

Part 10: Finally Free

Tyler Velin | Galatians 5:13-24

December 28th, 2025

In 2018, the results of a 30 year study were released. The study followed men, from nine different states, who had just been set free from prison. What opportunities would their newfound freedom provide them in our modern world? The results are shocking; sparking debates on the internal issues of the criminal justice system and external social realities. But most importantly, it challenges our understanding of the nature of freedom itself. What does it mean to be free?

This is not a new issue. Paul's letter to the Galatians is Paul's lecture on the nature of freedom. Last week we read: **Galatians 5:1**, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

Paul's efforts in his letter so far have been to stress *how* Christians are made free. We are made free in Christ alone, by faith not by the law with works. But now Paul is helping us understand *from what* and *for what* we have been freed.

If we are free in Christ, what does it look like to live free? For what purpose are we free?

You might think the answer is easy. We are freed to be free. But here's why we need to really understand the nature of freedom in Christ. That 2018 study followed men set free. But the statistic showed that five out of every six men set free were arrested again—within the first year. They were free from prison—but they weren't free from what put them there.

They were free from prison—but not from the underlying problems.

What does Christ's freedom produce in us? Does Christ's freedom set us free to go back to doing what we were doing before? Does he free us just to send us back to the law? Does Christ's freedom free us so that we can just do whatever we want to do? If Christ didn't free us to go back to the law, did Christ free us so that we can now freely sin without consequence?

These are important questions. All of which Paul will answer for us today in a sermon titled: "Finally Free." We live out of, and we live for whatever we think freedom is. But if we don't understand true freedom, that is freedom in Christ, our lives will be anything but free.

That's our big idea this morning: **Freedom from sin is freedom for life.**

The gospel shows us not only how we have been freed—but from what and for what we have been freed. We will see this in three ways this morning: Christ frees us, **From Craving for Caring, From Disappointment For Delight, From Labor For Life.**

Read with me, **Galatians 5:13-15**, "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another."

Here's our first point this morning: Jesus frees us **From Craving for Caring**.

Uncle Ben had no idea about Peter Parker's hidden superpowers when he said, "With great power comes great responsibility." But knowing the supernatural freedom that believers have in Christ, Paul says this to the Christian: "With great freedom comes great opportunity."

That word, "opportunity," carries the idea of a base camp. At the base of Mount Everest is a base camp. It's rich with resources and supplies so that you might find opportunity to make it to the summit. Part of those resources are oxygen tanks and respirators. Now, you could take those base camp supplies and drive 800 miles to the nearest ocean and use them to scuba dive. You could. It's possible. But it's not opportune.

The freedom we have in Christ is a base camp rich with resources. The question is—will you use those resources to reach the heights of Christian freedom, or will you go scuba diving down into the desires of the flesh. Just as using Everest's respirators to scuba dive is a wasted opportunity, so too is using freedom in Christ to serve your sinful desires.

But it's not only foolish, it's dangerous. Unchecked freedom often endangers others. I read a story once of a man who had a lion as a pet, and one day he decided to free the lion. He took him out into the wilderness and freed him. The lion, finally free, used his freedom to kill the man who set him free.

Freedom feasts. Freedom craves what it wants. Paul knows legalistic Christians might be tempted to use their freedom in Christ to twist the arms of those weird Gentiles so that they would stop acting weird. Paul also knew some people might hear the good news about this grace, forgiveness and freedom and use it as an excuse to do whatever they wanted because, Jesus paid it all. But notice what Paul says, "Do not use your freedom as a basecamp for the flesh--to satisfy what you crave according to your own desires--but instead through love serve one another."

Don't miss how profoundly counter intuitive this is! Remember what Paul said just a few verses ago, in **Galatians 5:1**, "For freedom Christ has set you free. Stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery."

You might have no idea what a synonym is--but sin makes all of us careful grammarians. And as careful grammarians, here is what we see. In Galatians 5:1 freedom is the opposite of slavery. But in Galatians 5:13 freedom is expressed as the work of service.

This flies in the face of what we typically believe freedom offers us. Freed people generally are free from the obligations of others. Freed people are served. I'm free for me, and my desires. Personal freedom has the potential to mean freedom for you, and service from everyone else. This is the way sin has perverted our hearts.

