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***Life in the Spirit***  
***Galatians 5:13-25***

<sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters;<sup>[c]</sup> only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence,<sup>[d]</sup> but through love become slaves to one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup> If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

<sup>16</sup> Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envy,<sup>[e]</sup> drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

***The Fruit of the Spirit*** <sup>22</sup> By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Today we have ***freedom*** on our hearts and minds, as we anticipate celebrating Independence Day this week. We know that freedom is a ***gift***, right? It is something for which we are ***grateful***, and we give thanks to God.

Many ***famous words*** have been spoken about freedom in our country. Our ***Declaration of Independence***, adopted in Philadelphia on July 4th, 1776, contains these famous words:

*"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights-that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.*

Our own **Statue of Liberty** has an inscription about people coming here for freedom:

*"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

But the idea of freedom **isn't new or unique** to the United States of America. It begins with **God**.

God didn't make us like puppets, or chess pieces,  
God created us with **free will**, right?  
And we took **advantage** of that that!

But **God made us for freedom**.

God gave us the ability to choose between right and wrong,  
Isn't freedom part of God's will for all humanity?  
God wants us to live free, right?

Long before our Declaration of Independence,  
the Hebrew people were yearning for freedom,  
as they suffered as **slaves to Pharaoh** in Egypt.  
The Exodus of the God's people from Egypt  
is one of the most defining moments in the history of humanity.  
God reminds the people time and again of this gift of freedom.

Then, God sent his only Son, Jesus, to **set people free**.

In his very first sermon in Luke 4, Jesus says,  
He has been anointed by the Holy Spirit *"to bring good news to the poor, to  
proclaim release to the captives. . .to let the oppressed go **free**."*

Jesus would later tell his disciples in John 8:

*"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the  
truth, and the truth will set you free. . .so if the Son makes you free, you will be  
free indeed."*

In the New Testament there are **over 50** references to freedom,  
including Paul's words in Romans 8:21 when he speaks about  
the '*glorious freedom of the children of God*'.

Today in Galatians we also read about freedom,  
In the context of life in the Spirit.

***Why is Paul writing about freedom?***

What was going on?

In Galatia at that time, there were ***two different factions*** in the church, each with their own idea about freedom in Christ.

The ***first*** group believed that freedom in Christ meant they could just ***do whatever they pleased***.

They believed in freedom *from* any constraints.

The ***second*** group believed that freedom in Christ could only be found by following all the Jewish ***laws***.

And what did Paul say to these groups?

He says *For you were **called to freedom**, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for **self-indulgence**, but through love become **slaves** to one another.*

In other words, Paul says that ***following the ritual Jewish laws*** will ***not bring freedom***,

and neither will ***doing whatever you please*** or self-indulgence.

Instead, he says that ***real freedom is about life in the Spirit***, as opposed to life in the flesh.

***What is he talking about?***

What does he mean life in the ***flesh***? Or ***Spirit***?

***Is he saying anything to do with the body is bad, and the spirit good?***

What if Paul is talking about ***choices***?

On the one hand, we can live as ***slaves to our sins***, and desires....

And Paul gives quite a list of those fleshly desires,

Things like *idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions,*

Or—if we want to ***be truly free***, we can pursue life in the Spirit,

Instead of doing whatever WE please,

we can do whatever ***JESUS wants*** us to do!

We can live, not by our OWN power,  
 But **by the POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT!**  
 That is a life that is truly free, and a life that bears good fruit!

It's kind of like living by that perennial question, WWJD,  
 What would Jesus do?  
 It's kind of like the analogy of being our own rowboat,  
 Or relying upon God's Spirit to fill our sails!

For Paul, freedom is not just freedom **from** something, is it?  
 It's freedom **for**—  
 For what?  
 Paul says it's the freedom for loving God, and your neighbor as yourself.

Christians celebrate a freedom **for—for love.**  
 We are **free to love God**  
 with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength,  
 and our **neighbor** as ourselves.

When we make a choice to **pursue love,**  
 When we decide to do **what Jesus would do**  
 When we do that by relying upon **the Holy Spirit**----our lives bear fruit.

Specifically, the **fruits of the Spirit that Paul lists here in Galatians 5:**  
<sup>22</sup> *By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,* <sup>23</sup> *gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.*

This week, I read a great explanation about the fruits of the Spirit,  
 and life in the Spirit vs. life in the flesh.

Life in the **flesh, is a self-centered** life,  
 Life in the **Spirit, is a God-centered** life!  
 Doesn't that make sense?  
 It's pretty simple, isn't it?

As Christians, we can be **self-centered, or God-centered.**  
 If we live God-centered, we are truly free.

The question is, ***which way are we living right now?***  
***And which way do we want to live?***

Do we ***WANT to follow Jesus Christ?*** And his way of life?

