

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Galatians 5

⁷You were running well! Who cut in on you, so that you are no longer persuaded by the truth? ⁸This persuasion is not from the one who calls you. ⁹A little yeast works through the whole batch. ¹⁰I am confident in the Lord that you will have no other opinion than this. But the one who is trying to disturb you will pay the penalty, whoever he is.

¹¹Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? Then the offense of the cross has been abolished. ¹²If only those who are upsetting you would also cut themselves off!

¹³After all, brothers, you were called to freedom. Only do not use your freedom as a starting point for your sinful flesh. Rather, serve one another through love. ¹⁴In fact, the whole law is summed up in this one statement: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵But if you keep on biting and devouring one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.



Intro. / Children’s Message: *Pastor hands out ID cards* Well, boys and girls, you have learned that Jesus saves us by faith alone. Some people hear that, and, knowing they cannot save themselves, have decided it’s okay to sin, miss the mark, cross the line, and fall short. They take it as encouragement to sin, and if anyone gets in their way, they pull out this card and say, “It’s okay; I have a license to sin. Here it says, ‘No punishments, no penalties, guaranteeing a cheap, self-serving, thankless attitude.’”

Is that what we are supposed to think? Is it a good takeaway to believe that now we can sin as much as we want because Jesus died for us? Absolutely not!

This month was all about salvation by faith alone. That means freedom, or Christian liberty, from legal claims that the Law of God has on us. But there is a difference between liberty and license to sin, especially if we are going to blame Jesus for all the wrong things we do. That is not the Gospel! The Gospel doesn’t free us to hurt our friends; frustrate our parents; lie instead of telling the truth; throw temper tantrums; steal from our neighbor; or pass up chances to serve one another in love.

If we do that, we enslave ourselves to God’s good Law all over, again because we didn’t trust in the great good Jesus did for us, the penalty we deserved, the cross. Instead, Jesus took away all our sins, *including the sin of thinking sin is okay*. I am sorry to tell you that these licenses are no good. They aren’t valid anywhere, and no true police officer, pastor, or parent will accept them. We will just have to try and do what is loving and right to serve other people around us. The good news is that when we fail, Jesus takes away our sin. Then again we are free to do so many nice things for each other, and our Savior Jesus sends His Holy Spirit to help us want to do good.

Dear Jesus, take away our sin of thinking sin is okay, and teach us to love more and more. Amen.

LIBERTY VERSUS LEGALISM AND LICENSE

Some people will tell you that the only thing which matters is whether you believe in Jesus Christ, because then you will be saved. In a way, that is true. It is the most important thing, because the pure Gospel message of free-for-nothing salvation liberates Christian believers in this life and finally lifts us to heaven. Salvation is by faith alone, not by works; righteousness in God is apart from works, but by

faith from first to last; we cannot pave the way to heaven; meanwhile Jesus has already done it for us long ago. This is a freeing, liberating fact.

However, while salvation by faith alone is most important, there are other things that matter, also. There are next-most-important things, like using our liberty for good.

The Bible tells you that *it is for freedom that Christ has set you free* (5:1). In our text today, you are told not to use your freedom as a starting point for your sinful flesh (“inner sinner”). Instead, “*love and serve one another*”; that is, to “*love your neighbor as yourself*.”

>>> There was once a 30-year-old paramedic who was called to a crash scene on the Pacific Coast Highway. The victim was a 72-year-old pediatrician. The front end of the man’s SUV was crumpled under a semi truck, and his feet were pinned under the dash. Two rescue teams helped get the man out, and Chris Trokey, the paramedic who rode with the victim, suddenly recognized this man’s name, Dr. Michael Shannon. As it turned out, the 72-year-old doctor, Michael Shannon, once upon a time, had taken care of the 30-year-old paramedic—when he was a baby. Chris Trokey had been a 3 1/2 - lbs. premature baby in 1986 when he went in for a dangerous fever. Dr. Shannon took care of the baby, ran the tests, did the spinal tap, and sat with the baby for two nights before the future paramedic got better. So before the paramedic ever got to save the pediatrician, the pediatrician was there to save the paramedic.

That pediatrician could not have had a more fulfilling day, don’t you think? He had saved this tiny little baby, and now that baby is a 6’3” 195 lbs. paramedic, out there saving other people in his occupation.

Today we consider how we were saved by Jesus Christ. We cannot possibly save the Son of God in return, but He did save us in order to love and serve others. Just as a pediatrician helps save the life of a premature child, but not to waste his life away; so Jesus did not save us in order to be loveless and animalistic towards one another. No, of course Jesus died to set us free for real liberty, the pleasure of loving and serving others.

I say this because in the book of Galatians, Paul has hammered it home that salvation is by faith alone. Salvation is not by works; righteousness to God is apart from works; righteousness with God is by faith from first to last. “*God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God.*” We cannot pave the way to heaven; meanwhile Jesus has already done it for us long ago. This is first and foremost. This is liberating!

>>> The Statue of Liberty has stood for 130 years in sheets of pure copper. She hasn’t moved an muscle. She has been legalistically confined to the laws of nature. Sometimes I wish she could just stretch out, loosen the arm holding the torch, shake it out. Christian liberty is better. We aren’t confined to rigid laws and volumes of regulations. We are freed from a legalistic interpretation of the Bible, which tells us to follow the rules just so or rely on our works in some way. No, Jesus has done it all! The Law has said, “Do! Do! Do!” The Gospel of Jesus Christ responds, “Done! Done! Done!”

