

One of the rites of passage for a teenager is getting a driver's license. I remember my mom reluctantly handing over the keys to her car to me. Those keys represented a newfound freedom. I was not going to be totally dependent on my bike, the bus or my two legs for transportation. I could now make decisions about where I was going, when I was going, and now I had the use of a car by myself to get there. With this newfound freedom came many choices and responsibilities. Mom of course, didn't like this new found freedom. She knew it was going to happen eventually – but she didn't have to like it. And we did have "chats" about this new freedom. This new freedom I had would involve choices that I would make. Hopefully they would be the right choices instead of poor ones. As we learn about freedoms we come to realize the importance of making wise, mature, Godly decisions or abuse the freedom and make poor decisions.

Poor decisions are made when we consider only our own desires and place ourselves in the center of our universe. Those decisions enslave us to our sinful desires. But in our Baptism, Jesus has called us out of the darkness of these poor choices. We have all been called to freedom, freedom to walk by the Spirit.

Paul finds that the Christian church in Galatia has come under the influence of Judaizers. A Judaizer taught that in order for a Christian to be right with God, the Mosaic Law must be strictly conformed to. Circumcision, especially, was taught as necessary for salvation.

St. Paul tells the Galatians that they have been called to freedom. And he tells them in the opening verse of our text, ***"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." (v.1)***

Note Paul's words here do not submit **again** to a yoke of slavery. That's what St. Paul has been preaching to them over and over again in the first chapters of Galatians. **"Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery" (Galatians 2:4)** Jesus said, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin."** (John 8:34)

The Galatians needed to also know and remember that anyone that tries to overcome his own sin by a better keeping of the Law is still a slave to the Law. Sin and the Law make us slaves because we can't overcome the Law, we keep on sinning.

We fail every single day of our lives. We can't keep one single commandment of God's Law. Remember Martin Luther as a monk, he realized he couldn't keep the Law. The Law just hammered him, it wore him down, it tore him apart, he saw no way out from the Law because it enslaved him.

Has the Law overtaken you? Does it enslave you and take you to dark places where you see no way out. Home life, work life, relationships has been infected by the Law to the point that God and His love and forgiveness through Jesus is a pipedream. This enslavement takes away our life both physical and eternal. All we see is the first half of Romans 6:23, **"The wages of sin is death."** (Romans 6:23a)

St. Paul says to the Galatians and to us today, **"Christ has set us free."** (v.1a) He came to earth to bring us freedom. Jesus said, **"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the**

truth will set you free. So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.
(John 8:31-32, 36)

Jesus yoked Himself to us, becoming a true human just like us. He placed Himself in slavery under the Law, obligating Himself to meet all of its demands perfectly. And He kept the Law perfectly for us and all mankind.

Jesus obtained victory for us through His perfect life, His death and His resurrection. Jesus paid the ransom price for our freedom - ***"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."***
(Matthew 20:28) Jesus gives us His victory over death - ***"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*** ***(1 Corinthians 15:57)***

No longer does the Law overtake us. No longer are we enslaved to sin that takes us to those dark places where we see no way out. Our home life, work life, and relationships are no longer infected by the Law because God and His love and forgiveness through Jesus is not pipedream. We now see and believe the second part of Romans 6:23, ***"but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** ***(Romans 6:23b)***

Our freedom then is to walk by the Spirit. Then as St. Paul reminds us, ***"Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."*** ***(v.13b)*** An opportunity for the flesh. Now that we have freedom how are we going to use it. Sadly, many use this freedom for the flesh. The flesh is our sinful nature. It's self-centered and doesn't care about others. It's all about self. St. Paul lists them for us - ***"Now the works of the flesh are evident:***

sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these."

(v.19-21) These works of the flesh not only hurt others but they destroy us. The consequences of walking in the works of the flesh has only one ending eternal death, eternal slavery. As St. Paul warns, ***"I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."*** (v.21b)

Our freedom should be Spirit led. We should walk in serving one another with the fruit of the Spirit. The purpose of freedom is to love and serve our neighbor. For this freedom Jesus has set us free. St. Paul writes, ***"For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*** (Galatians 5:14)

Freedom expresses itself with the fruit of the Spirit. ***"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."*** (v.22-23)

I want you to picture this congregation, your home and your circle of friends walking this way. Imagine throwing aside pettiness, jealousy, anger, rage and treating each other as we want to be treated, but more importantly as God wants us to treat others.

These are the fruits of freedom you have in Jesus Christ. St. Paul writes, ***"And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."*** (v.24) Jesus' death and resurrection set us free from death and

eternal slavery in hell. In Jesus, we have we have eternal life. We have love, joy, peace that can only come through Him. This is what true freedom is.

In Jesus, we have been set free. We are no longer under the Law but are led by the Spirit. That Spirit-led life brings us joy and peace in Jesus and keeps us from the works of the flesh. Thanks be to God that for freedom Jesus has set us free.

Amen!

