

1. Good morning, my name is John, I'm one of the elders here at City Life and I'm honored to get to look at this powerful passage in Galatians with you this morning.
2. Sunny Jacobs and Peter Pringle¹
 - a. Were a unique couple: both wrongfully incarcerated
 - b. Sunny was in prison in Australia for 17 years, including 5 years in solitary confinement.
 - c. She called it her own death row for 1.
 - d. 22 hours of the day, she was alone, in a room smaller than a parking space.
 - e. Peter was wrongly accused in the US for murder and on death row for 15 years.
 - f. They were both exonerated, their convictions overturned. But the long term effects of losing prime years of their life, and suffering this injustice is irreversible.
 - g. What would you do after 17 years of confinement? Road trip? Vacation? Binge watch all the shows you missed?
 - h. They met when Sunny was speaking on criminal justice reform. They opened the Sunny Center Foundation, which runs retreat center for exonerated prisoners.
 - i. She said, "When you are imprisoned, love is the first thing that disappears from your life. So the first thing we do for our exonerates is make them a part of our family, we invite them into our home and shower them with unconditional love."
 - j. After years of being locked up, confined, ignored by the system, called liars and criminals, they turned around to use their freedom to serve others.
3. Sunny and Peter give us a perfect example of deep freedom. The liberty to transcend personal desires or impulses and then helps others.
4. Where we are In the letter of Galatians today, Chapter 5 is a hinge from theological correction and teaching to practical exhortation. So now the Apostle Paul is telling the church what life looks like in light of the gospel reality he's been defending all this time. He turns to ask so what? How are we supposed to react?
5. So, this morning we'll look at Freedom, Love, and Standing Firm. This may sound like a 1970s hippy sermon: Freedom, Love, and Disco, but I assure you I'm just trying to follow the text: Freedom, Love, and Standing Firm.
6. Let's pray.

1. Freedom: Christ has set us free (1-6)

- a. Paul dives right in with verse 1, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."²
- b. Despite the caricature of God being a disapproving rulemaker: We see throughout the Bible that God is the great liberator.
 - i. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."³
- c. Remember that history shaping event of the Lord delivering the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. For hundreds of years, the Hebrews were slaves in Egypt, but the Lord told Moses, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, **8**and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey... **9**And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them... So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go."
- d. This is an epic narrative of God warring against Pharaoh with powerful plagues to set free his people from slavery. This has been a symbolic event through history for causes to promote justice for the vulnerable and oppressed. Even now the Exodus is a powerful motivation for ministries like the International Justice Mission a phenomenal organization that is fighting to end the modern day slavery and the slave trade globally.
- e. This historical event in Exodus reflects the theological truth that Paul is emphasizing for us today.
- f. This is a powerful gospel metaphor for Christ's work.
 - i. Jesus Christ came to earth, lived a sinless life, gave himself up on the cross, and rose from the death to emancipate us from a state of slavery and captivity.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/23/fashion/weddings/update-2011-vows-couple-sunny-jacobs-peter-pringle-deathrow.html> & <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/20/fashion/weddings/sunny-jacobs-and-peter-pringle-vows.html>

² He is not talking about abstract notion of freedom, but using the Greek article saying 'the Freedom,' Christian Freedom.

