

## Sermon Discussion Information

Sermon Series: Galatians: I Want to be Free

Sermon Title: "Freedom Lived Out"

Sermon Text: Galatians 6

Listeners journey: I want my listener to understand "freedom in Christ" as synonymous with "freedom to include" in that, ultimately the way of Jesus gives us the vision, and the Spirit of God gives us the strength—to bear the burdens and experience the joy of forming Christian community across differences.

Unique Quotes from Sermon:

Looking at Galatians chapters five and six as a group, Paul offers five practical ways to live out Freedom in Christ and one final reminder of the entire book's theme.

Chapter 5:

- Do not use freedom to indulge in the flesh
- Keep in step with the Spirit

Chapter 6:

- Carry one another's burdens
- Resist comparing and competing with others
- Do not grow weary in doing good, especially in your Christian community

FINAL REMINDER: "What counts most is 'new creation'"

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In Galatians 5:19-21 Paul gave a short list of what he saw was "sowing to the flesh." There is a meaningful sense of balance in his list: sexual mis-steps, idolatry mis-steps, relational mis-steps, and lack of self-control mis-steps. Each one of these matters hurts ourselves and others. They break relationships. And, Paul is simply saying, don't use "being free from the law" (meaning that we will be forgiven no matter what we do) to follow whatever urge or whim that comes along, because giving into our more base human tendencies can do serious relational damage to one another and with God.

For instance, it is fascinating to see how conversations and studies about pornography are evolving in this regard. For the most part porn is no longer socially taboo. The internet has removed much of the public shaming aspect of those who engage pornography. So, it should be no surprise that the largest porn website in the world reported that in 2016 there were 23 billion visits or an average of 64 million visits to their single website every day. And, that is only one website. Contrary to past trends, one study says it's not just men watching...of those who watch pornography regularly, 72% are men and 28% are women.<sup>1</sup> The negative effects are multiple and becoming increasingly addressed by science, psychology, and sociologists. New studies and such forums as Ted Talks<sup>2</sup> articulate that the ubiquitous presence and use of pornography is advancing outlandish chauvinism because of the gender portrayals in the content, and vastly diminished actual sex lives because the studies report that watching porn reduces sex drive, not increases it. I want to be very careful here because of how the Christian Church has un-healthfully and egregiously shamed and excluded people around the topic of human sexuality, and yet also say that in this case, sowing to the flesh really does breaks things.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://fightthenewdrug.org/gender-of-online-pornography-viewers/> (accessed 11-4-17)

<sup>2</sup> <https://tedxinnovations.ted.com/2015/12/11/playlist-4-talks-offer-new-ways-to-think-about-porn/> (accessed 11-4-17)

Because I am a pastor, you may have expected me to mention something about sexual fidelity, and yet considering that the entire letter of Galatians is focused on religious legalism, the larger point of Paul is the destructive outcomes of religious legalism that leads to hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions and factions. Here me clearly: Religious legalism is indulging in, and sowing to the flesh! And, Paul points out that the legalists indulge in the flesh by replacing God in terms of judgement and control, and enforcing methods that induce fear. It is difficult to put too fine a point on it, but religious legalism kills Christian community, arguably more than all of the other mis-steps of Paul's list combined.

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In Galatians 5:16 Paul wrote "walk by the Spirit." In 5:25 he wrote "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep *step* with the Spirit," In Galatians 6:8 he urged the Early Church to "*sow to please* the Spirit." These phrases have been tossed around so much in church circles that they almost sound like Christian lingo. The point behind Paul's choice of words is that, if the fruit of the Spirit is our goal, we have to be intentional in our pursuit of Christ-like-ness. And, walking with God's Spirit means:

- We notice God in our everyday life
- We awaken more and more to the intrinsic love of God for us simultaneous to being aware of our shadow side and separate self.
- That we live our lives in the flow of God that is present in all that is around us, and
- We do some simple intentional steps to nurture our awareness of the Spirit of God's voice to us.

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In my Galatians sermon a few weeks back, "The Crucible of Equality," I made the point that one key outcome of freedom in Christ is the struggle for equality to exist across human difference. And, that Christ followers are urged to courageously struggle with human prejudice, and our religious traditions, in order to create life together as equals in Christian community and common life together in broader society. On some days, it feels just easier to give up on this Galatians idea because, in my experience, the way *Christians* treat one another in the fray looks nothing like the Christ we claim to follow. I wonder if that may be one reason Paul said, "do good...especially to those who belong to the family of believers." At the beginning of today's teaching I mentioned that Galatians chapter 6 has one incredible discovery that may change the way we view Christ and community. The discovery is this-- (And, I swear that I have never paid attention to this Galatians verse in my decades of studying this letter) Paul was referring to the religious legalists when he wrote:<sup>12</sup> Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. *The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.* Galatians 6:12, New International Version (NIV)

What Paul is saying here is that Christ followers will be persecuted by even their own religious traditions for being as generous as Christ. And, when you look through the lens of the struggle for freedom in Christ being the same as freedom to include, this makes sense! And, this challenges much of how we frame our metrics for Christian community.

I brought all of this to an older mentor of mine. He is an African American pastor in North Minneapolis. And, he sent me a carefully crafted email this week that I have permission to read here because it will encourage all of us to not grow weary in doing good.

Dan,

Thank you for our time yesterday as usual it was very meaningful for me. I have been reflecting on your struggle with larger church leadership around the GBLT issue and the difficulty in navigating self-care. I have two thoughts for you to reflect on. One thought is that in my opinion what the larger church and society tends to do is "other" leaders who dare to speak for and with people on the margins. The message is if we dare to align ourselves with powerless people we will be "othered" too. It is important that you not allow yourself to be "othered." By this I mean avoid internalizing the messages you receive from the church and those who seem to hold the power.

There is a systematic cycle I know called the power of oppressions. The cycle begins with targeting or labeling people. It then moves to attaching mis-information about the person or group and based on mis-information it justifies mistreatment of the person or group. The final stage of the cycle is internalized behavior. So it goes from target to mis-information, justified mistreatment to internalized behavior.

Example with a cop, Black male youth (target) are gang members (mis-information), therefore (racial profile/driving while black) and black male youth join gangs and resist police...You might compare your own response in the cycle [regarding human sexuality].

My advice and prayer for you is to remember who you are and speak from your faithful grounding, inspired by God. Speak for and with those suffering oppression but not allowing the church to make you an "other." Challenge the church to see and hear that you are speaking from a rich, Christian, faithful, leadership and love for the church. Do not allow them to "other" you. If they can begin to see and hear you, then they can begin to see and hear the people they have a deep investment in seeing as "other."

Continue to be a spiritual leader. This brings with it the challenge of embracing your vulnerability and being a leader to both the oppressed and their oppressors.

It ain't easy my brother. Hang in there, you are in my prayers!

#### Three Discussion Questions:

1. How has the study of Galatians challenged or enriched your life? (Personal sharing)
2. What are some different ways that freedom and Christ has application to multiple aspects of the Christian life? (Exploring the text)
3. What are some ways that you can be more including in your own day to day life, and at church? (Direct application)