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Sermon Notes

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The Proper Use of Christian Freedom

Galatians 5:13-15

In 1520, Martin Luther wrote a treatise entitled, “The Freedom of a Christian.” In it, he argued that two seemingly contradictory theses were true: I. A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. II. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. His primary supporting text was 1 Corinthians 9:19, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all.” What in the world did this brilliant monk mean by this? How are Christians amazingly FREE FROM ALL OTHER PEOPLE? And in what way are Christians called to become SLAVES TO ALL OTHER PEOPLE?

Understanding Christian freedom is essential to grasping this beautiful little book of Galatians.

Paul has been asserting that the Galatian Christians are FREE FOREVER from the Law in its power to condemn their souls to hell. They are FREE FOREVER from the Law’s meticulous commands that governed their daily behavior in many ways—what they could eat or not eat, what they could wear or not wear, where they had to go to worship... etc. Moreover, they were FREE FOREVER from living to PLEASE OTHERS... living to satisfy the demands of legalists:

Galatians 1:10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

But yet, in this text, Paul is commanding a lifestyle of LAW-ABIDING in service to others... NOT in the legalistic sense of EARNING FORGIVENESS but in the beautiful sense of Christ-like SERVICE TO OTHERS IN LOVE:

Galatians 5:13-14 serve one another in love. ¹⁴ The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

The common tendency for us when we understand the soaring freedom of the gospel is to use it SELFISHLY... as I said a few weeks ago:

Many people think of it as the ability to do anything you want to do whenever you want to do it. They see it as a complete severing of all the shackles and chains and boundaries and requirements that could restrict your ability to do whatever you want to do. If you want to go there, you go there. If you want to eat this, you eat it. If you want to jump off

a cliff and soar like a bird, you do it. If you want to have this possession, you have it. If you want to say these words, you say them. No boundaries. No rules. No restrictions. No regrets!!

The Bible has a great deal to say about freedom. Our text this morning asserts plainly that Jesus Christ shed His blood to set you free.

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

Today, we will listen to Paul define the proper USE of that freedom!!

I. Called to Soaring Freedom... to Please God (vs. 13)

Galatians 5:13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

A. Pictures of Freedom

1. The hawks soaring regally on thermals going up from Echo Lake in Acadia National Park... upward in spirals from far below me to flying over my head
2. A pod of Dolphins leaping in the early morning sunlight off Carolina Beach... leaping, playing, running
3. A herd of caribou running across the tundra in the summer in northern Canada
4. Paul and Silas singing in the Philippian jail at midnight... with their backs bleeding and their stomachs empty, in pitch black, but filled with joy and power—caring only for the glory of Christ and the salvation of others

B. A Nation of People Who Yearn for Freedom... But Don't Understand It

1. A vastly different definition of freedom is in the mind of libertarian activists who march through the streets of Washington DC or downtown Durham, NC chanting slogans with their fists in the air
2. These people define freedom as the right to do anything that makes them happy
3. Many times, the rights they are seeking to defend so stridently are things the Bible calls evil
4. Their idea of freedom is self-defined... linked to their pleasures... linked to their flesh

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

People consider it freedom to be able to pursue their own pleasures, even if it means their own destruction.

C. Christian Freedom: The Power to Please God as Christ Did

1. A better definition of freedom: the power to do what is right... the power to serve God with a full heart as Jesus Christ did
2. The power to live openly for God, with no fetters, no restraints
3. Christian freedom is the ability to RUN IN THE PATH OF GOD'S COMMANDS

Psalm 119:32 I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.

D. Again: the Twin Dangers of Legalism and License

1. Against Legalism: vs. 1

Galatians 5:1 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.

Tim Keller: "Don't LOSE gospel freedom"

2. Against License: vs. 13

Galatians 5:13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh...

Tim Keller: "Don't ABUSE gospel freedom"

3. Tim Keller: "Don't LOSE gospel freedom; and don't ABUSE gospel freedom!!"
4. John MacArthur:

"Someone has pictured legalism and license as two parallel streams that run between heaven and earth. The stream of legalism is clear, sparkling, and pure (because God's Law is pure and holy); but its waters run so deep and furiously that no one can enter that stream without being drowned or smashed on the rocks of its unrelenting demands. The stream of license, by contrast, is relatively quiet, still, and shallow... and crossing it seems easy and attractive. But its waters are so contaminated with poisons and pollutants that to try to cross it is also certain death. Both streams are uncrossable and deadly, one because of impossible moral and spiritual demands, the other because of moral and spiritual filth.