³ 2 Cor 3:17,

- ii. God's mission in all of history, beginning in Genesis is this agenda of liberation....and it should be ours.
- iii. We fell in the garden to lies, deception, false beliefs that constricted us. Immediately Adam and Eve felt the binding consequence of sin: alienated relationships, distances from God, labor, toil, pain in childbirth, death. These are the shackles put on humans since the fall.
- iv. Brothers and Sisters, the work of Christ comes and shatters those cold tight shackles: Rising from the dead, crushing those limitations and brings us eternal life and one day we'll be back in the Garden City of New Jerusalem which we discussed last week.
- v. I know we just started the sermon, and coffee hasn't really kicked in yet, but that's good news. Something to be elated over.
- g. Here in our passage, Paul is emphatically telling the Galatian church that the Savior freed us so that we may maintain, exercise, and enjoy deep freedom.⁴
- h. Well, lets look at this: what has Christ set us free from?⁵
 - i. External rules of the law
 1. Paul has been making this argument for the whole book, that we are free from having to earn our salvation.
 2. We are free from saving ourselves by following the law.
 3. Remember to the Galatians, they believed in freedom from the law and all its external requirements like circumcision, but now people came in and added to the work of Christ. Saying yes, Jesus saved you but you have to do your part and follow these rules.
 4. They were falling back away from the gospel Paul preached to them.
 - ii. Internal merit system
 1. Some of us, we easily let go of the law, but we adopt the similar false gospel of the merit system.
 2. While I don't think Jewish customs and rules saves me, I do still tie my worth and God's acceptance of me to my spiritual performance.
 3. This could be how faithful I am with reading the Bible or the fact that I showed up this morning. Its that act that makes God happy with me, or that's why he forgives me, because even though the kids have been crazy, I still showed up to City Group.
 - iii. Expectation of others
 1. This merit system doesn't just stay within us though, right. We use this as a lens on others: We keep score on our family members, friends, coworkers and we judging whether they are measuring up.
 2. I was helping some friends move last week and realized that when they helped ME move a few years ago, I had a lot more heavy boxes of books.
 3. If Robin and Preston were using the merit system they would be holding that against me. Our score is not even yet. I'm still in the red. Thankfully, they are godly friends and not keeping score. Right, Preston?
 4. It's interesting, here in verse three Paul points out by adopting any merit system, any of this legalism, we're signing up for it all. Usually, we want to keep score on others, but receive grace from them. You have to earn my friendship, but I should receive it for free. Do you see that in your heart?
 5. It's pathetic. Praise the Lord we've been set free from all this: the law, the internal merit system, expectations on others.
 - iv. The liberating work of Christ also frees us from Sin!
 1. Sin itself is binding, oppressive, and destructive.
 2. Usually, we think rules telling us not to sin are restrictive.
 3. But Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave^b to sin...if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."
 4. Then Paul switches images here, do not submit to a yoke of slavery, do not go be loaded down again like an animal forced to work a field for someone else's gain. This is sin.⁶

⁴ Lenski

⁵ Hebrews 2:15

⁶ He's not calling them away from something good for something better, he's saying that yoke is slavery. Sin is not just captivating because it leads you to where you don't want – to death – but sin is slavery because of how it shapes you. We are not hopeless in the

5. Paul expresses this reality vividly in Romans 7:22-25, “For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, **23**but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. **24**Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? **25**Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”
6. John Calvin makes the point that its odd we call it freedom when a man sins without any and no outside compulsion. He mocks this idea and said, “A noble freedom, indeed – for man not to be forced to serve sin, yet to be such a willing slave that his will is bound by the fetters of sin!”⁷
7. For example, in a conversation, sin of pride and self-obsession forces me to talk about myself, bring every story back to me, remind people how great I am. Remember when I snuck in how many books I have at my house? (Oh I’ve got so many books, I’m smart. No, just ask my wife. The number of books is problem.)
8. But that self-centered agenda in a conversation deprives me of freely talking to someone. Listening to their stories, their perspective, without thinking of my response. I get to ask questions, I get to be with them, encourage them, point them to Christ, not plotting how point them to me.
 - i. Church, like Sunny and Peter, we’re the prisoners, but if you have faith in Christ, we’ve been pardoned, but the difference is, we did the crimes! We were found guilty without a doubt. The divine judge had all the evidence before him and declared us responsible of that sin.
 - i. Yet Christ set us free from all this. He went into solitary confinement for us. Left his Father and the luxuries of heaven to come to earth and be punished for us.
 - ii. Christ emptied the countless cells on death row and was executed.
 - j. This rescue was deeply needed because at the heart of all this, we had become slaves to our desires.⁸
 - i. Philosopher Roberto Unger, “Our desires are insatiable. We seek from the limited the unlimited...Our insatiability is [an] incurable defect in human life. Our insatiability is rooted in our natural constitution. Human desires are indeterminate....We force the limited to serve as a surrogate for the unlimited.”⁹
 - ii. What we’re seeking, what we desire is unlimited and indeterminate, we want eternity and infinite joy and acceptance.
 1. That’s why we sin and follow the law/merit system to win infinite and boundless joy and freedom.
 - iii. THAT’S exactly what we have in Christ.
 - iv. We’re *in Christ Jesus and have boundless intimacy and deep freedom.*
 - k. This sounds too good to be true. We’re suspicious of happy endings.¹⁰
 - l. The promise of freedom gets even complex and beautiful...