Or do we want to ***do whatever WE please?***

There's always a broken, fallen part of us that WANTS to do as we please,  
 But don't we find true joy and purpose when the Holy Spirit guides us?

How are we ***living?*** For ourselves? Or for God?

***And what kind of FRUIT*** is showing up in our life?

Are we seeing the fruits of the Spirit, like,

*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, and self-control.*

Rev. Dr. Joanna Adams says, in a sermon on freedom:

*To be free really means to be **liberated** from the prison of "me, myself, and I".*

*To be truly free is to be able to move beyond the self and,  
 as one who is wise has put it,*

*to move into the risk of love and to give oneself to the demand of **service**.*

*To be free is to be free **for** responsibility, **not from** responsibility.*

*I think of how Christ Jesus who had everything in the world going for himself—  
 power, status, safety—how he chose,*

*freely chose to empty himself and take on the form of a servant  
 for the sake of the world.*

*Now that is **freedom**.* Rev. Dr. Joanna Adams, Day1.org, "The Predicament of Freedom".

Wow—don't we ***want to be LIBERATED*** from a selfish prison?

That sounds like real life to me!

If that means following the love and sacrifice of Jesus,  
 that's the way to live, isn't it?

In Philippians 2, Paul writes about the love and sacrifice of Jesus,  
 And how Jesus freely chose to ***empty himself and serve***.

Listen to these words about Christ Jesus:

*Jesus, Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God  
 something to be used to his own advantage; **7** rather, he made himself nothing  
 by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

***8*** *And being found in appearance as a man,  
 he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—  
 even death on a cross!*

Are we choosing to **empty** ourselves and **serve** one another?  
 When faced with a choice to serve ourselves, or others, what do we do?

When I think about freedom, I can hear some people saying:  
**well, it's a free country!**  
 What do people mean by that?  
 Sometimes, that phrase is an EXCUSE for doing what you please.  
 It's like saying: We can do what we want because as Americans, we are free.

**But how free are we** if we just do whatever we want?  
 How free are we if we become self-centered?  
 Isn't that a kind of **slavery to ourselves**---our desires—and our sins?

Paul does not say that everything about desire  
 or the physical body is bad—  
 he says that those desires can  
 Go way too far, and become **self-serving**.

**There is a way out.**  
 A better way to live---a way of freedom.  
 And how do we find that way?

I think we first have to realize that  
**Life in the Spirit is NOT ABOUT US---it's about LOVE.**  
 Loving God, and our neighbor as ourselves.  
 That brings real freedom.  
 And that kind of freedom is something to celebrate, isn't it?

In the United States of America, freedom and liberty are incredible gifts.  
 Especially our **religious liberty**, that enables us to gather here today!

Is that a **freedom to do whatever** we please?  
 No, it's a freedom to **love God**,  
 and our **neighbor** as ourselves.

It's a freedom for---and it carries the **responsibility**  
 to work **for the good** of every neighbor,  
 to **speak up** against injustice,  
 to **stand up** for those who are oppressed.

Paul had this **warning** to the church at Galatia,  
a warning very appropriate for all of us today:

*"if you bite and devour one another,  
take care that you are not consumed by one another."*

We can't afford to hurt one another,  
We can't afford to act selfishly, can we?

Friends, how are we being models of love and compassion?  
What does that mean in your life, and mine?  
What does that mean right here in this church?  
What does it mean in our nation?

There are a lot of people being treated poorly,  
Not with love, compassion, and mercy.  
How do we stand for ALL of our neighbors, including those we do not know?

We may disagree on solutions to immigration, but as followers of Jesus Christ,  
there **should not be disagreement on the way we care for those in our care**,  
especially innocent **children**.

Editor Jill Duffield in the Presbyterian Outlook this week wrote a prayer for all  
the migrant children, and I want to read you a bit of it:

....

One of our most famous American judges, wrote eloquently about freedom.  
**Billings Learned Hand** was a United States judge and philosopher,  
who lived from 1872 to 1961.

He was once asked, '**What is the spirit of liberty?**

He said:

*The spirit of liberty is the spirit which seeks to understand the minds of other  
men and women. . .it weighs their interests alongside its own,  
it remembers that not even a sparrow falls to earth unheeded. . .  
the spirit of liberty is the **spirit of Him** who, 2,000 years ago,  
taught humanity a lesson it has never learned but has never quite forgotten:  
that there may be a kingdom where the least shall be heard  
and considered side by side with the greatest.*

**So, where** and **when** are we turning away from selfish desires?  
**And, How** are we showing love of God and neighbor?

**How** are we bearing the fruits of the Spirit?

Friends, hear the **Good News** of the Gospel,  
If we want to pursue the best life, as followers of Jesus Christ,  
We will do what Jesus would do,  
And we will pursue the gifts of the Holy Spirit—  
*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, and self-control.*

***That is the pathway to true freedom.***  
And for that, all God's people say, Amen.