We think perhaps many are too young and we also think many are too old, too far gone. We think many is understanding their intellect is too small, too limited.

We give you praise that you do not perceive the people the way we do. You call all people to yourself, young and old, those of great ability and those with what seems to us to be zero ability, those with various issues and so on and so on.

Lord, the call goes out to the whoever and the whosoever. Help us, Lord, then to be faithful, to pray for our young friends, to pray, Lord, for these boys and girls, to remember their Sunday school teachers, also remember their school teachers.

We thank you just now for school teachers. We remember especially just now school teachers who are yours, who are faithful to you. Lord, we ask you to encourage them and support them and be with them in days that are challenging, in circumstances and situations and schools that require so much gospel-based tact.

[ 12 : 40 ] Lord, give them wisdom and give them peace. We pray once more for those of our number who are still suffering with COVID and other situations, other issues. Pray just now for those who are away from us, who are engaged in ongoing health treatment and care.

Lord, we ask you to be with them. You know the details and you care for them more than we do. Thank you, Lord, for the gift that we have a country and a situation where we have access to such quick and accessible medical aid and help.

Remember just now those across the world this evening who are suffering in ways we have never suffered, those in warfare, those in agony, those who are mourning the loss and the ongoing loss of family members and loved ones.

Lord, we come just now bringing before you a hurting world, a world where sin has ravaged not just our lives but has ravaged every part of this world. We leave all these things at a foot of the throne of grace where we find ourselves crying out for mercy and for guidance, for hope and for peace.

And we trust as we come, you're the God who hears the prayers of your people. Not a single one of your people's prayers as lost by you. Help us, Lord, in this evening to serve you well, to have listening ears and hearts ready to be changed and moulded and convicted by your living word.

[ 14 : 06 ] We ask all these things in and through and for Jesus, his precious name's sake. Amen. Let's read in God's word. Carrying on our series in Galatians.

We're in Galatians chapter 5. Galatians chapter 5. That's on page 915.

Galatians chapter 5, page 915. Galatians chapter 5, page 915.

We can read the whole chapter together. Let's hear again God's word. For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Look, I, Paul, say to you, if you accept circumcision, Christ will be made of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision.

[ 15 : 11 ] He is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who have been justified by the law. You have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. You are running well.

Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from us, from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no overt view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

But if I, brother, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case, the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish that those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves.

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. for the whole law is fulfilled in one word.

[ 16 : 27 ] You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh. For these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things that you want to do.

But, if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now, the works of the flesh are evident. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

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

[ 17 : 51 ] Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. I may give praise to God for his holy and his perfect word.

Let's again sing in the same psalm we had, Psalm 51 in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 51 in the Scottish Psalter. This time singing verses 7 down to verse 12.

Psalm 51 verses 7 down to verse 12. Do thou with hyssop sprinkle me? I shall be cleansed so. Ye wash thou me and then I shall be whiter than the snow of gladness and of joyfulness.

Make me to hear the voice that so these very bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Psalm 51 verses 7 to 12 to God's praise.

Psalm 51 ■ or to me I shall be cleansed of his soul We are the nation in white than the storm of blackness and of joyfulness.

