

Series: Transition

February 2, 2020

## **Title: Live by the Spirit**

### **[Slide 1]**

**Text: Galatians 5:13-16**

### **Called to be Free**

#### **No more slavery:**

What does it mean to be free? In our contemporary society freedom is usually thought of as an individual right. We should be free to think and speak the way we want. We should be free to worship as we wish. We shouldn't have others making decisions for us. In fact, many such freedoms are enshrined in the Bill of Rights.

But what did it mean to Paul when he wrote to the churches in Galatia:

### **[Slide 2]**

*Galatians 5:1 NIV*

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*

For Paul this was what you might call Exodus language. He was recalling God setting Israel free from slavery in Egypt and making them His own special, chosen people. They had known the heavy yoke of slavery. They had been subjected to systematic genocide. Then God stepped in and delivered them. No longer would they be slaves. They were free.

Now, Paul is saying that God has done the same thing in an even more profound and life-changing way through His King, Jesus. Jesus came as our Passover Lamb to set us free. This isn't about some list of personal rights. It's about being on a New Exodus Journey as God's chosen people. We are finally free to take the journey, no longer slaves of anything or anyone!

#### **The one thing that counts:**

This kind of freedom comes with responsibilities. We aren't free to do whatever we want. We are part of something bigger than ourselves, and Paul reminds the Galatians:

**[Slide 3]**

*Galatians 5:13 NIV*

*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another humbly in love.*

What a difference from individualistic, self-centered notions of freedom! God has set us free from our own sinful nature through Jesus' death and resurrection, so that we can be *slaves!* Freed from slavery so you can be a different kind of slave? Sounds totally contradictory, to say the least. But Paul is reminding us that we will always serve something or someone, no matter how great our freedom. Will it be our own broken self? Or will we become willing and joyful servants to each other, serving "humbly in love"?

**Called to be free:**

In describing this new freedom Paul uses the word "called." He says:

*You, my brothers and sisters, were **called** to be free.*

This, again, is Exodus language. Israel was *chosen, called*, out of all the peoples of the world to fulfill a special task. She was chosen to be God's light to all the nations, revealing the wonder and love of the One True God.

Now Paul is saying to Christians in Galatia that they, too, are called to a special task. They are now God's covenant people with the task of restoring His Creation as He works through them.

And how does God restore His world? Through people who serve each other, humbly in love.

That is your calling and my calling. To be a follower of Jesus doesn't just mean that when you die you go to heaven. It doesn't just mean that your sins are forgiven and you're off the hook. It means that

- You are part of God's New Exodus people.
- You are freed from your broken sinful nature through God's power working in you.
- You are to use your freedom to serve each other humbly in love.

## The New Commandment

### New Exodus/New Torah:

How important is it that we serve each other in love? Paul points out that the command to love each other is the New Torah for the New Exodus. In the original Exodus Israel traveled through the desert to Mt. Sinai, where God gave them Torah – the Law and teaching for living in covenant with Him as His people. This was the highlight of the entire journey to the Promised Land. Keeping Torah, God’s Law, marked Israel out as God’s chosen people.

Now Paul says that in the New Exodus out of the realm of sin and Death, Jesus is our Lawgiver. And the Law He gives us is to love each other:

#### [Slide 4]

*John 13:34-35 NIV*

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

When we “serve each other humbly in love” we show the whole wide world that we belong to Jesus.

### The single command:

It is this command that Paul refers to when he writes to the Galatian Christians about how to live in their New Exodus:

#### [Slide 5]

*Galatians 5:14-15 NIV*

*For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

Read the Exodus story and you will find that again and again when Israel refused to love each other they ended up at war with each other. In fact, the virtually the entire first generation of the Exodus never even made it to the Promised Land. This command is non-negotiable!

Evidently the same thing was happening in the churches in Galatia. Christians were being tempted to fight with each other over doctrines and practices. Paul calls them back to basics: to the single command Jesus gave us: "Love one another."

## **Live by the Spirit**

### **Two opposing forces:**

Sounds good, but so hard to do! That's the problem with the New Exodus Journey. We have been set free from the past, but the past keeps popping up in our thoughts and actions!

Paul explains that we experience a never-ending conflict between two opposing forces: the Holy Spirit on one side and our old sinful, broken nature on the other:

### **[Slide 6]**

*Galatians 5:16-17 NIV*

*So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.*

Sound familiar? We've all been there. No matter how hard we try to be a better person, or not make the same mistake the next time, we find powerful forces within us dragging us back into the old slavery to sin and death.

### **Led by the Spirit:**

The cure for this problem is to, in Paul's words, "walk by the Spirit." Once again, he's using Exodus language -- the journey from slavery to the Promised Land.

In the original Exodus story, God led His people through the desert by a tall column or pillar of cloud that glowed with inner fire at night. The prophet Isaiah tells us that this cloud was actually a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, leading God's people every step of the way.

Now, the Holy Spirit promises to come and live inside us, guiding us every step of the way.

**[Slide 7]**

*Galatians 5:18 NIV*

*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

No more slavery. No more trying to do things on our own. No more wandering aimlessly in a vain attempt to find God and do His will. When we're led by God's Spirit, we find the freedom to which God called us!

**Live by the Spirit:**

We're in the middle of a New Exodus journey as a church right now! At times it's filled with blessings; at times it's scary and confusing. Who will be the next pastor? Will I feel comfortable with him and his family? How will they care for us as a congregation? A million questions come up, and answers are few and far between!

That is why in this part of our desert journey we need to come to our own Mt. Sinai and sit at Jesus' feet. He is our Lawgiver. His new command to us is to double down on the love that we have for each other. He is calling us to serve each other and not use our "freedom" as an excuse to hurt each other.

He has sent His Holy Spirit to lead us and to fill us with His love and power so that we "walk by the Spirit," and not in our strength.

Do this and we will never be slaves to the old self and all its brokenness.

**[Slide 8]**

*Galatians 5:1 NIV*

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*