

**Walking in the Spirit: Freedom**  
**Galatians 5:1-12**  
**January 24, 2010**  
**FBC Waynesboro**

Look with me at the last two verses of Galatians 5. Here is our goal. This is where we are headed. Verse 25 is a very simple conditional sentence: if our lives really are controlled by the Spirit of God then everything we are and everything we do will be governed and guided by the Holy Spirit. Pride will increasingly pass away as humility emerges out of our love for God that comes from His love for us and enables us to love one another. Anger and bitterness of spirit because we do not get our way will be deeply buried because of the joy that is ours in Jesus. Envy of others for whatever reason will increasingly evaporate because of the peace that we have come to know through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the fruit of the Spirit will be increasingly evident in our lives. This is our goal but in order to get to this goal we must go back to verse one and listen to Paul as he points us down the path that leads us toward this goal.

We are now in the final stretch of a sermon series on the Holy Spirit: who He is and how He works in our lives. We are going to spend a couple of weeks now talking about what it means to walk or to live in the Spirit. We are going to spend one week looking at how this is seen in the body of Christ in the manifestation of the Spiritual Gifts. And then we are going to end this series with one sermon on what it means both to grieve and to quench the spirit and a final sermon on the sticky issue of what it means to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. But we begin our stretch run with two sermons on living or walking in the Spirit. How do we get to that place where the fruit of the Spirit is growing and showing in and through our lives?

Paul says that it begins with a right perception and practice of freedom, 5:1. For freedom, Christ has freed us. The opening phrase points to the place where the believer stands: we are free. The phrase that follows shows us how we got to this place and it was not on our own. Whatever freedom is, it is brought to us by Jesus Christ. Philip Graham Ryken says that Americans prize nothing more highly than freedom but this freedom that we prize is quite different from what the Bible calls freedom. We see freedom as a personal possession that empowers us to live life by our own choices so as to carve out our own niche so as to live as we

please. Robert Bellah defines this kind of freedom in these words, “. . . it means being left alone by others, not having other people’s values, ideas or styles of life forced upon us, being free of arbitrary authority in work, family, and political life.” But this is not at all what the Bible means by freedom, and it is certainly not what Paul is proclaiming here.

True freedom is that which God brings to us by His Spirit and through His Son that brings us into union with Him on the basis of what His Son has done so as to enable that union. Jesus has told us that true freedom comes through the knowledge of the Truth and He makes it clear that He is The Truth. You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. And the truth is that true freedom is found in a life of faithfulness to Jesus where we have died and continue to die to our own desires so that we can be dominated and directed by what He desires for us and desires to do in us and through us. And we have to fight for this kind of freedom standing up to and standing against those who would reduce it to something other than what it is so that if we are not careful and prayerful we can come to the place where we think that we are free when in fact we are in greater bondage than we have ever been.

So, to get to the goal of living in the Spirit we must know what true freedom is and to know what true freedom is we must know first that there have always been and will always be artificial representations of the real thing. Then Paul takes us to the next step: in order to know real freedom we must know what genuine salvation is. What does being faithful to God look like? Verse two tells us what Paul is dealing with. He is dealing with people who have tweaked what it means to be saved so as to make it something other than it is. This is the master plan of Satan in every age. It did not start with the prosperity gospel in our period; it was present as early as just over a decade after the death and resurrection of Jesus. It took shape then as it does now in one of three ways.

In Galatia, it was legalism. Salvation required trust of Jesus alone in surrender to Him plus circumcision, plus and the list grows. We could put this in our context by replacing circumcision with baptism or church membership or fill in the blank. In Corinth, it was libertinism. Salvation required trust of Jesus alone for saving your soul and then you are in so let the good times begin; profess faith in Jesus and live as you please and did they ever in Corinth. In Colossae it took the form of substitution. Salvation required trust of Jesus plus all kinds of ecstatic

experiences and expressions. One of these three is present in every period. We either add to the Gospel, take away from the Gospel or substitute something for the Gospel that is less than the Gospel. Paul was astounded that this happened so quickly in Galatia (Gal. 1:6-9). They had exchanged the truth about God for a lie and were thus cut off from the grace of God. So what does Paul do?