- [ 19 : 33 ]    Make me to hear the voice that's holy, scary, old spiritual.  
                   Has broken, dear rejoice, all my miracles be slaughtered.  
                   By this I fall my sin, begin, God, bring our Lord, renew.  
                   Arise, let me with him. Cast me not from thy side your day, thy holy strength I'll live.  
                   Restore me, I salvation's joy.
- [ 21 : 04 ]    With thy peace fill me still. Let's turn back just for a short time to the chapter we had in Galatians.  
                   Galatians chapter 5. Again, carrying on our series. We're almost at the end, of course, of our series. But we got to verse 15, our last time together.  
                   Let's even look at verses 16 down to the end of the chapter. Just to help remind us, the last time we saw these verses, we were reminded of the freedom, the liberty we have in Jesus.  
                   But in Jesus we are free. It was two weeks ago now, but just to remind us. But in Jesus we're no longer under, as it were, the heaviness and the penalty and the works of the law.  
                   We said that really Paul's summary, Paul's conclusion of the last four or so chapters, is really found here in chapter 5.
- [ 22 : 18 ]    And we said that Paul, we saw that Paul used pretty strong language. Language that would make us a bit uncomfortable in a church context. Paul uses it in verse 12.  
                   That those who do say that to be a proper Christian, you must be circumcised. Paul says, I wish they would emasculate themselves.  
                   Paul is so full of the passion that it takes that Christians understand, that in Jesus we are free.  
                   We said last time, we have to be so careful to defend our liberty in Jesus. Not to follow the ways of man, even the ways of tradition, if it's against God's word.  
                   It's God's word first and foremost. And other things, if they're helpful, and other things, if they can be found in God's word, or the principles are found there.
- [ 23 : 14 ]    And we said all that last time. But again, scripture's balanced. Scripture's always balanced. We ourselves are not balanced. I've said this before plenty of times, but in college, Bob, Bob Ackroyd, professor Bob Ackroyd, doctor Bob Ackroyd, always used a very simple illustration.  
                   But it's like, brothers, we are like horse riders who aren't very good at riding a horse. We're always liable to falling off one side of a horse or the other. So last week we said, well, in Christ we are free.  
                   And we are liable, every one of us, saying, well, if that means we're free, then we can live our Christian lives as we want. We have no worries, no cares. We can do whatever we want.  
                   It's eat, drink, and be merry. Be free in Christ. We're going to heaven anyway. No worries about it. And fall off the horse that way. And last week we saw the other way, didn't we?  
                   That said, follow these rules. Do this, do that. History, tradition, man-made laws, and then be right with Christ. That's the other way, isn't it? That's too far the other way.
- [ 24 : 27 ]    God is a God of order, not a God of chaos. And scripture, as God's word, is always balanced. It is always truthful. It's not balanced, perhaps, how we want it to be.  
                   It doesn't say very often what we want it to say. Because it's God's word, not our word. If we wanted ourselves to be more popular, perhaps, in our preaching, if we wanted to get more people into our doors, we would say the former, wouldn't we?

We would say, become a Christian, do what you want, live as you want, go be free. There's no more worries, no more cares. We can say that. But God's word doesn't give us allowance to say that.

It gets balanced. And here this evening, we see the balance kick in. It's almost like a ballast in a ship, isn't it? Especially the new ferry. You're going to hear it kicking in.

I watch what I'm saying here, because there's plenty here know more about ballast on boats than I do. But the new ferry, even I know this, when sometimes a wave goes too far that way, you can hear the mechanics kicking in, the pump kicking in, and you can hear the ballast being shifted, and the ferry is put even again.

[ 25 : 38 ] Well, last week, Paul says, we're free in Jesus. And that is a gospel, glorious truth. Let no one take your freedom. Let no one rob your freedom. But Paul ended last week with verse 15.

If you bite and devour one another, watch out, you're not consumed by one another. Paul's not leading us the other way. He's saying, yes, be free in Jesus.

But with that freedom, to have true freedom, there has to be some sort of way of living our lives well. And that's what we have here in our chapter, in our section.

But I say, walk by the Spirit. Walk by the Spirit. This section this evening deals with two ways.

The two ways open to us as Christians, how we deliver our lives. And that's our two simple points. Walking against the Spirit, and walking with the Spirit.

[ 26 : 42 ] Walking against the Spirit, and walking with the Spirit. Just a quick caveat reminder for us. We know this, but just to remind ourselves.

Brothers and sisters, we're not saved by works. No one of us was saved because we showed ourselves to be a diligent, good enough, hard-working enough churchgoer.

That's not why the Lord saved us. We're saved by His grace and His mercy, and we know that, but do we affirm that? We are saved, what? By grace alone. By grace alone.

We affirm that. We love that. We're not saved by works, and also, we're not kept by works. We're not taught, and we never teach, that to be a Christian, to maintain being a Christian, it means to keep on working really hard, and have this constant worry, if I'm not working hard enough, the Lord will let me go.

We're not saying that either. What we are saying, and what God's Word says, if we're to be a Christian, we're to live in a way that shows that.

[ 27 : 52 ] We're to live in a way that shows that. It's quite simple. It's quite simple. That helps us as we go into these two points.

First of all then, walking against the Spirit. A life walking against the Spirit. As Paul calls it, walking, are being led by the flesh.

Verses 16, down to verse 21. This is a life where a Christian does not care what they're doing.

