

# Implications of Christian Freedom: Living a Spirit-led Life

Galatians 6:1-18  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman  
July 11, 2010

Freedom! More specifically, Christian freedom! We talked last week, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, about what that means to us today, and what it meant when Paul first wrote the words in Galatians 5:1, **"For freedom, Christ has set us free."**

Since the Epistle reading for today continues Paul's discussion on the implications of Christian freedom, I felt it was appropriate to explore this issue even further, especially as to what living a life marked by Christian freedom may actually look like for you and me, and this congregation.

The historical context in which the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the churches in Galatia reveal that there were some Christian teachers who claimed that a convert to Christianity must first embrace Judaism. It was the belief of some that a Christian must obey all the Jewish laws of Moses, including circumcision.

Paul wrote this letter to the Galatians to counter this argument, to insist that **Christians comes into union with God through faith in Christ, not through following a set of legalistic religious rituals.** As it turns out, this letter was instrumental in transforming Christianity from a small sect of Judaism into a new world religion.

Paul's main point is that Christians are free from the law when it comes to redemption! But as we have learned, liberty does not mean absolute libertarianism, which is unrestricted liberty in our actions. As we discussed last Sunday, **freedom in Christ is not license to do as we please, but rather it is a call to serve others and to live responsibly.** Christianity, then, is not about following a set of rules, but rather living by the law of love.

Perhaps the best summary of this issue of Christian freedom was written in 1918 by W.R. Inge, an Anglican priest, professor of divinity at Cambridge, and Dean of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London. "Christianity promises to make people free; it never promises to make them independent."

Indeed, **one of the Apostle Paul's deepest concerns was how people lived together in community.** He was afraid that living a life of self-indulgence would lead to a life of destruction, and therefore pleaded with the Galatians to allow themselves to be led by the Spirit of God. Paul said that **there are ways of telling if an individual or a congregation is living a Spirit-led life.** He called these characteristics the 'fruit of the Spirit,' and they include a life marked by: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**

That's where we left off last week. And in today's Scripture passage, the last chapter in Paul's letter to the Galatians, he provides some practical examples of what it means to live a life guided by the Spirit of God.

Spirit-led Christians, according to this text, are those who act responsibly toward each other within the context of Christian fellowship. The reality of the presence of the Spirit of God working in and through our lives isn't so much about walking around on a spiritual high, as it is demonstrated in the real life situations of personal relationships.

Paul provides a specific example in verse 1 of Chapter 6. He imagines a hypothetical situation in which a believer unexpectedly learns that another is trapped in some sin. What is that first person to do? Does love for neighbor mean overlooking the sin and refusing to face or deal with the facts? Or, should that person expose the sin openly to others and so gain a reputation for superior holiness?

Paul defines a Spirit-led person as proceeding in neither of these two ways. Rather, he says that **we should 'restore' the person who has fallen into sin.** And he tells us how are we to do this? **Gently!** Restoration should be done in a "spirit of gentleness," with care and compassion.

**Church discipline is something we almost never talk about,** perhaps because it has always been liable to abuse. It seems that Paul is aware of this as he presents his example. So he explains: First, **the task of discipline is not that of punishment but of restoration.** There is to be no hint of retribution. Christians are not being urged here to set up a tribunal to see that the guilty party pays for his or her sins.

Yet, the very idea of restoring a person "caught in any kind of wrong-doing" sounds a bit strange to modern ears. The current mood, especially among us progressives who don't want to come across as being moralistic and judgmental, is more one of live-and-let-live, of staying out of other people's business, of even avoiding those who seem to constantly want to correct us.

Paul, however, describes **the process of restoration** in a very interesting and practical way: **as bearing that person's burdens.** He states in verse 2, "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." We are being taught that the law of love translates into actions that build others up.

Here is a truth that inspires a true vision for the role of the church. **The ministry of any congregation is not nearly so much about programs, budgets, buildings, and endless meetings, as it is about seeking the wellbeing of persons, particularly burdened persons.** And in case we think we're except, that includes you and me.

That has been and will continue to be a guiding vision for College Hill. Our church's *Mission Statement* reflects this in our call to:

- Build and inclusive community of faith
- Receive and openly share the love of God
- Reach out with a compassionate voice for peace and justice

When we are at our best, we are indeed fulfilling this Spirit-led law of love.

Paul also realizes **how connected each of us is to one another.** There is truth in the biblical concept that when one suffers, we all suffer, when one is honored, we are all filled with joy.

Paul adds a warning, though, when it comes to bearing another's burdens. **We must take care not to be tempted ourselves,** for none of us is above being tempted and falling into sin. Therefore we must be aware of our own personal needs and weaknesses when helping others. Realistic self-evaluation, Paul suggests, is a guard against falling into temptation, and it helps put us in a position to help another person with their burdens.

**We are also told not to compare ourselves to others**, particularly with those we are trying to help, so that we don't become arrogant, prideful or conceited. For if we think we are any better than anyone else, we are only fooling ourselves.

Paul goes on to say that living a Spirit-led life involves not only helping others, but in **“carrying our own load.” We are reminded of the need to fulfill our own duties and responsibilities, especially in the church. In so doing, we lessen the load and burdens carried by others. What can you, then, do to help?**

Next, Paul quotes a familiar proverb: **“Whatever one sows, one will also reap.”** We are presented here with a choice of sowing seeds in one of two fields. This metaphor is well stated in the Jerusalem Bible translation, “If we sow in the field of self-indulgence we will get a harvest of corruption out of it; if we sow in the field of the Spirit we will get for it a harvest of eternal life.

**So what might keep us from sowing in the field of the Spirit?** Paul again has a very interesting answer: **weariness**. Specifically, weariness that results in discouragement that eventually leads to giving up.

As any farmer or gardener knows, it may be months after a seed is planted before any results are seen. Such is the case when sowing spiritual seeds. Since results are not often seen right away it's easy to become weary, discouraged, and tempted to give up.

Paul may have been thinking of his own extensive but thus far unrewarding efforts that he expended on the church in Galatia. You may be thinking of your extensive efforts here at College Hill, or in other areas of your life. So Paul clearly warns, **“Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up.” Perseverance, then, is an important and crucial key in living a Spirit-led life.**

I'll end today with Paul's final thought on this subject. “So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those of the family of faith.”

What we are reminded of in today's biblical text is that Christian freedom requires a lot of hard and dedicated work. It involves bearing one another's burdens; providing for each other; persevering in doing good; and working for the well-being of everyone, particularly our fellow church members.

One biblical commentator summarizes Galatians 6 this way: “If we walked by the Spirit we would love one another more, and if we loved one another more we would bear one another's burdens, and if we bore one another's burdens we would not shrink from seeking to restore a fallen brother or sister.”

The great Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, summarized Galatians' paradox of Christian freedom with these words: “A Christian is the most free person of all, and subject to none; a Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.”

**A Spirit-led life – a life guided by the indwelling Spirit of God working within, among, and through each one of us – is reflected in how we live together in community.** May God give us the strength to fulfill this part of our mission and vision for our own lives, and for College Hill.

Amen.