The Bible anticipates this, which is why Peter assumes the same temptation and caution in **1 Peter 2:16-17**, "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the Emperor."

Freedom, Christian freedom, can easily hide what Paul and Peter call selfish and evil practices. This is subtle and it is dangerous. Think of it this way: I'm free to drink alcohol in moderation--therefore I'm not going to pass up what I enjoy just because you might have a problem with it. I'm free in Christ, I'm not

saved by my Bible reading. We don't ever join a church because after all, I'm justified in Christ, I don't need to serve, or give or submit to anyone else—that would go against my freedom.

But when believers say, "I'm free in Christ," we aren't saying, "I'm free from serving you."

The Judaizers were leveraging the cultural codes of Moses to justify them not serving or caring for their Gentile brothers. We too might use our freedom in Christ in ways that justify us not caring for others. But Paul says the whole scope of the law, and the lived experience of Christian freedom is in the opportunity to serve others through love.

Our world loves to quote Leviticus 19. But Paul quotes it here as if to say, "Christian, do you believe it." As much as our world loves the idea of loving service, Paul is saying that it is only the Christian free in Christ who is finally free to love and serve others.

Why? Because, if we are free in Christ we no longer *need* people for our own justification. Those who are freed from needing others are finally free to lovingly serve others.

Paul says option one to through love serve one another. But Paul gives a second option. If you want to live for the flesh, here's his advice: **Galatians 5:15**, "but if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another."

Without the gospel, it is a dog-eat-dog world. Several years ago, a story came out of Germany. An individual had posted a wanted ad online looking for, "a young, well-built man who wanted to be eaten."

Unfortunately, the ad was filled, and one was consumed by the other. It's a graphic and disturbing story—but Paul is making a strong point here. Unless you're freed from the law, unless you're freed unto salvation—then service of others is always an act of consumption.

What do I mean by that? I mean that without the gospel, we generally see people as threats or tools for our own freedom.

I will serve you, because you provide me something I feel I need. I need you to affirm how kind I am, without it I feel like a jerk. I to serve you but in such a careful way that others notice it while also not thinking I'm being showy. I need the affirmation to make my guilt go away. I need the praise so I don't feel worthless. It looks like service, but it's actually supper for the deep ache in my heart. You're a tool for my own needs.

On the flip side, maybe you have what I don't. Your popularity, your holiness, your family is a threat because my life doesn't look like that. And if you're a threat, I'm going to do one of two things. I'm either going to ignore you and distance myself from you, or I'm going to quietly tear you down so that other people see your flaws in hopes they don't notice my own.

Nip, nip, nip, bite. But the gospel de-fangs us. It finally frees us. How? The best way to shut the mouth of a hungry man is to feed it. And because we have been freed in Christ, we are satisfied. We don't need to consume others, because we are free and we are full.

I don't need to manipulate you or others to tell me that I'm loved—the cross tells me I'm loved. I don't need to tear you down so that I look better than you—the cross tells me that neither of us look as good as Jesus and yet his righteousness is ours through faith. The Dutch Theologian, Berkouwer, captured Paul's contrast well, "the heart of sanctification is a heart which feeds on...justification."

De-fanged by grace, we live with full hearts and through love we serve other another. Finally free.

And like a bell, this freedom keeps ringing. Read with me: **Galatians 5:16-18**, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."

Here's our second point this morning: Jesus frees us **From Disappointment for Delight**.

I remember growing up thinking that I certainly didn't want to go to hell. But it seemed like going to heaven later meant living in hell now. All the things I once wanted to do were things I now couldn't do. Some of us in here might think that freedom in Christ is being set free from the possibility of finding happiness in this life.

Others might have the opposite thought. You might think that because you are free in Christ now you can do all the things you wanted to do because you'll just be forgiven and accepted by grace.

Paul wants to correct both wrong understandings by showing us how Christian freedom allows us do finally do what we want—by actually changing what we want.

He draws our attention to this by acknowledging the war being played over the stockpiles of your freedom. You're going to want to use your freedom on your own desires—but don't. Walk in the Spirit, says Paul.

