

Live Free...in Love
Galatians 5:13-15 August 3-4, 2013

Introduction

- America and freedom go hand in hand. From wars to various movements, it seems like there is always some cause for freedom being trumpeted here. From the Freedom tower **PP**, to our national anthem **PP**, when calls America the land of the free, to our Declaration of Independence **PP** which promises life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, freedom is engrained in consciousness.
- Perhaps no time in our history was filled with more freedom movements than the radical times of the 60s and 70s. **PP** We had just emerged from WWII and things were going well...almost too well for some. You see, the “American Dream” and conservatism became stale to many young people who wanted to “express themselves” more fully.
- Riding alongside several other freedom causes, **PP** including the civil rights movement and **PP** the feminist movement, the free love movement sprang up **PP** and gained a huge following. The free love movement promoted the idea that society needed to cast off the shackles of marriage allowing people to be free to love whoever they wished without the suppressive bonds of the church or state interfering. To “love the one your with”. Any children of the 60s here, any hippies? Groovy, make love not war!
- Of course, that was just the starting point, **PP** and after the Summer of Love in '67 promiscuity and drug use exploded, contraception and abortion became the norm, and the claxon call for tolerance and greater indulgence grew as people sought to expand their mind.
- The effects of these movements are strong today as the calls for tolerance, acceptance, and relativism become louder and louder....the idea that no one should let their standard get in the way of someone else's happiness. That we all should be able to do whatever we want – do whatever makes us happy – so long as it's not hurting anybody
- And that is the path that the worlds' concept of freedom always takes – it always pushes the limits into deeper levels of depravity and indulgence.
- And this is not a new problem....it happened over and over again throughout history.
 - In fact, Paul addressed this very problem in Galatians chapter 5 when he taught us what it means to truly live free. **PP** If you've heard the first three sermons in this series then you know that Paul has taken to task the world's idea of what freedom is and has made clear that God's idea of freedom is far different than the worlds.
- So as you turn with me in your bibles to **Galatians 5:13-15**, we're going to study what scripture says true freedom is all about, what the real free love movement looks like.
 - As you turn there, let me pray.
- **Galatians 5:13-15** **PP** “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.”

The Call

- Paul begins by summarizing the first 12 verses of this chapter in one short statement – that as Christians, we are called to freedom – PP freedom is our call.
- In the first sermon in this series we studied verse 1 and we learned that Christ freed us for the purpose of being free – he freed us for freedom’s sake – God wants us to have freedom.
- Now Paul takes that teaching one step further and says that not only does God want us to live free, PP but God actually calls us to live free
 - If you are Christian, you are called to live free
 - The Greek word for PP called here (*kaleō*) means invited to something by someone who has the authority to give the invitation...party example, everyone’s invited
- PP (Just Text) Christ, has invited us to live free of the bondages of sin – and He is the only one who has the authority to give that invitation to freedom.
- You may be wondering what it means to have true biblical freedom? What is freedom?
 - Now, I’m not going to spend much time explaining this here because the first sermon in this series goes into depth on this point and you can go back and watch or listen to that sermon online if you’d like a more in depth answer...or if you’re having trouble sleeping.
 - But here is the answer to what true freedom is: PP it is the liberation *from* something.
 - We are called to be liberated *from* the eternal penalty of our sin
- And contrary to what the world would have you believe, here is what true freedom is not: PP (Just Text) it is not the license *to do* something

The Negative Command

- Paul underscores this point in this passage by giving us a two part command as to how we should live out our freedom from sin: the first part is a negative command and the second part is a positive command.
- The first part of the command says PP “Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh”
- Paul begins by using the term “only” in order to show that there are limits – restrictions – on our freedom. Specifically, we are not to use our freedom from the consequences of sin as an opportunity to indulge in sin.
 - The Greek word for “opportunity” (*aphormē*) PP here is interesting because it literally means a staging area or base from which an army would launch an attack
- We cannot treat our freedom from the consequences of sin as a Launchpad to indulge in whatever we want, to participate in whatever our fleshly desires and passions would have us do

- In Romans, Paul puts it this way: **PP Romans 6:15** “What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!”
- Unfortunately, Christians have been abusing their freedom and trampling over God’s grace from the very beginning.
 - In fact, there is a heretical school of thought that says that because we have been forgiven by the grace of God we are now free to do whatever we want without consequence.
 - This lie goes by the fancy name of antinomianism **PP** and literally means against the law....and from what I’ve seen, it’s typically the result of poor parenting (the father in particular) **PP**. We love you Ackley family, hope the vacation went well!
 - But in all seriousness, someone who falls into this lie will excuse their sin by saying “no biggie, God will forgive me anyway” and then they go and indulge in whatever they want without any restraints or limits.
 - It’s a deadly and destructive lie because someone can claim to be a Christian – say they are a Christ follower – and yet ignore the moral teachings of the Bible. Thus, they not only deceive themselves into thinking they’re saved, but they deceive others as to what a true child of God looks like.
- So if you’re sitting here and you ever think this way, then you need to hear the truth – yes, we are forgiven, yes we have received God’s grace, but we are *not* free to live however we want, we don’t have license to live our way.
 - And if you think you have the freedom to live how you want, you’ve fallen for the lies of the world, **PP** because you’re actually *still* enslaved to sin, nothing’s changed you’re still trapped in your sin, and you’re ignoring the will of God to do your own will.
- This is the lie that Paul is speaking out against here, which is why he doesn’t merely give us a negative command against it but he also gives us a positive command to show us what true freedom actually looks like.

