

Freed for growth

Set free to live free #4

Galatians 5:13-26; John 16:7-15

19 June 2016

Everton Hills

We are nearly at the end of this Sermon Series, **Set Free to Live Free**. The concept of freedom is strong in Paul's letter to the Galatians. And so over the past few weeks we have focussed on what we have been freed from (**religiosity and rules**) and we have started considering what we have been **freed for**. In fact, last week, Pastor Rob emphasised the reality that because we have been baptised into Jesus, because we have been made one with Jesus, that gives us a new freedom and a new inheritance. In effect, **we don't need to be afraid of anything, because our father actually owns everything!**

So what does that mean? Well, I'm not afraid of much, but I am afraid of how things might affect **ME**. You see, I am the problem that affects my own freedom.

I like everything to be about ME. But that's not God's intent. As Paul says ... Jesus has not set you free to sin but to serve.

“For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.” (Galatians 5:13, NLT)

In other words, the intent of the freedom that we have, is to move our focus from **ME**, to **WE**. (Notice that We is the opposite of Me).

Christian pastor and author Timothy Keller sums up what this means for us: ***“The gospel therefore neither leads us to live a guilty life (since God has lovingly accepted us), nor an unholy life (since the God who has accepted us is perfectly holy). If we forget either of these truths we will lose our understanding of the gospel.”***

So Paul emphasises the reason for using our freedom to serve others.

“For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”” (Galatians 5:14, NLT)

That's not a new law, it is simply an invitation, or a description, of how to live in community.

To put it another way, if I know how much God loves me, if I understand how God gets me (with my anxieties and fears), if I know how much God gets community better than I can possibly imagine, then I will understand how doing whatever I can to 'satisfy my sinful nature' is what gets me into trouble in the first place. Whether it was to some form of addiction, or some other insecurity, when I focus on **ME**, in a strange sort of way, all that happens is that I feel more unfulfilled, more unloved, more unable to be loved, and more unable to live up to other people's (or God's) expectations.

And to that, Paul says, ***“So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.”*** (Galatians 5:16–17, NLT)

Do you see what happens? Why do we find it difficult to love, to genuinely focus on others? It is because there is a battle carrying on inside us... a battle between the Spirit and our sinful nature; a battle between the **WE** and the **ME**.

You see that is what the sinful nature is. It is that part of our hearts which is not renewed by the Holy Spirit, which only focusses on the **ME**.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, talks about the internal battle this way...

“The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t.”
(Romans 7:14–18, NLT)

And what does that look like? In Galatians, Paul gives us a bit more of a clue as to what the **ME** within does... ***“When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these.”*** (Galatians 5:19–21, NLT)

What Paul is saying is that each of these actions and attitudes within, destroy relationships!

Now you need to know that we still mess up.

And you need to know that Satan will use our mess ups to tell us that we are not good enough. And when we start thinking that way, what sort of thinking are we re-engaging in? It is **Jesus Plus** thinking. So I want you to understand that if you are wrestling with that stuff, that’s OK... it is simply a sign of the fact the Spirit is at work in you.

But I also want you to know that that internal battle is there for a reason... to rattle your cage, to prune you, so that you produce the fruit of the Spirit... ***“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!”*** (Galatians 5:22–23, NLT)

At the heart of the Spirit led life is transformation and change. It is about moving to develop the character of and heart of Jesus. In Jesus, God sets us free from sin and sets us free to be his adopted children. That is a done deal. But now God’s heart is not to leave you in the muck. God

loves you too much to leave you as we are; so he gives you his Spirit to change you and transform you to be more and more like Jesus. As free people, we are now free to become the people we are meant to be, and deep down want to be, as we walk in step with Spirit.

That is what that internal battle ground is all about.

I feel like I am harping on it. But often, we run away from conflict. We avoid inner pain and struggle. But in reality, Paul invites us to embrace it so that we can deal with it, and more fully become the people God intended us to be.

That's why today there are a series of questions that I want you to take home and reflect on. But I want you to look at them now...

Remember we belong to Christ

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus” (Galatians 5:24, NLT)

Reflection Questions: **Are you secure in who you are as a child of God? Are there times you pretend before others and God to look better than you really are? How can you regularly remind yourself that you belong to Christ?**

Remember that your sinful nature HAS BEEN crucified

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.” (Galatians 5:24, NLT)

Know that while your sinful nature, while in its final throws, has been defeated, put to death – because of what Jesus did on the cross.

Reflection Questions: **As you look at the fruit of the Spirit, which ones do you struggle with? When you think about how you sin in these areas, what is the deeper motivation behind your actions? What do you believe is so important for you to have that it justifies disobeying God?**

Remember that our sinful nature loses its grip as we follow the Spirit leading

“Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.” (Galatians 5:25, NLT)

Perhaps this prayer might help...

Lord, my heart thinks that I must have this thing, otherwise I have no value. It is a pseudo-saviour. But to think and feel and live like this is to forget what I mean to you, how you see me in Christ. By your Spirit, I will reflect on your love for me in Jesus until this thing loses its attractive power over my soul.

Reflection Question: **What are some of the things you can do that will help you better reflect on God's love for you in Jesus so the desires of your sinful nature lose their appeal? How can you ensure these are a regular part of your life to help you keep in step with the Holy Spirit?**

As God's Spirit does his transforming work in your heart, notice the new fruit growing within you.

What God has begun through the work of Jesus he will finish in us through the work of the Spirit. The apostle Paul writes, ***'And I am certain that God, who began a good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.'*** (*Philippians 1:6 NLT*) When Jesus returns we will get to see the Spirit's finished work in us and we will be the people we have always longed to be and that God desires us to be in Jesus. This is what Jesus has set us free to be. Amen.