2. Love: Freedom to serve others in love (13-15)

- a. Look at verse 13, “*For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*”
- b. Look at this, “*Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh.*”

face of our sin, whether its genetic, tied to past experiences, the way we were raised – Christ is more powerful than the seemingly fatalistic forces of our nature or our past.

⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Full quote: “Man will then be spoken of as having this sort of free decision, not because he has free choice equally of good and evil, but because he acts wickedly by will, not by compulsion. Well put, indeed, but what purpose is served by labeling with a proud name such a slight thing? A noble freedom, indeed – for man not to be forced to serve sin, yet to be such a willing slave that his will is bound by the fetters of sin!”

⁸ Augustine, “Without the Spirit man’s will is not free, since it has been laid under by shackling and conquering desires.”

⁹ Philosopher Roberto Unger, *The Religion of the Future*, “Our desires are insatiable. We seek from the limited the unlimited. We must fail. Our insatiability is [an] incurable defect in human life. Our insatiability is rooted in our natural constitution. Human desires are indeterminate.... Even when, as in addiction and obsession, they fix on particular objects, we make those particular objects serve as proxies for longings to which they have a loose or arbitrary relation. We force the limited to serve as a surrogate for the unlimited. This misalliance, revealed most starkly in our obsessional and addictive behavior, carries over to our entire experience of wanting and seeking...We suffer when desire goes unsatisfied and, when it is satisfied, we are briefly relieved of pain. Our desires, however, are unlimited in both their number and their reach. The moment of dissatisfaction is soon followed by other unrequited wants. Contentment remains a momentary interlude in an experience of privation and longing that has no end.”

¹⁰ “Almost anything that consoles is a fake.” Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 59.

- i. The Greek word “flesh,” here means body or the self.¹¹
- c. While yes, there is this aspect of freedom where we have been set free from these forces, our freedom is for others not the self.¹²
 - i. We think of freedom as the ability to do whatever I want.
 1. That's ingrained in the American ethos. Self-determination & autonomy.¹³
 2. George Otis said “In America the most important thing is that people have freedom. In restricted countries the most important thing is what people do with freedom.”¹⁴
 3. But, the biblical vision is that we are saved to a freedom that includes walking in holiness and righteousness
 4. Specifically here under the authority of a better King we serve others before ourselves.
 5. “but through love serve one another” in verse 13.
 - ii. This is what the exonerated inmates, Sunny and Peter, did. They used their freedom to tell their story, a painful thing to do, to listen to others process their abuse from the justice system, and walk with those broken people in their new-found liberation.
 - iii. This may seem odd but when we're freed from selfish desires, the option to truly serve others opens up, which we couldn't do in our sin.
 1. **When Christ unshackles us, we can lift our head to see the others around us.**
 2. “Freedom is not to be seen as an exercise in selfishness; it must be exercised in love.”¹⁵
 3. That slavery to law and the merit system is intrinsically self-focused & abuses others – But not in Christ's freedom.
- d. “Through love serve one another,” So, who should I love? We'll we could make a list:
 - i. Those in need (parable of the Good Samaritan)¹⁶
 - ii. The vulnerable (poor, weak, fatherless, marginalized)¹⁷
 - iii. Those who depend upon you (family, household)¹⁸
 - iv. But really, love of neighbor is those God has put in your life. This does not mean you are called to serve them the same way all the time.
 - v. If God has put someone in your life, you are called to love them. Not because they are lovely.
- e. How should I love them? What is does that look like?
 - i. Loving service is **seeking their good** in God
 1. Its loving to seek justice for the oppressed and marginalized
 2. Meet physical needs
 3. Ministry of presence
 4. Listening to their struggles
 - ii. These make sense, but we're not just seeking whatever we think would be good for them. We are seeking **their good in God**. So, that means, whether welcomed or awkward or not:
 1. Reminding others of the gospel
 2. Pray for them – keep a list of what you're praying for.¹⁹
 3. Speaking the truth to them in hard things.
 4. Calling them to repentance
 - iii. When we seek another's good in God, we commit to walk alongside them in life: physically and spiritually.
- f. With all these, this doesn't look like freedom! It seems like a long do-to list, a weighty obligation.
- g. **It is. It's an impossible task that is too much and too complicated: BUT Faith is the key**
 - i. There's this amazing phrase in verse 6: Faith working through love.