This is the life of a Christian who at some point has decided to do their own thing, to go their own way, to not care anymore about what God thinks about them.

To not care anymore what God is calling them to do. We might think, well yes, we all think people of Christians who have publicly backslidden. That's one thing. But brothers and sisters, public backsliding is one thing.

[ 29 : 03 ] But private backsliding, I'd argue, is all the more dangerous. Private backsliding is all the more dangerous. by that we mean the walking away, the walking against the Spirit that takes place privately in our minds, in our hearts, perhaps in our own homes behind closed doors where Christians, or these people who profess to be Christians, privately or secretly live a life that is so against what they show themselves and call themselves to be.

Now the danger of these sermons are, and that's why we give praise to God that we preach through the Bible section by section. Because if I was just to preach this this evening you'd think, well he knows something. He's heard something.

We're preaching this because it's the next part in our series. It's what we've been preaching on the last few months now. We might think, well surely in our congregation this doesn't have to be heard. Same as sermons on adultery or sermons on fornication and so on and so on and so on.

Is that for us? Well the danger of sin is it almost always happens in secret. And we don't know what goes on behind the closed doors of a home or the closed doors of a heart.

And God's word is God's word. This is a life of a Christian who decided who has slowly because of sin or see has walked away from God.

[ 30 : 38 ] Paul breaks down just three areas roughly of this sin. He gives his list here in verse 19 of how we identify this sin in our lives.

Just a note here this list of sin and this whole section is to use to self-evaluate our walk. Our sermon is not to say well yes so and so they're doing this and they're doing that and they're doing that that means they're backslidden.

No, no. This is to evaluate this is a self-evaluation. This is to evaluate our walk our lives privately perhaps. There's just three areas again Paul lists out here so he roughly breaks down again verses 19 and verse 20 down to verse 21.

we see sexual sins we could see what you might call spiritual sins and sins against others. Now the works of the flesh are evident sexual immorality impurity sensuality.

These are the sins we all know what these sins are there's time and place to go into detail perhaps we're all adults we all understand what these sins mean we all understand what's being said here and again for all these sins don't think for a second that neither you nor I or anyone here we're not capable of any of these sins.

[ 32 : 09 ] Calvin reminds us that our heart the human heart is an idol factory in other words it's a factory that makes idols we're always ready to engage in sin.

Brothers and sisters this is us too plenty of brothers and sisters gone before us who have fallen into these sins in a horrendous way at one time said this won't be me this would never be me this can never be me and yet they find themselves gradually in this place.

It's uncomfortable but it's supposed to be uncomfortable that's why it's there for us. Sin is uncomfortable but uncomfortable sermon is far better than a very long uncomfortable life of being away from the Lord.

Again these sexual sins sexual immorality that is within relationships that would be adultery and everything else that's personal immorality engaging in pornography and everything else that includes impurity included in that and sensuality living for yourself in the most self gratifying selfish way possible and all that entails.

Then we have what you might say our spiritual sins idolatry and sorcery idolatry and sorcery again we are so easily led even as Christians to make an idol of something else.

[ 33 : 47 ] Now for the Galatians the danger was very much literal they had both idols in their hearts but also there's idols in their town centre there's pagan temples there's no pagan temples in Stornoway there's no great god of Artemis there's no great temples of Baal to worship in but the devil's smarter than that the devil hasn't changed anything but our idols today in the same way there's idols back then why do people worship idols back then?

pleasure ease and self fulfilment if you sacrifice your child to this idol if you throw and kill your living child for convenience you have an easier life if you give this money or give your time to this god this idol you'll get something better back nothing's changed brothers and sisters nothing's changed the format's changed the idol worship hasn't also note sorcery perhaps we take a low view of this we don't understand if god and god does in both old testament and new testament if he warns against sorcery it is not just to fill in a space why does god warn against christians engaging in things like sorcery because it is real it is real it was said before in the pre-mitting and our spiritual warfare series don't think for a second that these things aren't real now we'll joke and there's a feature sermons for us here and won't go too long tonight in it but if paul warns the galatians and the lord through the paul warns the galatian christians be aware of being engaged in sorcery in these things it means it's real again our own history of course is an island and our history is a culture and we can't escape the fact that as a village perhaps there are plenty of jokes made and jokes which are played upon even in our own village of the supernatural history of this place those of us perhaps who are engaged in these things we know it is no joke these forces are real they are dark forces they are evil forces they are the forces of the enemy yes christ is king and yes he reigns supreme and yes we have nothing against him and we pray his name and his power against his situations and they depart but at the same time these things are real these things are real and if you think our age is not engaging in sorcery then you're wrong if you think there's teenagers here and adults here not engaging in sorcery then you're wrong online and on certain apps online well used apps there is a real trend a real uptick even locally in engagement with witchcraft and the occult and the teenagers do it for fun and for a laugh