In the noisy battleground of our hearts, walking in the Spirit is the pacifier which quiets our discontent and furnishes us with powerful, satisfying freedom. To see this comfort, Paul points out two things.

First, pay attention to the source of our disappointments: the desires of the flesh and the life in the Spirit are opposed to each other. Depending upon who we listen to, our desires will either be satisfied or disappointed.

Desires are often strong, but they are often dumb. I read a story the other day of a man in another country who had his prison sentence overturned. But he had spent so long in prison that he begged the court to send him back. He had to be physically removed from the courtroom and pushed out into freedom. Desires are strong, but sometimes they are dumb.

When we are confronted with walking in the Spirit it seems at first glance to be opposed to everything we want in life. But the flesh doesn't give freedom, the Spirit does. Paul helps us see this in Romans when he says this: **Romans 6:20-22**: "For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life."

When my kids are refusing to obey me, I often ask them if they are happy. In that moment they are doing exactly what they desire. They are choosing to live the freest life they could. And yet, they are frustrated, angry, tearful, and very, very sweaty.

Free to pursue the desires of the flesh is freedom to be disappointed. It never satisfied. But the Spirit brings freedom. Do you want to be free? Learn to identify the slavery of the flesh—and walk in the promise and power of the Spirit.

If the flesh is the source of our disappointment, consider now the source of our delight: the desires of the flesh are attempts to keep you from doing that which you really want to do!

Now that is astounding! We generally think that if we are free to do what we want to do, we will do things that sin against God and harm others. But notice how profoundly powerful our justification in Jesus is: it redeems our desires. It gives us new desires; it creates in us a heart that actually wants what is joyful for the first time in our lives!

A life of walking in the Spirit is not a life of forced captivity—but a life set free to do what we want to do in the Spirit. This might seem to you a very dangerous sort of freedom: how do I know if I'm doing what I want in the Spirit or what I want in the flesh? If you feel burdened by these desires, take heart. This is a good burden and a good tension. The fact that you care is a sign of God's work in your heart.

So how do we navigate the newfound freedom that lives in the midst of tension? Paul's answer is radically simple: to walk in the Spirit, be led by the Spirit.

We used to be led by an enslaving task master. We used to think that we had to satisfy our lust to feel joy. But every lustful activity demanded more and more. We used to think that we had to have the approval of people to feel safe, so we followed what culture says wins us favor and influence—but it demanded more and more. We cashed those checks and they bounced every time.

But we are no longer under the law. We don't have to listen to those voices anymore. The freedom we have in Christ comes into our heart and it places a wonderful sign on the front door: "Under New Management." We are led by the Spirit.

We are under construction for sure, but there's a new master and his checks don't bounce. One who loves us and wants to help us walk in joy and life. We follow him because he lives in us. He leads us out of endless disappointments and sets us free to desire that which truly satisfies—the life we were made for, the enjoy God and obey him forever.

This is why we sing during Advent: "Sinners, wrung with true repentance, doomed for guilt to endless pains, justice now revokes the sentence, mercy calls you--break your chains."

If you want to enjoy a cold drink--you drink it. If you want to enjoy a hot meal--you eat it. If you want to enjoy your freedom--you live in it. Free to obey, free to love what God loves, finally, free.

But in case we still have questions about what this looks like, or how freedom in Christ is better than freedom to do what I want—Paul continues: **Galatians 5:19-21**, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Here's Paul's final point: Jesus frees us **From Labor For Life**.

Imagine with me for a moment that you saved up for a long time to go on vacation to an all-inclusive resort that boasted ultimate satisfaction and rest. You pay way more than you could afford, but it seems worth it. However, you show up and you're not greeted with lemon water, you're handed a mop and told to get to work. Instead of collapsing into the bed, you're endlessly making other people's beds. Instead of being waited on by staff—you're the staff.

If that were your experience, you'd probably be upset. You'd claim false advertising, you'd ask for a refund. And you'd want everyone to know it's a sham.

But did you notice the words Paul used in that list? They are all things we look to for rest and peace: endless sex, alcohol, respect, always being right, and getting exactly what you think you deserve. But did you notice the head verb described all of this: "the works of the flesh are evident."

