

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity, October 3, 2010**

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Hymns: 544, 236:1, 351, 293, 48.

Lessons: Isaiah 51:1-9, Galatians 3:25-5:1, John 8:30-32.

Sermon Text: Galatians 5:1 and 13-25.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Can Christians do anything they please? Are there no guidelines? How are Christians to live and put their “freedom” into practice?

The United States of America has been built on a constitution which provides certain “freedoms” for its people. We even have holidays which celebrate the freedoms we enjoy as United States citizens. As the USA has been involved in other countries and especially in wars against some kind of tyranny, it has tried to instill certain freedoms in those countries, too. Our nation was founded by breaking away from the tyranny of a king half a world away. Without examining today the rightness of that American revolution, I use it as an example of freedom. You no doubt remember some of the things that the king of England imposed on citizens in what is now the USA such as “taxation without representation”. The founders of this nation gave us a number of very important freedoms such as the freedom to worship God as we choose.

But very few of us probably know what it really means to be free. We might think of being free from school rules, or free from our parents, or some such “freedom”. Someone who has escaped the tyranny of another country’s harsh government might understand freedom quite well. Someone who has been released from prison with no probation or parole hanging over his or her head might understand freedom quite well. In the transition from our New Testament Epistle lesson to our sermon text, you heard: ***“Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman. 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.”*** Galatians 4:31-5:1.

Today we are talking about a freedom from sin, a freedom from the law of God which because of our sinful nature damns men to an eternity in hell.

**JUST BECAUSE YOU ARE FREE,  
“DO NOT USE YOUR FREEDOM TO INDULGE THE SINFUL NATURE;  
RATHER, SERVE ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE.”**

- 1. “Freedom” is not license to do everything exactly as you choose.**
- 2. We still have our sinful flesh clinging to us, but God encourages us to**
- 3. Live in such a way as to bring forth fruits of the Holy Spirit.**

As born-again children of God, born of water and the Holy Spirit at our baptism, we are free from the slavery of sin, and thus also free from the slavery of having to obey the law to earn our salvation. As one Christian writer put it, “To stand firmly in God’s good graces without having to do anything to merit or earn this blessing – that is freedom indeed.” God has justified us, that is, he has declared us not guilty of all the sins we commit. He has done that because Jesus Christ was punished for all those sins.

Paul has just told the Galatian Christians by the inspiration of God the Holy Ghost that they were set free by Christ. He tells them that it is no longer necessary to obey the Old Testament customs and demands to earn salvation. In the words that I did not read from Galatians 5, he talks about circumcision as an example of what some false teachers were demanding from these Christians. He says that if a man ***“lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.”*** Galatians 5:3. You can’t have it both ways. You can’t believe that

Christ paid for all your sins AND obey the law – or the parts you choose – to earn salvation. Paul wrote by inspiration of God: ***“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”*** Galatians 5:6.

In the 1500s Lutherans settled a controversy by stating that Good Works are necessary. (Formula of Concord, Article IV) They are not necessary for salvation, but are necessary as fruits of faith. Or to put it another way, “Faith alone saves, but saving faith is never alone. It is always ***‘expressing itself through love.’*** Galatians 5:6. We simply have to say ‘thank you’ to our God by doing deeds of love wherever and whenever an opportunity presents itself. Living this life of appreciative love is what is called sanctification”. And if you remember your catechism instruction, you recall that the work of the Holy Ghost is called Sanctification.

Then, in the next words selected for our sermon text, we see that Paul emphasizes that Christians are free: not to sin, but to be kind to one another in many ways.

***“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”***

Since the Protestant reformation of the 1500s, Lutherans have been accused of inciting people to live wicked lives by telling people they are free from having to obey laws to earn their way into heaven. The argument has been made that ‘if you tell people they don’t have to obey the commandments and all the laws of the church to get into heaven, they will live wicked lives.’

The words of our sermon text reject that argument. If we truly understand law and gospel, we will exercise freedom, and not licentiousness. We will not use our freedom as license to live as libertines. Libertines! There’s quite a word. It comes from “liberty”, meaning freedom. But a libertine is one who uses freedom to live just as he or she pleases, and the definition includes the catalog of wickedness that we just read.

***“Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.”*** When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, when his Words start your day and end your day, when you read and hear what he has to say to you from Holy Scripture every day, your thoughts and words and actions will be guided by God. We have the picture of the sinful flesh and the spirit within us. This is the fight of the new man and the old man. Flesh and spirit fight against each other, are contrary to each other.

Paul writes about it this way in Romans 7:18-19 and 24-25: ***“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. ... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”***

After speaking of the struggle of the sinful human nature and the Spirit of God, the old man versus the new man, then we read one of those New Testament catalogs of sins, a listing of the wickedness that our sinful flesh, the old man within us really wants us to do: ***“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*** Remember the commandments that show us our sinfulness? Compare this list to the commandments! And the terrible condemnation: ***“those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”***

And then we read of the fruits of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost: ***“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things***

***there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.***” Walk in the Spirit, not in the flesh.

Some churches delight in rules. There are a few in our congregations who might remember the kinds of rules that some Baptist high schools enforced as dress codes even for athletic events played against Lutheran high schools. For example, cheerleaders’ skirts had to touch the floor when they knelt. I have read that no woman can go into a Roman Catholic church in some European countries with a bare head, but must have some kind of covering, even a simple lace cap. And of course, you know all about the rules of the Roman Catholic church from your acquaintances, even to what foods people were at one time, by church decree, supposed to give up during Lent, while in some cases continuing in sins which God forbids.

Paul here is speaking out specifically against those who would force Christians in the congregations in Galatia to obey the Old Testament laws and regulations, and circumcision is the one he specifically points out. I have heard that there are even Lutheran churches which have “dress codes” for all who come into church. God does not set such rules. But that does not mean that our dress for our worship services means “anything goes”. For example, the “fasting and bodily preparations” in preparation for the Lord’s Supper give us opportunity to dress appropriately for such a tremendous banquet as the forgiveness of sins, and not to dress as we would for the beach or the ballpark.

We are to serve one another in love. And the fruits of the Spirit that God causes in our lives do that. Fruit is and means something good, profitable, beneficial. But isn’t it interesting that fruit takes time to develop, to mature. It won’t come instantly. We must sometimes be patient and wait for fruits. When you plant an apple tree, it may take years for fruit to grow. Developing fruit from your apple tree is not always easy. It can be hindered by what we do or don’t do. If we don’t nurture the fruit tree, fruit won’t develop.

You don’t plant a seed and then ignore it. You nurture it – water, cultivate, prune, pick weeds, fertilize it. In his fields the farmer plants the seeds and fertilizes and perhaps puts on some pesticides or herbicides but it is God who gives the increase and causes the plants to grow and bear fruit.

So in the life of the Christian, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 3:7: ***“So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”*** In our text Paul reminds us: ***“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”*** May God walk with us always, each day, so that we ***“keep in step with the Spirit.”*** Amen.