I'm sure they do the devil is happy to use whatever he can use these things are real brothers and sisters idolatry and sorcery again you think well who here is engaging in sorcery the devil can tempt in any way possible be aware and be ready sins against others then it's broad category sins against others we could say strife enmity jealousy fits of anger rivalries dissensions divisions envy drunkenness and orgies orgies there's debate over orgies there in the greek it's either the sexual type or it's just big parties it's hard to tell the greeks and the culture would use it interchangeably in a way these are sins which destroy which destroy relationships which destroy congregations rivalries enmity jealousy strife arguing over nonsense falling out over nonsense all these things destroy our relationships one another therefore destroying unity therefore destroying the congregation plenty of good congregations scripture believing scripture preaching congregations are destroyed not by big sin not by big heresy they're destroyed by constant ongoing wearing down of infighting jealousy strife all these sins here because the congregation was not willing to stop and consider that their actions were sinful their actions were against the spirit and as jealousy envy dissensions grow congregation dies unity dies and the work of the Lord in that place begins to die this is not theory this is what happens it has happened not that long ago in certain congregations

I was reading about one congregation recently and that's what happened you think well how do they go from being this to being pretty much gone what big thing happened what big story happened what awful thing happened arguments dissensions envies strife brother against sister sister against brother and eventually the Lord removes his candlestick he removes his light and his people are gone like a public witness is gone brothers and sisters every one of these sins listed here they can easily be found in our lives easily so what's a warning Paul gives a heavy warning a hard warning in verse 21 I warn you also note at the end of verse 21 well at the start of verse 21 and things such as these



Paul says this list isn't exhaustive there's plenty more sins you can mention but these are the ones that come to mind first I warn you as I warned you before that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God if you have ESV it helps a wee bit there you see number four go down to the bottom of the page where it says those who make a practice of doing such things that's a literal translation it's not adding words the Greek there is those who habitually partake of these things those who habitually partake of these things those who make a practice those who engage in these things what's Paul saying then quite clearly if you without stop without care without grieving your sin without wanting to stop without caring to stop if you find yourself engaged in these sins with no desire to do anything else other than sin then you're on very very dangerous ground very very dangerous ground if you're engaging in these things and you're happy to keep engaging without stop and that is a wake up call for you to stop and pray and ask the question where am

[ 41 : 32 ] I and who am I the glorious gospel hope here is if you're a Christian and if you find yourself engaging in these sins even right now and you're thinking well where do I find my hope where do I find my help or maybe you're worrying to yourself or maybe I'm not a Christian maybe I want to keep sinning how do I get help how do I get hope well the help for the struggling Christian and the help for the non-Christian are help or hope where is it to be found trying harder working harder looking better acting better do we cure our sins by trying very hard not to do them no that's self help the source of our help and our hope is singular and it's the same if you find yourself struggling with sin as a Christian and if you worry you aren't a Christian then you come to

Jesus that's the beauty of it it's the beauty of it I think I've shared before and you're careful I won't share my pulpit too much information but I've shared before what happened and quite openly but one of my biggest struggles was and still is is lack of assurance I've got no problem saying that I often struggle with lack of assurance even now and plenty of Christians struggle with lack of assurance I remember speaking to one Christian last year whose struggle of lack of assurance was something I've never seen before in my life ever before they were completely debilitated by how little assurance they had now to everyone talking to them anyone who knew them it was clear they knew and loved the Lord but to them they felt like they had no hope and no help I remember thinking what do you say to someone in that position what the glorious gospel hope is that to that person who is so far in her mind away and the person who is worrying about where they are of the Lord the person who's engaged in sin come to Jesus come to Jesus we have no other answer we have no other solution come back to him or come to him for the first time and find your hope and your help and your welcome in him that's a simple gospel it's a simple truth when you find yourself as a Christian engaged in sin you will find the desire strong desire to keep away from the Lord

