

**Galatians 5:1, 13-25** *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery...*<sup>13</sup>*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.* <sup>14</sup>*For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* <sup>15</sup>*If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.* <sup>16</sup>*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* <sup>17</sup>*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.* <sup>18</sup>*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.* <sup>19</sup>*The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;* <sup>20</sup>*idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions* <sup>21</sup>*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.* <sup>22</sup>*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* <sup>23</sup>*gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* <sup>24</sup>*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* <sup>25</sup>*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

Our founding fathers were committed to freedom. When they signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776, they were signing a death warrant on themselves. As he signed it, John Adams said, "Whether we live or die, sink or swim, succeed or fail, I stand behind this Declaration of Independence. And if God wills it, I am ready to die in order that this country might experience freedom." That's a strong statement. What courage and boldness it took for him and his companions to sign that document! They were committed to freedom.

Are we this committed to freedom? Now I'm not talking about the freedom which we enjoy living in America as citizens of this country. We know about the sacrifice the members of our military are willing to make, along with their comrades in arms on the police force and with the fire departments to protect and maintain the freedom which we enjoy. I'm talking now about the freedom which is ours as citizens of God's kingdom. This is the freedom which God has graciously given to us from the guilt and punishment of our sin to live as his people every day as we go about our lives. God wants us to be as committed to this freedom as our founding fathers were committed to freedom from the tyrannical rule of England. God not only wants us to know the freedom we have in Christ, he wants us to live in this freedom every single day. He wants us to battle against our sinful nature with its desires that tempt us and to live our lives of love for God and one another as we walk in the Spirit of God. He wants us to leave behind our lives of sin knowing we are forgiven in Christ, and not look back and follow our Savior completely with willing hearts that are joyful to serve God. He wants us **Committed to Freedom**.

To say that Christians are the free-est people in the world might sound a bit strange. The common perception of Christians is that we are not free people. In fact, the perception of Christians is that we are just the opposite—slaves, people who are bound by a bunch of rules and laws. When people in our world talk about freedom, they often do so thinking of freedom as a license to do whatever anyone wants. To many, freedom means that there should be no rules governing behavior or binding them in what they want to do. To many, freedom means I get to do what I want and everyone else is just going to have to deal with it. But even in America, this is not what freedom means. Freedom always has limits of reason and morality. With freedom comes responsibility. Even though we are a free society, we are not free to do everything. We aren't free to hurt people, kill them, steal from them, or drive as fast as we want. There are rules we follow. We have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but we still have to follow rules that limit our behavior.

To fully understand the statement that Christians are the free-est people in the world, we need to define what Christians are freed from and what they are freed for. The freedom which Paul talks about in the Bible is a special kind of freedom. In the first verse of our section, God through the Apostle Paul says, "*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*" The yoke of slavery Paul was talking about here was the pressure of trying to earn your way to heaven. The Bible defines slavery as trying every day to be a perfect person, hoping to please God enough to someday earn your way into heaven. Paul reminds us here that Jesus has set us free from this slavery. This is biblical freedom: you are free from the obligation of having to keep God's law to earn favor before him. To stand in God's good graces without having to do anything to merit or earn this blessing: this is freedom. God is not pleased with you because of who you are or because of anything you have done. He is pleased with you because of what Christ has done for you. The truth is: there is nothing you can do to please God. That runs contrary to much of the thinking of our world today, but this is what God says. That is the slavery that the law holds us in. Try as hard as we may to do what is right and to follow what God says, we can't do it perfectly. Any imperfection—even just one—displeases God. We were in trouble right from the start because we were born into the world with the status of sinners. We were destined to spend our lives working under the burden of the law only to be cast away because we could not do it perfectly.

Christ has freed us from this life of slavery. By living on this earth and keeping God's law perfectly in our place, he fulfilled God's law for us. His innocent sacrifice on Calvary's cross when he willingly gave up his life and suffered hell for us did away with the obligation of that law forever. He not only paid the punishment for our sins, but he freed us from the guilt and shame and fear that comes with our sin and made us pleasing to God in heaven. We have now been freed from our obligation to keep the law in order to please God. This is a freedom to which we are committed!