But spanning those two deadly streams is the bridge of the gospel of Jesus Christ... the only passage from earth to heaven. The two streams lead to death because they are man's ways. The gospel leads to life because it is God's way." [*Comm. On Galatians*, 145]

The Gospel calls us to FREEDOM... total, soaring freedom!!!

E. To Understand Our Freedom, We Must Understand Our Previous Bondage

1. Slaves to sin

John 8:34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

Romans 6:20 ... you were slaves of sin

2. Slaves to Satan

Ephesians 2:2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

3. Under the wrath and curse of God

Romans 2:5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

4. With unseen chains binding us to continue to live like that

- a. The chains of the flesh... internal lusts and drives that bind us and keep us from living to please God
- b. The chains of Satan's power... unseen influences that are powerfully effective in causing us to violate God's Laws
- c. The chains of addiction and habit and lusts and the world's influences
- d. This CHAIN:

Romans 7:15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

F. Invisible Chains Now Completely Broken

1. We are FREE from all these chains
2. Christian freedom is a mysterious MIX of "already" and "not yet"
3. We are completely free from sin and Satan's power to COMMAND us...

Romans 6:14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Romans 6:18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

4. BUT because of the ongoing power of the flesh, we are commanded to LIVE UP to our freedom

Galatians 5:1 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.

Galatians 5:13 You, my brothers, were called to be free.

True Christian freedom is an UPWARD CALL... living more and more like Jesus Christ in serving God and others... living a more and more joyous, powerful, heavenly life

Living AS FREE FROM SIN as you were at one time FREE FROM RIGHTEOUSNESS

Romans 6:20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.

G. The Most Perfectly Free Man that Ever Lived: Jesus Christ

John 14:30-31 I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, ³¹ but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

Lit. "He has nothing IN ME..." no power, no ability to accuse, no hold... nothing

JESUS WAS TOTALLY FREE!!!!

Matthew 4:8-10 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

H. The Son and the Spirit Give Freedom

John 8:36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Romans 8:2 through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

2 Corinthians 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

So... we ARE FREE, and we are called on to LIVE AS FREE PEOPLE... but in order that we may do that, we must learn more accurately what this Christian freedom MEANS!

II. Christian Freedom Does Not Indulge the Flesh (vs. 13)

Galatians 5:13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature

A. The First Thing: Do Not Use Your Freedom to Indulge the Flesh

1. Paul's opponents looked on him as an antinomian, a lawless libertine... saying the laws of God meant nothing, and you can live however you want

Romans 3:8 Why not say-- as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say-- "Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is deserved.

2. Nothing could be further from the truth!!
3. Jesus didn't come to free us up TO sin... He came to free us up FROM sin!

Matthew 1:21 you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

B. What is "the Flesh"?

1. Greek word "sarx"... NIV translates it "sinful nature"
2. It is the drive of our minds and bodies toward habitual sin
3. For years we trained our minds and bodies in self-indulgence and sin... the memory of that training is lodged in what the NT calls the "flesh"... part mental memory (called habit), part muscle memory
4. It is tied to the natural drives of the body—the natural drives for food and comfort and sex and pleasure—pushed beyond boundaries set by God

C. How Could Freedom Be "An Opportunity" For the Flesh?

1. The word "opportunity" often indicates a "base of operations"... like a "foothold"

Illus. Think of Normandy in France the day after D-Day—June 6, 1944. On that following day (June 7), the Allies used the beachhead as a "base of operations" from which they could land supplies and equipment to continue their conquest of the rest of France, and eventually all of German-held Europe

So also the idea of Christian freedom could be a BASE OF OPERATIONS for the flesh to exercise its FREEDOMS

2. This happens when Christians think, "It doesn't really matter how I live or what I do with my body... I will be forgive no matter what! I will go to

heaven no matter what! ‘Once saved, always saved’, right?! So I can do whatever I want to do without being too worried about what will happen after I die!”

D. How Do Many False Teachers Teach This?

1. In the NT era:

2. In our day: “Cotton Candy Christianity”... prosperity gospel
 - a. Joel Osteen: refuses to preach on any controversial issues, so he can help all his people “stay positive” and seek to gain their “best life now”
 - b. Most prosperity gospel preachers refuse to confront sin
 - c. Preaching plainly on sin and the need we have to be pure is “negative” in that type of Christianity...
 - d. Such a “positive” approach is not new... but it is very popular

Luke 6:26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.