I've sinned against him I've gone against him I've brought shame to myself so on and so on and so on therefore I wait till my life looks better till I'm acting a better way till I'm a better Christian then I'll come back in prayer and in Bible reading and back to church and everything else then I'll come back to him that's a devil quite honestly quite simply that's the devil the gospel is never make yourself good then come to God come what come as you are bring all the disaster of your life all the sadness all the pain all the backsliding all the tears bring all that to him and say here's me here's what I have help and that through the Lord shows his love and shows his grace and shows his mercy to us walking against the spirit it's a hard place to be it's a lonely place to be but it's not a hopeless place to be brother and sister just come back to him this evening just now tonight whatever works just pray once more to him and say

I've gone astray I've gone away I'm engaged in this I'm engaged in that Lord take me I'm sorry forgive me again and cleanse me again and go through Psalm 51 pray that Psalm for yourself I mean quite literally read the verse and pray it apply it to yourself Psalm 51 after the loving kindness Lord have mercy upon me you're allowed to do that it's a good practice the early church did it our forefathers did it you pray the Psalm to yourself apply it to yourself me cleanse from sin and freely wash from my iniquity apply it to yourself you have no words to say use God's words if it helps Paul then gives the other side of the story doesn't he that the fruit of the spirit is love joy peace patience and so on this is walking in step with the spirit walking in a way that we're built to walk and every

Christian here knows that when we begin to walk away from the Lord you can feel it you can really feel it recently Emma and I have been looking to get a new car both our cars are making noises that are what you hear us in Tolstoy it's a Subaru it's not it's just our engines and you can hear noises and think oh my new cars look at different cars and a lot of cars now have lane assist or driver assist so if you verge into a lane the steering wheel will shudder and shake and vibrate to say oh you're drifting you're drifting go back straight again Christians do you feel that sometimes you feel yourself if you're engaged in sin or heading towards sin you can feel your conscience screaming at you the spirit inside you he is warning you you are drifting you're drifting come back come back that's walking in the spirit for it requires effort to do this the Christians know this it requires effort our effort doesn't save us our effort doesn't keep us but it requires discipline if there is discipline in the Christian life that's no surprise to any of us and this is where perhaps as a congregation as a church we're here to disciple one another to build one another up as we hope we're doing as we're practicing doing as we're trying to do for all the things we do fellowships and ideas and plans and this and that we're trying to build one another up to encourage one another to live more like this way in love and peace and joy and patience kindness and goodness and faithfulness and so on and so on

[ 48 : 25 ] I want to keep the whole fruit of the spirit the actual fruits themselves for a future sermon in the not so distant future but to show us and to remind us just some of the fruit here to be a Christian is to walk in love in joy in peace and in patience with one another with ourselves with the Lord kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness it's interesting when you see the qualifications of an elder we might think it's scriptural knowledge or theological knowledge is taught there across all even bible passages that mention the qualification for a pastor for an elder for a minister for a church leader what is the one qualification that is mentioned the most gentleness gentleness is mentioned the most if leaders or elders if we're called to live to a higher standard not we achieve it we're called to live to it at least we're called to be gentle brothers and sisters we're called to be gentle gentle self-controlled again we do it in the Lord's power and by the Lord's power it's not by trying very hard it's by continually day by day dying to self and living to him by carrying a cross and saying this brother this sister they are annoying me

Lord they're annoying me just now they're causing me great problem just now great pain just now great misery just now you pray for them you bring them to the Lord one example of many you're struggling with peace struggling with lack of assurance take it to the Lord day by day by day engage in the gospel work use the means of grace attend worship together as brothers and sisters read God's word pray make the most of what God has given you and lay hold of both hands and say Lord you can do it through me you can do it through me Paul gives us a reminder to us in verse 24 and we mentioned this a few weeks ago actually in a different context but just remind ourselves verse 24 and those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires brothers and sisters you are dead to sin sin will still as it were a tug at your jacket it will still be there you will still find yourself falling into times of sin of that there is no doubt to our horror and to our shame but we are realistic we are honest but you are dead to sin once you were slave to sin you had to sin but now you have been bought with a price he has purchased you and yes you are tempted and yes it hurts and yes you are swayed and pulled and yes you and I will all begin to fall time and time again but you are no longer a slave to sin that slavery that sin was crucified that flesh as Paul says here was crucified with Christ on the cross no one is saying