These activities are a life of slavery, strenuous labor, and endless exhaustion. It's no surprise that the more we seek such things, the more restless we feel. The more we try to sex our way into love--the less love we experience. The more we try to lie our way into relief--the less relieved we feel. The more we try to cheat our way to the top--the more cheated we feel. We feel exhausted, we feel empty--and to top it all off Paul says that you should feel hopeless.

For whoever does these things will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Whoever does these things will not get what they are working for. They will never find the peace they want. They will not inherit the Kingdom of God. As miserable and endless as their toil in this world seems, eternal judgement for their sins stands waiting for them in eternity.

If we don't want that to be the case, we might want to fill in the equation on the other side. We might expect Paul to say, "But the works of the Spirit are evident: Bible reading, charity, honesty, moderation, chastity, community service, never raising your voice, never showing up late, always saying thank you, and obeying your parents."

But that's not what Paul says is it? Look at what Paul says: **Galatians 5:22-23**, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

What a plot twist! That's what freedom looks like! The works of the flesh are not immediately cancelled out by the works of the Christians--but the fruit of the Spirit. How much work is it for a tree to bear fruit? None at all! That's what trees do. They produce fruit. It's in the nature of the tree. And it's the nature of the Spirit to bear these fruits in the life of a believer.

Notice how it's not the "fruits" of the Spirit—as if we need to make sure the Spirit in us produces all of these. Instead, it is the "fruit" of the Spirit. While it might be the season for some fruits more than others in our lives--if we have the Holy Spirit we have the tree that bears all this fruit. The life of the Spirit produces in us not the work of the flesh--but the fruit of the Spirit.

And the fruit of the Spirit is in opposition to all that the flesh might do. We have love--we live out of it, not for it. We have joy--we live out of it not for it. We have peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We've been freed from a life where all of those were absent--now through God himself all of those are present and we get to spend and be spent in a new way.

Thomas Chalmers once said, "The freer the gospel, the more sanctifying the gospel; and the more it is received as a doctrine of grace, the more it will be felt as a doctrine according to godliness."

If we were made to enjoy God, if we were freed to no longer walk in sin, but instead to walk and live in the freedom to love and obey God which we were made for—then here is true freedom.

Why is this true freedom? Because against such things there is no law. When you find something that satisfies, what is the immediate danger you have? You want to consume it. But as we know, too much of

a good thing is sometimes a bad thing. Kids, maybe you got your favorite candy for Christmas. You're happy to have it, but each time you eat it, you know you're getting to the end. It's limited.

But here, against these things, there is no law. There is nothing that limits it. There's no caloric bloat. There's no static life that comes from it. You can use it, and enjoy it, and love it, and give it, and rejoice in it endlessly because it is the unregulated, free and wonderful gift of God given to you in your salvation.

Why are we so certain that this is ours? Look at how Paul closes this: **Galatians 5:24**, "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

The fruit of the Spirit belongs to us--because we belong to Christ. The flesh that we still have--it's been crucified. It's like that dead skin which hangs and snags. It's still there, but growing behind it is the new growth that brings life. When Christ died--he made us free. Our flesh has no power--except the power we choose to give it. Its desires have no dominion over us besides that which we would otherwise give it.

Paul's logic then is--if you finally have such freedom as this, if you've been freed from all of this--then why would you ever go back? Augustine once said this about sinners: "They are more strongly taken up with other things which have more power to make them miserable than that which they so faintly remember to make them happy."

If you are to come to Christ--you come to Christ because you acknowledge that your sin is a problem. Your sin has enslaved, harmed, and damned you. And if we come to Christ because sin is the problem--then having such freedom why would we go back to it?

Brothers and sisters, you have been set free from sin. You have been set free for a life of joy defined not by the laws of the world or the desires of the flesh but by the God who is blessed forever and ever. This is freedom. This is what it looks like to finally live free. So, when you are released from sin--let's not remember that we have not just been rehabilitated, we have not just been released--we've been resurrected. We've been given the power of God himself, and let us walk in light of that. This is a life that is finally free.