¹¹ This word, *sarx*, does not always have a negative connotation: Galatians 2:20.

¹² For secular perspectives on this vision of Freedom see Immanuel Kant and Hegel. According to Hegel there are three freedoms: 1) natural freedom – free flight of bird, seeking appetites aimlessly 2) formal freedom – in which you can make choices 3) rational freedom – not following appetites to achieve a consistent meaningful whole

¹³ So, though we think this way, we should not equivocate autonomy and freedom. Autonomy means self-law / self-governance - not depending on others.

¹⁴ This would have been common to the Galatians shaped by Greek culture where ‘a free citizen’ was someone who participated in public affairs – that's why you wanted freedom.

¹⁵ Morris, 163.

¹⁶ Luke 10:25-37

¹⁷ Psalm 82:3-4

¹⁸ 1 Timothy 5:8

¹⁹ 1 John 3:22

1. Add this to your vocabulary and prayers. Pray the Lord gives you faith working through love.
 2. Faith is more than just believing the right things, but trusting in the right person.²⁰
 3. Eph 4:20-32 gives us this picture of what faith looks like: taking off the old and putting on holiness of God. Then he immediately clarifies how we're to treat other people: He says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."
- ii. So this love and service to others comes out of our faith in Christ and the Spirit in us. Is that how you're loving others today? When you serve here at the church or sit down to catch up with a friend who is in a trial, is that your faith in God working through love?
 1. Or do you serve out of faith and confidence in yourself?
 - iii. Too often we depend upon alternative sources of love:
 1. Are you serving out of duty/obligation? – "I committed, so I have to serve"
 2. Guilt – "They did this for me," or "I couldn't help last time, so"
 3. Reputation – "What will CG think if I don't speak up and encourage the person who shared?"
 4. Exchange of goods – Being a good friend so feel better about yourself, or so they'll listen to you when you have a bad week.
 5. All these alternative sources of love are self-focused.
 - iv. Our faith in Christ allows you to stop obsessing over self and see other people. Not focused on how they compare to you but how God sees them: valuable, worthy of your time, patience, effort.
 - v. Seeing my service to others as faith in God also frees from taking on responsibility for others.
 1. So, we're not constrained to our own agendas in relationships: **Christ doesn't need us.** He can save that marriage, bring our neighbors to faith, encourage family members. He can accomplish all that. So now we have the freedom to just obey in joy.
 2. Also, we don't have to be obsessed over the future, just freedom to take one step at a time. A couple of months ago a friend came to me after a sermon and said the Lord clearly called them to forgive their father after years of hurt and sin. They experienced the freedom not to worry about what happens after that, whether they'd have to keep up a relationship or explain it to other family members. They had the freedom to simply walk one step at a time. This is beautiful.
 3. They could only do that out of faith in God
 - vi. CS Lewis explained that his love of neighbor grew when he increased his love of God, but when he focused on his neighbors instead of God, he actually was less loving. "When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased."²¹
- h. The other side of that coin is that God uses serving others and messy relationships to draw us to himself.²²
- i. We're doing it out of faith and he is using it to strengthen our faith.
 - ii. Think of that moment when you see that name on your phone. We probably have at least one contact like that in your phone. The text alert or worse the unsolicited phone call! I see the name and pray, "Holy Spirit I need you. Please help." Then I press the button. The answer button to be clear...
 - iii. We think God's love would remove us from suffering, hard relationships, awkward situations. God's grace is that he's with you in that.

3. Stand Firm / Who is hindering you?

²⁰ Morris, 158. "Sometimes Christians have been so concerned with a zeal for rigid correctness in doctrine, which they have identified with faith, that they have overlooked the warmth of love that is inevitably the outcome of faith as Paul understood it."

²¹ CS Lewis, *Letters of CS Lewis*, 248. Full quote: "When I have learnt to love God better than my earthly [neighbors], I shall love my earthly [neighbors] better than I do now. In so far as I lean to love my earthly [neighbors] at the expense of God and instead of God, I shall be moving towards the state in which I shall not love my earthly [neighbors] at all. When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased."

²² One huge sign of this is forgiveness – patience, gentleness. We need Christ as much when we're sinned against as we do when we ourselves sin.