So after so many sermons in Galatians, we might ask: What is the use of the Law? Why do we still teach the Ten Commandments? Why do we still try to do what is right? Conversely, why don’t we throw out the constraining commands of the Bible that we don’t like? If we have a Savior like Jesus who did it all, if we have liberty to do as we please, why don’t we just have a sin-fest and paint the town with our darkest desires?

There are false teachers who hold to this view, by the way. They teach that Christians are liberated from the Law in that the Law no longer applies to a Christian in any way. They are called *antinomians*, meaning “against the Law.” They suggest we can live for fleeting pleasure and happiness. Their god

rescues even if sinners are no longer sorry for their sin, since they have no divine Law to convict them and to bring them to realize wrong is still wrong. However, they are wrong.

There is a deep need for us to preserve God's will in matters of life, speech, marriage, sex, stewardship, and church. There is a deep need for us to do good works. It is neither Lutheran nor Christian to suggest we cease and desist from God's Law and from all good works. Yet denying the Law altogether is a temptation for all Christians who know salvation is free-for-nothing. God does not need our good works, nor do they save us. But if we are truly cheerful and liberated by the work of the Son of God, we will love to do good works. Suddenly, in a way, *His commands are not burdensome* (1 John 5:3).

The thinking goes like this: Jesus saved my life! I'm redeemed and reconciled to God. I am free. Now what do I do? Well, Jesus holds out heaven to me for free. It only stands to reason that I follow Jesus—and do as Jesus pleases. So what is the will of Jesus? Well, Jesus clearly stated that He wills as the Father wills. What is the Father's will? For the sake of this question, we need to go back to what behavior and love and service pleases the Father.

Thereby (this is why) we go back to the Laws of old. The Law of God is a great guide to us what the will of the Father might be. How are we to act? We are told in the psalms that His "*Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.*" Isaiah says that the people's hearts are **far** from God, so we Christians would still strive to bring our hearts **near** to God. At the fall of King Saul and his subsequent rejection, Samuel said, "*To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.*"

>>> I see a group of incarcerated men on the boulevards of 146th street from time to time. They are wearing yellow and orange vests and pushing lawn mowers. I guess that would be a nice liberty to be allowed outside, off-location from the prison (and it takes pretty good behavior in the clink, I'm told; that is, these are the most trusted prisoners). However, if one of those prisoners cuts away and dashes across the street, if he runs away, he has subjugated himself back to the old laws again. He won't get that liberty to mow the boulevards on 146th Street for a very long time. They don't take the prisoners out there to commit crimes, but to give them freedom of fresh air, the sight of society, and a chance to prove themselves.

So it is possible for us to subjugate ourselves under the Old Law of the Bible again when we sin. Jesus died for those sins! He did not die in order to release us into old patterns and wicked actions again. No! Jesus was our Savior to liberate us to a life of love and service to one another.

Luther repeated from time to time: "God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does." "One can make God neither stronger nor richer with works, but one can make a man stronger and richer who needs them. To whom they are needed, there also they should go, and not to God. You have often heard that and now it is in your ears; would to God that it might also come into your hands and into your works!"

You know that the feeling of being liberated by Christ only continues in our good works. True Christians, saved by faith alone, take it as no license to sin, no license ignore the chance to do good deeds. We are liberated to hold doors open for each other, warmly greet each other, and to listen to one another's challenges in this life. We are liberated to bear each other's books to school, and to bear each other's burdens of conscience. We are liberated to sit with each other in a hospital room, to send one another greeting cards, and to get each other gifts. We are liberated to rebuke each other, to correct each other, and challenge each other to be better. We are liberated to put away the pornography, to watch our mouths, and to change our minds about something God has said is wrong. We are liberated to give to those in need, to raise funds for certain causes, and to put together food

and clothing drives. The key here is Christian liberty. It is not a license to sin, but the desire to love and serve.

But we cannot ever love and serve one another enough. Paul encouraged us to let the “*continuing debt to love one another*” remain outstanding (Rom. 13:8). Where can your love grow more and more?

Meanwhile, the devil will creep in and remind us how we have hurt others, even our closest companions, and list what we haven’t done right. When our liberty has become license or legalism, we cannot lose ourselves in our works. You might start to think that your feelings of guilt may pay for your sin, or that more works will add up to liberty again. But that’s how Christian faith is lost.

Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone for rescue and renewed liberty. Your sins of license and legalism are lost on God the Father, for He has punished His Son Jesus for them.

Your liberty is back today. How will you love and serve? Follow the Law.

How will you live? Looking at each person as a chance to love and serve? Be the paramedic who, after being loved and served by the pediatrician, used his life to love and serve others.

How will we learn to love and serve perfectly? It will not happen until He raises us in the end. But the Lord has already started teaching us by faith. Amen.

Luther quote found: (Luther, SL.XI.1272,2 – church postil on the 4th Sunday after Trinity; i.e., Luke 6:36-42)

Pediatrician and paramedic news article here: <https://www.rd.com/true-stories/survival/doctor-saved-by-former-patient/>