- e. So also other mainstream evangelical pastors refuse to address controversial issues of sin like fornication, pornography, homosexuality, abortion, materialism, divorce
- f. Speaking biblical truth on these things makes people feel uncomfortable and many pastors (like Joel Osteen) just want to “stay positive”... and all of it is under the loosey-goosey guise of “now that Christ has died, nothing really matters”

E. How Do Many Christians Live This Out?

1. So much worldliness today
2. So much indulgence of worldly input from internet and movies and books and magazine... many Christians go trolling through the sewer-system of the world’s filth looking for some tidbits of pleasure, all the while thinking “I am forgiven...” “God will protect me” “I am not under law”
3. Christians are ready to accuse of legalism anyone serious about Christian disciplines or Christian morality or personal holiness

F. How Does the New Testament Refute It?

1. Peter refutes it in one verse:

1 Peter 2:16 Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

“cover-up” = literally “cloak”... veil... covering...

The freedom of a Christian should not give him/her a license to sin

2. Paul refutes it for three chapters in Romans 6-8

Romans 6:1-2 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Romans 6:11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:15-18 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Romans 8:1-4 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

G. Immediate Application

1. How are you using your freedom?
2. Do you think, “I am forgiven and will be cleansed by grace” while you look at internet pornography?
3. Do you think “It doesn’t matter what books I read, what magazines I look at, what movies I watch... I am not under law”?
4. Do you bristle when pastors like me meddle in matters of personal lifestyle, thinking that such preaching is really “legalism”?
5. Do you think, “I can skip my QTs or church regularly because I don’t want to be ‘legalistic’”?

6. Do you think to have a regular time of intercessory prayer or fasting is “legalistic”?
7. Do you think that for FBC to emphasize the absolute need for personal holiness is “legalistic”?
8. Do you use your freedom as a cover-up for evil??
9. Do you live as though all that matters is that grace is greater than all our sins?

III. Christian Freedom Serves Others in Love (vs. 13)

Galatians 5:13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another in love.

A. Christian Freedom is the Power to Do What Is Right...

1. That means not only pleasing God but serving others
2. The essence of the flesh is fanatical commitment to SELF
3. God wants us to live for blessing others

B. Christian Freedom Means Serving Others In Love

1. The selfishness of the flesh is refuted by true Christian freedom
2. We have been truly richly blessed by God... all our needs are met... we are infinitely rich... we are going to heaven when we die... we are FREE from all concerns about the self... we are FREE from jealousy, FREE from lust, FREE from materialism, FREE from covetousness, FREE from self-interest...
3. Free to SERVE OTHERS... live for others, live for their needs

C. Jesus Lived This

Philippians 2:3-8 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

John 13:1 Before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart from this world to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

John 13:3-5 Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into His hands, that He had come from God, and that He was going back to God. ⁴ So He got up from supper, laid aside His robe, took a towel, and tied it around Himself. ⁵ Next, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around Him.

Jesus' whole life was a life of humble service to others... seeking to meet the needs of others... seeking to heal others and feed others and counsel others and lift the burdens of others... He poured Himself out continually as a FREE MAN, living for others every moment of the day

Ultimately, Jesus DIED to serve others... He was a FREE MAN even while dying on the cross!! Free from selfishness, free from compulsion, He could have come down from the cross.. but He stayed there until our sins were atoned for

Jesus lived and died to serve others in love

D. Jesus Taught This

Matthew 20:25-28 "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

E. Application

1. By the power of the Spirit, we are enabled to forget about ourselves and love one another
2. How is your life of service? Are you serving others in love? Are you using your freedom to live for others?
3. Is there a regular pattern of laying down your life in cheerful service to the needs of others? Visiting the sick? Evangelizing the lost? Caring for the elderly? Sacrificing for the poor? Counseling the discouraged? Carrying other people's burdens?
4. Young people: you are strong and energetic... are you serving older people in love? Using your abundant strength and energy to care for elderly people who can't care for their houses like they used to?
5. Rich people: are you using your abundant financial resources to meet needs of evangelism, missions, and relief of the poor?
6. Homeowners: is there a regular pattern of hospitality in your life? THANK YOU, HOME FELLOWSHIP HOST FAMILIES!!! Well done!!!