The Positive Command

- Paul continues on in verse 13 **PP** and says, “but through love serve one another.”
- Now we get into the heart of this passage as Paul reveals what living free truly looks like: it’s not about indulging ourselves in whatever we feel like, living free is about serving others through love
- The word for love here is agape **PP** which refers to the unconditional, selfless, unmerited love of God. In the original Greek, Paul is even more specific as he uses an article and calls it “the love” – *the* distinctive love of a Christian.
- This is not a love that we can produce within ourselves – only God can produce it within us as the Holy Spirit transforms us.
 - And it is through this love that we are to serve one another.

- So what Paul is saying here is that the only way to truly live out our freedom is through the power of God's love focused on others. This has several implications that I think are noteworthy:
 - First of all, **PP** it means that people who do not have God's love in them can't live free.
 - Second, if you are saved and claim to know Christ, **PP** you should be serving others, you should have a servant's heart.
 - What does that look like – how do I know if I have a servant's heart? Well, how often do you serve others – not because you have to but because you want to? How do you spend your free time, your talent, and your treasure – is it all for your own pursuits and desires or for the benefit of others? What is your attitude like when you are helping someone out? How well do you serve those people who rub you the wrong way? Do you expect to get something back when you serve others?
 - Service of others is one of the primary ways that the Lord refines and matures us...and if we're not doing it we're probably stagnating in our faith
 - Which leads to the last point, and this may hit closer to home for a lot of us, Paul shows us that anyone who is focused on themselves can't live free **PP**
 - Anyone who is consumed by their own desires, wants, passions, and preferences, will live in bondage to those things. In short, selfish people are enslaved by their selfishness.
 - **2 Peter 2:19 PP** "...For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved."
- And it is our selfishness that keeps us from serving others. So we have to ask ourselves, am I a selfish person? And if we're honest, I think the answer that every one of us would give, is yes...to some degree. So the real question is how selfish am I?
 - Am I consumed by doing what I want, how I want, when I want? How often do I serve others? How willing am I to share what I have? How do I react when someone asks me to help them or when I see someone in need? How willing am I to sacrifice my comfort and stability for others? Do I only help others when it's easy or convenient for me, or will I go out of my way to do so? Do I only help those who I like or will I help anybody, even those who I would rather not be around?
 - You may be hearing these questions and telling yourself that you're not really that selfish of a person. Well, here's the real test...take those questions and ask someone else to answer them for you – perhaps a family member. Someone who knows you and is going to give you a straight answer, and see what they say.
 - Because how selfless we are and how well we love others is perhaps the best test of how well we live out the faith we claim. Not how often we read the bible, not how

much we pray nor how much we tithe, not how many bible verse we can quote nor how often we go to church, but how well we love others...that is the real measure of how we are living out our faith and how well we know Jesus.

- In fact scripture confirms this in **PP 1 John 4:7-8** “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”
- So here’s the bottom line: selfish people are enslaved people and if we don’t do a very good job of loving others than we probably haven’t tasted of God’s love very deeply.
- Why is that? **PP** Well, our selfishness is evidence of a void in us – an emptiness –that we haven’t allowed the Spirit to fill - either by not accepting Christ altogether or by keeping Him out of that part of our life.
 - On the other hand, **PP** when we have the Holy Spirit working in us He produces God’s love in us...and as we press deeper into our faith and allow the Spirit to continue to work in us, that love will begin to overflow into how we live and serve others.
- That’s why Paul says that it’s through love that we serve one another. It’s through the fullness, through the outpouring of that love of God that we can serve others and truly live free.
- Now, the reality of the matter is that we’re all selfish to one degree or another. So the practical question to ask ourselves is am I growing less selfish, am I learning to serve more and more, am I growing in love for others? As Christians, there should be evidence of the Holy Spirit working and filling our lives with God’s love.
- And depending on whether we live free through love or we live to love ourselves there are two different consequences that Paul shows us.