But how committed are we to this freedom? Paul goes on in the rest of our text to remind us what we have been freed for: <sup>13</sup>*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.* <sup>14</sup>*For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself..." So I*

say, *walk by the Spirit.*" You have been freed from keeping the law to please God so that you can now follow it in love and joy to serve God and one another in love. You have been freed from your slavery to sin so that you can live guided by the Spirit of God. There are two ways that we can ruin this freedom: one is by adding our own good works to the grace of God that freed us from the law. Adding any of our own works puts us right back in the obligation to keep the law perfectly. Paul talked about that in the verses which aren't included in our text. The other way to ruin our freedom is go the complete opposite way and use our freedom in Christ as a license to live however we want to live. This is the specific point Paul deals with in our text. You have not been given freedom in Christ so that you can live however you want and indulge your sinful nature. The fact that we as Christians have been freed from all legal requirements to please God does not mean that we can now do anything we please. We have been given freedom in Christ so that we can now serve him and each other in Christ-like love.

Yet how often aren't we tempted to use our freedom to indulge our sinful nature? Ironically, in the name of freedom, we give up our freedom in Christ to submit once again to the slavery of sin. People use their freedom in ways that do not please God. People use foul language, promote immorality or say hurtful things about other people all in the name of freedom of speech. People live immoral lifestyles, focus their entire lives on money, eat and drink excessively, live incredibly self-centered lives—all in the name of freedom. Yet God speaks rather bluntly in our text that this is not freedom but slavery. The person who speaks crudely or lives immorally is a slave to his sinful nature. That person may feel free, and on the outside might even look free. But on the inside he's being held captive by his sinful desires.

And God has some difficult words for those who continue to conduct their lives this way: *<sup>19</sup>The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup>idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup>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.*" Those who live their lives under a license to do what they want are not free. They are slaves who are destined to be separated from God and enslaved in hell forever.

Rather than using our freedom to indulge the sinful nature, God wants us to use this freedom to live guided by his Spirit. As Paul laid out life under the slavery of law, he also laid out what the life lived under the Spirit looks like: *<sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup>Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*" God's encouragement for those who know the freedom of Christ and who believe in him is to get rid of the old life completely and in everything you do, walk in the Spirit producing fruit that the Spirit alone can give. This is freedom!

So how committed are we to this freedom? Undoubtedly today we all stand in God's house and voice a wholehearted commitment to live with the fruits of the Spirit. But this is much easier said than done. Too often in our lives, we give testimony that we are less committed to this freedom than we ought to be. It's much easier for us to hide or excuse our sinful nature rather than get rid of it completely. You might compare this to the highway department who rather than removing or fixing the bump in the road simply puts a sign up announcing that there is a bump ahead. Sure it helps, but it doesn't get rid of the problem. It's the same when someone says, "I have a short temper so you'd better be careful around me." Or "I've got a problem getting along with certain kinds of people. You'll just have to accept it." Others say, "I use a few bad words every now and then and that's just the way that I am. People can take me or leave me." Still someone else might say, "Sometimes I can't keep my mouth shut, but there's nothing I can do about it. If people don't like me that's their problem." This behavior is not behavior that is committed to freedom in Christ. It's not crucifying the sinful nature to live guided by the Spirit. It's putting up a yellow sign announcing there is a bump ahead. What a warning from God: those who continue to live this way will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Thankfully, Jesus used his freedom under the law of God to live perfectly according to the law. His perfect sacrifice paid for all the excuses we have made and for all the times our actions said we were not as committed to freedom as we said. In Jesus, you are forgiven for these and all your sins. You are free from the punishment due for those sins along with the guilt and shame they come with them. You are now free to live guided by the Holy Spirit and produce fruits that come from him. Now our lives look much different than they did before. Now we live in love, always looking out for the welfare of other people rather than ourselves. Living in love brings peace between people because we are always working for their welfare. This brings joy as people celebrate Christ together. When we love people and are seeking to serve them, we are patient, gentle and kind with them, able to hold back on our desires to do what is best for them. No, this isn't always easy. Committing to live in this freedom means signing a death warrant for your sinful nature. Yes, a commitment to this freedom means a battle as you struggle to put aside your desires. We too easily fall for the illusion that saying "Yes" to faith in Christ will bring with it a life of ease. Saying yes to Christ means saying yes to a war. It will be a fight to put down your sinful nature and say no to your sinful desires. It will be a struggle, at times an extremely difficult struggle, to set aside what your sinful nature wants to live guided by the Spirit. Why would we willingly commit ourselves to this kind of a battle the same as our forefathers did when they signed the Declaration of Independence? They had a freedom worth fighting for...and so do we. We fight for the freedom we have been given in Christ knowing complete freedom will come in heaven when this life is over.

What we have in Christ is worth fighting for. It's worth giving up everything, even if called for, our earthly lives so that we can live with God forever in heaven. With his sacrifice and because of his love, Jesus has freed you from your sin so that you can live as his people. We treasure this freedom. We live in this freedom. We are committed to this freedom. Amen.