Christians are sinless again we said it in John if you say you are a Christian and you say you are sinless you are a liar but as Christians we are not sinless but as Christians we are no longer slaves to sin we are now servants to Jesus instead and we take our temptations to him we take our trials to him and he promises if we go to him he will hear us and he will act on our prayers and act on our cries just in conclusion for us a few thoughts perhaps for many especially in the world those outside of even church circles but perhaps brothers and sisters us included we have fallen into the wrong thinking and to answer it with sinful thinking that to be a Christian means you are marked by perfection you are marked you are set aside by being perfect what is a Christian?

a Christian is a perfect person or someone who portrays himself as a perfect person and many in the world outside these walls they think that is what we think and they think that is what we are taught but we see here it is the opposite what marks out a Christian it is someone who knows they are not perfect we are marked out by trusting in one who is perfect in his finished work in his covering in his power in his righteousness as it envelops us in his love we desire to live holy lives we strive to live holy lives yes we must strive but it is his finished work we put all our hope and all our trust in there is great danger great danger in habitual unrepentant unmourned for uncared for sin about that scripture leaves us in no doubt but even in that dangerous place in Jesus there is ongoing eternal hope right until you take your last breath as it were there is hope he will never say you've gone too far he will never say right

I have now given up on you how many times did I forgive my brother seven times seventy times Jesus gives well in his day was that a maths equation that was huge you keep forgiving him if that's why we're to be of one another than how the Lord of us he is covenantal in his faithfulness it stretches and it stretches and it stretches his mercy his forgiveness brothers and sisters we're called to walk in freedom no longer to walk as if we're still chained to the sins we are no longer chained to sin yes we're assailed by it attacked by it but the chains have been broken off we're now down stead we're chained to Christ as scripture says we're servants to him we serve now a better master the perfect master then walk as Paul tells us here walk then instead in step with the spirit if we live by the spirit let us also keep in step with the spirit let's put our heads now a word of prayer

[ 56 : 11 ] Lord we thank you for the the gift of your word but also this evening we are aware of the challenge of your word there are passages in it which challenge us which confront us which cause us to stop and to ask the uncomfortable questions the painful questions but at the same time because you're a God of order not a God of chaos even as you ask us the hard questions you point us to the answer for these questions which is found in the finished work of our saviour the Lord Jesus Christ who is the friend of sinners who draws close to all and everyone who cries out to him for safety for salvation for repentance he is close to us help us Lord then this evening to do the difficult task of evaluating ourselves according to your word at the same time not to look to ourselves for our hope but to look to him and to know that those who the son has set free they are free indeed keep us Lord pages now especially if any of our number where we publicly but also perhaps we said more dangerously privately are wandering away or moving away from you

Lord bring us all back to yourself that together as one body we would be united in all that we are of focusing on Jesus and on no one else let's call these things in and through and for his precious name's sake Amen let's sing in conclusion in Psalm 86 Scottish Psalter Psalm 86 Scottish Psalter Psalm 86 Scottish Psalter Psalm 86 verses 1 down to verse 7 Psalm reminds us that even thousands of years ago our friends our brothers and sisters of old they had the same worries and the same cries that we have and God is the same God who saved them as he saves and keeps us

Psalm 86 O Lord do thou bow down thine ear and hear me graciously because I so afflicted am and I'm in poverty because I'm holy let my soul by thee preserved be O thou my God thy servant say that puts his trust in thee Psalm 86 verses 1 to 7 to God's praise O Lord O Lord to thou bow down thy ear and hear me shall see your divine die and and thy cy and shall

Jam God bless you in your heart Siddhartha unto thee, I daily lie, be merciful to thee.

Rejoice thy strength, O Lord, I lift my soul to thee.

[ 60 : 43 ] Are thou ambitious, O Lord, and ready to forgive?

And which in mercy all that fall upon thee do believe?

Hear, Lord, my prayer unto the voice of my request.

At his endless times I call on thee, for thou will answer stand.

In the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, for of you now and forevermore. Amen.