- a. So we looked at Freedom, Love, and now Disco, I mean “Stand Firm.”
- b. So we have this amazing gospel truth that we’ve been set free and this practical point to work out our faith in love to others, but this passage also has very strong language about our perseverance.
 - i. In verse one, he says, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”
 - 1. “Stand Firm” is an imperative.
 - 2. The Galatians had accepted the gospel, then ceded ground. They back away full faith in Christ.
 - a. SO Paul tells them to stop retreating!
 - b. Stand Firm and resist any forces putting you in captivity.
 - ii. Christ has set us free, don’t submit again to yoke of slavery
 - iii. Even after centuries of back-breaking slavery and oppression, the Hebrews people got out of Egypt by the phenomenal miracles of God and then complained about the food! THAT SOUNDS LIKE A PARTICULARLY AUSTINITE THING TO DO. They “wept and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat! 5We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. 6But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.”²³
 - iv. This is ridiculous. How could they want to go back to making bricks under the oppression, harsh treatment, whips of the taskmasters?
 - v. This is what we do when we run back to sin, thinking we need to earn God’s favor, and then when we hold others to the merit system.²⁴
- c. This message of slavery, weight on your shoulders, doesn't come from the Lord.
 - i. So we need to ask what Paul does here in verse 7, “who hindered you from obeying the truth?”
 - ii. They were running well, making progress, growing in faith.
- d. Do you know what hinders you? Have you reflected, prayed, and worked with others to map out where your personal hindrances are?
 - i. That’s what fight club does: Helps you identify the spiritual slave masters that want you in chains. Name them and then flee them.
 - 1. We say “I’m struggling with this sin,” but the reality is temptation opened the door and you ran back into its prison cell.
- e. Paul does not mince words about the false teachers who were trapping the Galatians with a false gospel.
 - i. Look at verse 12, “I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!”
 - ii. Yeah, that’s in your Bible. Probably not the versions we use over in KidsLife, but its really here.
 - iii. This zeal is not just Paul getting carried away, in John 2, Jesus sees people selling and making a profit in the Temple and he flips over tables, pours out their coins, and even makes a whip to drive everyone out. He was appalled by the distortion of worship to God.
 - iv. Here in Galatians, the distortion of the gospel and false teaching was so severe and dangerous that Paul says he wishes these teachers would castrate themselves.²⁵
- f. Throughout the series we’ve referred to the call to mortify your sin, but it to death.
- g. Similarly, we need to mortify those things that tempt us to sin. We must identify and cast out whatever is hindering us from embracing our freedom in Christ and whatever is keeping us from loving others in service.
- h. These false teachers, the movies/shows we’re watching, books we’re reading. They are formative and these lies become belief. I’ll give an example: toxic relationships.
 - i. This is a popular doctrine in our culture: if a relationship takes more than it gives – dump it.
 - ii. Now, Bible gives us real wisdom about relationships, warns against sinful ones, but our culture has false teachers telling us its okay to categorizing people as toxic and cutting them out of our lives simply because the relationship is hard relationship.
 - 1. Again, the Bible does not tell us to stay in abusive relationships, but throwing the label ‘toxic’ around on people is not Biblical.

²³ Numbers 11:4-6

²⁴ Stott. “You cannot have it both ways. It is impossible to receive Christ, thereby acknowledging that you cannot save yourself, and then receive circumcision, thereby claiming that you can.”

²⁵ Paul is mocking this false gospel since those teachers insisted new Christians follow Jewish rules including circumcision.

- 2. We're motivated by Christ's love, not the loveliness of others.
 - iii. Two questions to ask your FC, CG, or friends:
 - 1. What is hindering you from freedom?
 - 2. What is hindering you from loving others?
 - i. Begin to answer this question today, what is hindering you?
 - i. Is that additional streaming subscription getting in the way of your generosity to others?
 - ii. Is your love of comfort keeping you from making that call and having that awkward conversation with the family member?
 - iii. Are you using a busy calendar to excuse yourself from having coffee or lunch with a friend that you know is going through it and wants to talk?
 - j. Let's identify the sin and also the false teachers, if we don't we're sitting in a Spiritual disaster. Look what happens if fall back into slavery and don't practice faith working in love (verse 4):
 - i. We're severed from Christ
 - ii. Fall from grace
 - k. Sin and self-obsession is captivity but its also distance and solitary confinement from Christ!
4. Oh brother and sisters, we have been set free from external rules, internal guilt, shackles of sin, and can practice faith working itself out in love.