

## **Free to Choose**

### **Galatians 5:16-26**

The very early Church was thought to be a group of Atheists who were also cannibals. Weird... until you think about it. Christians had no images or Idols in their worship practice. They also meet for their central act of worship in a ceremony that has the eating of the body and blood of the One they worship. No surprise then that such actions could be so grossly misunderstood by the people of their day.

Paul faced another misunderstanding. He was charged with teaching complete lawlessness. The main message of Galatians is that Christians do not have to obey the Law to become members of the Kingdom of God. So some said, "That means we can do as we like." and used this to indulge themselves in whatever they wanted to. Both here in Galatians and in Romans 6 Paul deals with is problem. Listen to what the end of last week's lesson said, "You were called to freedom brothers and sisters; only do not use freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but rather through love become slaves of one another." WHY? "The whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself"

Here is a question for us: How much of the Law Paul? Answer the WHOLE Law.

Now here is a problem. If Paul is now asking us to love one another and love is obedience to the WHOLE Law, aren't we back into having to obey the Law. And isn't that a contradiction to all that Paul has just been telling us??? That is what Paul is grappling with here. His answer is vital for us to understand if we are to be both assured of what God has done and aware of our new responsibilities as Christians.

We gain entry into the Kingdom of God solely on the basis of God's faithful fulfillment of the promises He has made. We are in Christ because of what God has done. We are in Christ because of God's absolute trustworthiness. We rest now and into eternity on the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. There is no cost to us. The price of our redemption can not be measured for it has been gained at the cost of God's one and only Son.

Once at the funeral of a soldier I told the people that they had the best chance of understanding what it cost God to secure our redemption for they knew that they were enjoying the freedom they had today because of the sacrifice of their comrades in arms who did not return. Parents who had sons and daughters that did not come back knew full well the price that they had paid for the freedom of their Country. Salvation is VERY costly but the cost is paid for us.

What that means is that we need never again have to worry about our standing as members of God's Kingdom. We are members because God is faithful. We can trust him. We are and will be forgiven. You can not earn this, it is the free gift of the Father to you. Now, spend the rest of your life living in that freedom and being transformed into the person you were designed to be. Be ready to be made fit to live now and into eternity as a member of God's Kingdom.

It is like this; Once upon a time I walked into a Church and with lovely young woman at my side I said, "I do". At that moment I was transformed from being a single man into being a HUSBAND. Now I have had to learn what it means to be a husband and I am learning to this day.

So what does it look like to be a member of God's Kingdom? We are no longer looking for entrance into the Kingdom by what we do but what does Kingdom life look like. Paul gives us two opposing statements to show us.

Galatians 5:16-21 gives a brief sketch of what people in this world live like.

Galatians 5: 22 gives a what Kingdom people are like.

But please note we are not EARNING our place by doing these things we are LEARNING how to be members of the Kingdom which we have already been given a part in.

Let's list the "Works of the Flesh"

**Fornication:** Christianity came into a world where sexual immorality was not only condoned but was regarded as normal and essential to the ordinary working of life. (William Barclay Commentary on Galatians)

**Impurity:** That which prevents a person from approaching their god.

**Licentiousness:** Readiness for any pleasure

**Idolatry:** Worship of gods made by human hands

**Sorcery:** The use of drugs for witchcraft & sorcery

**Enmities:** Hostile to people. Opposite of Love

**Strife:** Contentious rivalry

**Jealousy:** The desire to have what another has

**Anger:** Outbursts and blazes of anger

**Quarrels:** Self seeking not self giving service

**Dissensions:** Division rather than community

**Factions:** Disliking the PERSON rather than the ideas

**Envy:** "Grief at your neighbour's good fortune"

**Drunkenness:** The abuse of strong drink

**Carousing:** Unrestrained and uncontrolled revelry

AND THINGS LIKE THESE: The list is not exhaustive.

This is the kind of behaviour that is normal for a world made up of those in rebellion to God. This is the world in which we live and outside of Christ, one of which we are a part. Because it is a part of us there is always the temptation to go back to these ways of life

While we may easily go through a list like this and feel a little superior to those who do such things, some will apply to us at one time or another. Whenever we see even a hint of these things in us we are to crucify it. Verse 24.

Contrast this with what the Holy Spirit is bringing to fruition in the People of God.

**Love:** AGAPE we will seek the highest good of the world around us regardless of the cost to us.

**Joy:** That joy whose basis is God.

**Peace:** Shalom. Everything that makes for our highest and best good.

**Patience:** Patience with people NOT patience with circumstances

**Kindness:** Goodness which is kind

**Generosity:** Better translated "Goodness" Virtue equipped at every point

**Faithfulness:** Trustworthy

**Gentleness:** Submissive to God, Teachable in all good things and considerate all people.

**Self Control:** Those who are so master of of themselves that they are fit to be the servant of others.

There is no legislation for any of these for they are all to do with the character of an individual or a Church. We need to change from the inside out and no law can achieve that. Paul is quite clear, "If we live by the Spirit let us be guided by the Spirit.

This is where obedience comes in. I may not be able to love perfectly but I can choose which way of life I am going to follow. We may not be a perfect Church but we can choose which kind of Church we want to be.

Someone described this to me once as being like a cake mould or like the boxing used for concrete. Our obedience is like erecting the boxing. The Holy Spirit is pouring in the real stuff that will eventually produce the character of a person or Church made in the image of God and fully reflecting God's Kingdom. But please let us not imagine that the boxing is the real thing. It is worthless without the work of the contractor giving the real material.

Here then is the great freedom we are given in Christ. We are free now to choose to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and free to engage in the spiritual battle to remain faithful to the One Who has given His ALL for us.

The great danger is that we will go back to thinking that it somehow depends on us. IT DOES NOT. So let us cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He changes us as individuals and as a Church to be the kind of people He designed us to be. And as we do so let us remember that the whole message of Galatians is that we are not EARNING our salvation by our obedience but rather LEARNING what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and a member of the Kingdom of God.