7. Let FBC be characterized by a regular pattern of serving one another in love... not living for the FLESH... for selfish purposes

IV. Christian Freedom Fulfills the Law (vs. 14)

ESV Galatians 5:14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

A. The Pattern of Loving Service to Others Fulfills the Law of God

1. The Two Great Commandments

Matthew 22:37-40 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the greatest and most important commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments."

2. This is the "Second Table" of the Law

- a. Ten Commandments in two tables
- b. First Four Commandments: vertical... "Love God"
- c. Second—Last Six Commandments... horizontal... "Love Neighbor"

3. Paul Elaborates More in Romans 13

B. Amazing that Paul Brings Spirit-Filled Believers Back to the Law

1. Having been told we are "free from the Law", we now come back to the Law to know how to live
2. The Law cannot justify our souls... but it is still God's perfect standard for an excellent life of love
3. Open teaching in Romans 8:1-4

Romans 8:3-4 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

In other words, the indwelling Holy Spirit enables us to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law

4. The Holy Spirit enables us to live the law!! This is the gift of the New Covenant

Hebrews 8:10-12 *This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹ No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹² For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

Ezekiel 36:25-27 *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

C. The "Moral Law" Is Still "Binding" on Christians... But Not Like the Judaizers Were Teaching

1. We "must" obey the moral law of God... "love your neighbor as yourself"
2. But that "must" is radically different now... we do not use the Law to earn God's favor... we obey the Law now because we love the law and the way it perfectly reflects the character of God... we obey the Law now because it is the best, most glorious way a Christian can live
3. Sin... the violation of the Law of God... is an EVIL POISON... we want to pour out blessing on people, loving them and serving them

D. God's Law is Excellent... the Best Way to Live

Romans 7:12 *So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.*

Romans 7:22 *For in my inner being I delight in God's law*

Psalms 119:97 *Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.*

Psalms 19:7-10 *he law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. ¹⁰ They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.*

E. Paul's Elaboration on the "Whole Law Summed Up"

Romans 13:9-10 *The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may*

be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Simply put... God's Holy Spirit works the law in our hearts, making us as loving to others as Christ was

By the power of the Spirit, we love our neighbor as ourselves

By the power of the Spirit, we OBEY THE LAW OF GOD!! We do so not out of grudging obligation but out of delight to please God and please our neighbor

Summarizing:

True Christian freedom produces GODLY SELF-CONTROL, LOVING SERVICE TO OTHERS, and OBEDIENCE TO GOD

V. Christian Freedom Does Not Destroy Others (vs. 15)

Galatians 5:15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

A. Paul's Commands Cover Both Positive and Negative

1. In verse 13, we use our freedom to SERVE one another
2. In verse 15, we don't use our freedom to HARM one another

B. If We Don't Actively Love One Another, We Will Eventually Actively Harm One Another

1. The image here: of wild animals, like wolves, snarling and growling and lunging and biting and ripping and tearing viciously
2. The world of lost people is very BEAST-LIKE
3. Daniel 7 saw the rise of four human empires out of the sea like four beasts... each one a mindless eating machine
4. So human beings, if not restrained by grace, will become selfish and vicious and bite and devour

C. Look at the Acts of the Flesh vs. the Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:19-23 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ 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. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,

patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Notice how many of them are RELATIONAL...

HATRED... DISCORD... JEALOUSY... FITS OF RAGE... SELFISH AMBITION... DISSENSION... FACTIONS... ENVY

Notice also how many of the Fruit of the Spirit are relational as well:

LOVE... JOY... PEACE... PATIENCE... KINDNESS...

This is the kind of life that glorifies God

D. Legalism Produces Strife

1. A church characterized by this kind of legalism usually devolves to this kind of hostility
2. People don't love each other... they devour each other

E. Application

1. What about you? Do these words characterize your attitude toward others?
2. Do you see this at work in your marriage? Your family? Your church life?
3. Do you see how non-Christians do this out in the world? Isn't this the essence of what "dog-eats-dog" means?
4. Do you see the tendency to go hard after someone who opposes you? Do you see pride and anger in your own heart?
5. Are you using Christian freedom to mask a competitive drive to dominate other people... getting your way in what you want?
6. Pray for the Christian remedy:

Philippians 2:1-4 *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Ephesians 4:1-3 *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient,*

bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Conclusion:

Christian freedom is a beautiful thing... we MUST protect it (vs. 1)... but we must also not MISUSE it (vs. 13-15).

God has set us free from the flesh... free from selfishness and sin... free at last to live openly for His glory