

FREE TO LOVE

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July 8, 2012

Sermon in a sentence: In Christ, we are free to love each other.

Scriptures: Gal. 5:1-6; John 8:31-32,36; Rom. 8:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:16-17; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; Mt. 7:12; Phil. 2:1-13; 1 Pet. 1:13-22

Galatians 5:1-6 (NASB) **It was for freedom that Christ set us free;** therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 **You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.** 5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. 6 **For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.**

When we begin our Christian life, we begin a life of total, complete, utter freedom! This may sound fantastical and unrealistic, but the scriptures tell us this is exactly what Jesus came to do. **“It was for freedom that Christ set us free”** (Gal. 5:1a).

Let's think of a bird in a small cage. It is restricted on all six sides in a rigidly defined and confined space. It has no option to leave.

Now provide the bird with a two-way trap door on any side of its cage. It is now free to leave the cage and never return. Or, it can stay in the cage and never leave. Or it can leave and return at its whim. It is free.

When Jesus died on Calvary's cross, He opened the door of our cage and set us free. Now we have choices we didn't have before. Our sin debt has been paid, we are in right standing with God, and the 'scales' have been removed from our eyes. For the first time in our lives, we are freed from the bondage of sin, self and Satan, which all lead to eternal death and separation from God. We are now free!

The apostle John reports:

John 8:31-32,36 (NASB) ... Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 36 "So **if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.**

The apostle Paul continues:

Romans 8:1-2 (NASB) Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 **For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.**

Going back to our first reading in Galatians, Paul takes the argument another major step forward:

Galatians 5:2-6 (NASB) Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 **You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. 6 **For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.****

He considered all the history and teachings of the Jews in making his point: keeping the Law cannot justify us in God's sight. In fact, if we try to live by the Law, we are responsible for the whole book of the Law, start to finish.

What is the alternative? It is the absolute freedom of living a life of "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6b)!

Here's the difference between the two. When we live for the Law and judge everybody around us by the Law, we tend to become pompous, self-righteous and condemning. We tend to spend all our time looking for specks in the eyes of others, while ignoring the beams in our own eyes (Mt. 7:3-5). It becomes a life of holding others to an impossible standard of adherence to rules and regulations that *nobody* can keep (Neh. 9:34, Acts 15:10).

Nehemiah 9:34 (NASB) "For our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers have not kept Your law or paid attention to Your commandments and Your admonitions with which You have admonished them.

Acts 15:10 (NASB) "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?"

In fact, the only thing the Law is capable of doing is confirming that we are all hopeless sinners.

On the other hand, our Lord Jesus has called us to live a life of faith in Him, having received His amazing mercy, grace and salvation. This life of faith works through love: God's love for us, our love for God; God's love for others, our love for others.

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Here's how love works. When we love someone, we ask questions like these: "What can I do to please you? What can I do in your best interest? How can I honour you and show you I care? What can I say to express my love and appreciation for you? How can I serve you? What do you need? What can I do to help you?"

When we have a love relationship with someone, we never think in terms of rules and regulations. We don't think in terms of onerous duties and obligations. We love and serve with joy and happiness, seeking every opportunity to show our love. We find freedom and fulfillment in our love.

When we truly love someone, it is amazing to see our levels of tolerance, acceptance and understanding of the mistakes they make. Even if we don't agree with their actions, we don't slaughter them with our words. In our hearts, we don't even desire to hurt them or see them embarrassed or humiliated by others. When we truly love someone, we try to correct them in love and help them overcome their faults.

This is the way we are called to live with each other at all times in the body of Christ.

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We have had notorious criminals in Canada who have committed heinous acts of violence against others (e.g. Clifford Olsen, Robert Picton, Paul Bernardo and most recently, Luca Magnotta). In spite of what they have done, there is one question that never comes up – whether or not they are Canadian. They are Canadian by virtue of birth or naturalization, and their status as citizens is never questioned. As Canadians, they are tried in our courts and

punished according to our laws, and even in our secular society, our hope is that criminals can be rehabilitated as good citizens, even while they are incarcerated.

How does one become a Christian? Through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ at Calvary, responding to His initiative by being “born again” of water and Spirit. This makes us Christians. Some may become weak, some may fall, some may commit heinous acts, contrary to biblical righteousness. Some may have to be severely punished for their crimes by those God has put in place for this purpose, but even in such cases, we should not question the fact that they are our fellow-citizens in the kingdom of God.

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At the same time, all of us need to be keenly aware of this point:

1 Peter 2:16-17 (NASB) Act as free men, and [but] do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. 17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

We may well feel that we are free to do whatsoever we choose, and we would be correct in saying so. However, if we truly love God as we say we do,

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 (NASB) ... we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Ecclesiastes 11:9 (NASB) Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of

your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 (NASB) The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

So, we are all free to love each other and not to condemn each other. God is the final judge. We are free to treat each other in the manner we wish to be treated, because this IS the “Law and the Prophets”.

Matthew 7:12 (NASB) “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

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Philippians 2:1-13 (NASB) Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of

those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. 12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**

1 Peter 1:13-22 (NASB) ... **prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." 17 If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.**

Choruses:

I Love You With The Love Of The Lord (F)

You're My Brother You're My Sister (F)

I'm So Glad I'm A Part Of The Family Of God (C)