He speaks the truth about the truly saved. First, he wants us to know that those who belong to God are those in whom the Holy Spirit lives. He comes to us when we are in our sin and he awakens us out of our sinful condition as He calls us to Jesus. He births in us a desire to be devoted to Jesus and in faith we trust Jesus alone for salvation as we surrender our lives to Him. That same Spirit comes now to live in us and to begin to make us what we already are. He declares us to be right with God on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus and then He begins to work in us to make us those new creations in Christ. The old is passing away and the new has come, but it does not come all at once so the work of the Holy Spirit in making us who we are is done in hope. We see our flaws and we see His faithfulness and we wait with eager anticipation the day of the fullness of our redemption. And while we are waiting we are working and while we are working we are doing so with a deep awareness of what matters: we are in Christ Jesus and as His we know that what matters is faithfulness to Him manifest in love. Love for God as expressed in worship. Love for fellow believers as expressed in our life together. Love for the world as expressed in our going and our giving, in our sharing and our showing. Paul creates pain for me here: circumcision does not “count for anything” nor does not being circumcised. Put baptism in there or whatever else you want to stick in there. Honor them but do not make them more than they are. They do not have any strength to save. Only Jesus saves and when He saves it shows in a faith that is faithful to Him.

Remembering our goal at the end of this chapter, Paul comes now to ask and to answer in his asking what happened. They had lost sight of what real freedom is: it had come to mean the freedom to carve out their own course and it had led them to exchange the truth about what salvation really is for a lie. But how did they get to such a place? The same way we do. Ultimately they got there because they stopped looking at Jesus and stopped longing for Jesus and started looking at and longing for lesser things. And here Paul points out again the path that brought them to that place.

First, they had gotten tired. The verb form for running is a verb form that means continual action from the past to the present. You were really running and the word for well can also mean “beautifully.” You had good form. You had good focus. Your feet were properly placed. Your pace was perfect. What happens to us as believers when we hit that kind of stride? What happened to Peter when he was walking on the water and took his eyes off Jesus? You and I can get to the place where contentment turns south and becomes comfort and comfort becomes confidence in ourselves or in what we are doing and confidence by God’s grace will take us to the place of collapse. Out of nowhere we who are running so well and so beautifully begin to get tired. Look at the second thing here: the word for “hindered” can mean “to cut in on.” It was not unusual in ancient races for someone to slow another down in order to impede their progress by stepping in front of them, perhaps even trying to trip them. It was prevalent even though it was not polite. It was a little thing that loomed large and particularly when the runner was tired. Can’t you get that way? Get your eyes off Jesus and the least little thing trips you up, tears you down, delivers you into despair. And the result is always the same: we begin to settle for what is convenient to us rather than what is an expression of commitment to Him. We settle for learning the truth rather than living the truth. We will come to church and participate in worship only to leave the church to live as if we had never known this God. And our relationship to God gets reduced to a ritual and routine and it happens so slowly and so secretly that our whole life is compromised before we even know what has taken place. And Paul wants us to know that this kind of thing is not from God, 8. This is the work of Satan to steal our joy, to kill our life, and to destroy our passion for Jesus.

Now I want us all to focus on verse 10. Paul is very plain here. Satan’s strategy to bring us from freedom into bondage by setting before us a false understanding of what it means to belong to God is effected by people. And he shows us here what Satan is after through these people, he shows us his heart for the glory of God here and he reminds us of who he is and who we are if we are indeed the people of God. Paul’s confidence in God is due to his belief that he is talking with people who truly belong to God and thus they will see what he is saying. And what he is saying is that Satan has put in their lives persons who are under the judgment of God but whose role in the kingdom of Satan is to seduce the saints. So how do people do this? By making the way of living that gratifies the desires of the flesh attractive while convincing the person that happiness is

found in gratifying the desires of the flesh and living for Jesus is just too hard anyway, 13. Whenever you start to get serious about a sanctified life, Satan will put a person or persons in your path whose purpose is to sabotage your sanctification. And most often these people are at least religious if not professing Christians who “go to church.” But Paul reminds us of something here that we must not forget: when we commit ourselves to Jesus and surrender to His Lordship as the way of life that we live, the world is going to hate us and is going to persecute us by seeking in every way possible to pull us back onto its path. And we will stay faithful and focused only so long as our eyes are set on the glory of God and His goal for us as opposed to their goal. Paul’s word in verse 12 sounds harsh and cruel until we understand the context which is the glory and grandeur of God as manifest in the lives of His people which is dimmed and diminished by those whose practice of life does not square with their profession of faith and they are always trying to get the committed child of God to become like them. Jesus makes Paul’s words sound Sunday School like because He says that it was better for a millstone to be thrown around their neck and they be drowned in the ocean because that is exactly how dead to God they really are and how much under His judgment. And that could be people here today. I pray not. But I know there are those about whom Paul would say, “you were running well, what hindered you . . .” Today could be the day by God’s grace you get back in the race.