The Positive Consequence

- The first is the positive consequence. Paul says **PP** in verse 14 “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
 - When we love one another and serve each other we fulfill God’s law for us.
- Well hold on a second, you might be thinking. Hasn’t Paul just been saying that we’ve been set free from the law, addressing the arguments of the judaizers who said that we had to fulfill the law in order to be saved? Why is he now bringing the law into this?
 - Well, it’s true that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has fulfilled and set us free from the civil and ceremonial law. But God’s moral law is still in effect.
- Christ himself recognized this when He summed up the moral law and said **PP John 13:34-35** “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- So when we live free in love and serve one another we are living out the commands of Christ – not because we are obligated to keep the law, but we because we want to please our Lord and Savior.
 - And you know, the Greek word for serve (*douleuō*) in v 13, **PP** it literally means to be a slave, to make yourself a slave to someone. And it's written in the present tense, which means we are to have an ongoing lifestyle of serving one another.
 - Bondservant explanation
- So Paul is saying that if we are truly living out our freedom in love we should be putting ourselves in bondage to others. How's that for a paradox!?!
 - Now we begin to see why this is only possible through the love of Christ. I mean who wants to be a slave?
- And that is the beauty of freedom in God's love...it moves us to want to do something that is completely contrary to our selfish nature.
- When I was in high school, grooming myself was not a high thing on my priority list. I mean, I was clean, I just didn't really care if my hair was brushed or my clothes were wrinkled, etc. Consequently, I had a pretty awesome uni-brow. **PP** I mean look at that thing...pretty much one eyebrow. I had lots of people tell me I should pluck it or shave it off, but I really didn't care what other people thought....that was my uni-brow and I was proud of it...I mean who wouldn't be?
- Well, one day I met this cute little lady named Leslie Meyers, and despite my grooming habits **PP**, she couldn't resist my manly charms and we started dating. So we dated all through high school and then went off to college and eventually got married. But as you can see in our wedding picture, **PP** I was still rocking my sweet uni-brow – though I did brush my hair. Some of you are probably wondering, "What was she thinking?" I often ask myself that same question.
- The truth is, up to that point Leslie never really said anything about the brow...but one day, perhaps emboldened by the fact that she was now my wife, she said, "you know, Matthew, have you ever considered two eyebrows?" It didn't take being married very long for me to know that that was code for "you better go and get rid of that thing or else."
- So apart from the fact that I was shocked that she didn't truly appreciate my look...I immediately went and plucked it away. Why'd I do that? Because I love my wife and my love for my wife allows me to serve her even when my selfish nature says I shouldn't...and yes, I still pluck my eyebrow to this day.
- The point here is that as God's love moves in us we are able to fulfill His command that we're to love and serve one another despite our selfish, fleshly desires to the contrary.
 - Through love, we are able to do things we never otherwise would do.

The Negative Consequences

- Of course, Paul also shows us a picture of the negative consequences of living in bondage to our selfish desires, when he writes **PP** in verse 15 **“But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”**
- The words, bite, devour and consume, are all Greek words that were used to describe the behavior of wild animals fighting, **PP** typically fighting each other over food to fill their empty stomachs. **PP**
 - And that is exactly what selfishness does. Remember, selfishness is the evidence of an absence of God’s love – it’s a spiritual emptiness. Whereas God’s love fills and overflows within us causing us to serve those around us; selfishness causes us to fight and devour anything we can find to try to fill that emptiness within us, even our fellow Christians
 - And instead of showing the world the love of Christ, when we allow our selfish nature to consume and control us, we destroy our witness to the world, and cause division
- **Norman Bartlett PP** put it this way, **“Mutual depreciation is as destructive as mutual appreciation is constructive. The church that does not keep the peace will go to pieces. Alas, when the members of any church prey on one another and do not pray for one another! Praying and preying cannot coexist. Of necessity one must yield to the other.”**
 - Unfortunately, many of you know the danger of this through firsthand experience and have been the victims of church splits and broken fellowship.
- This is why Paul cautions us to “watch out” or “beware” of these selfish tendencies within ourselves....we must remain vigilant or our selfishness will tear a unified body apart.
 - And God hates disunity, **in fact proverbs 6:19 PP** says that the person who causes **disunity is an abomination to God.**
- So Paul shows us that when we allow our selfishness to go unchecked, destruction and disunity is the inevitable result.

Conclusion

- And you know, **PP multiple pics** that disunity and destruction is exactly what happened to the free love movement of the 60s. Eventually, people took the idea of free love and twisted it further and further into their own selfish conception of it. This caused the movement to ultimately implode and splinter into several other “freedom” causes and groups who wanted to expand their minds in new and more indulgent ways.
- But an interesting thing happened, out of the collapse of the free love movement emerged the Jesus movement **PP multiple pics** and people began to see what it truly meant to have free love...that Jesus Christ’s love was the only love that could possibly set anyone free. And the Jesus movement spread from the west coast to the east coast and beyond as many of the hippies who formerly sought to serve their own selfish ways found freedom in Christ and began new lives of loving service to others

- And that is what God is calling, what he is inviting, each of us to do – to stop indulging in our own selfish pursuits and allow God’s love to transform us into willing servants of others
 - We are not free to love ourselves by doing whatever we want...we are free to love others and serve them as Christ has served each of us by laying down his life for us.
- Don’t get caught up in the lie of the present day free love movement – that life is all about loving yourself. Be set free by the ongoing Jesus Movement **PP** and love others as Christ loved us.
- Let’s all live free **PP** in love. Amen. Amen.