

Galatians 5:1, 25

“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...Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (vv. 1, 25)

For Bible-believing, confessional Lutheran Christians, last week was not a good news week. It started in Texas. As the state legislature was attempting to vote on restricting abortion, one person filibustered—talking hour upon hour—looking to derail the legislation. Then, when it came time for the vote, a mob of women interrupted the proceedings and screamed for the right to end the lives of the unborn. For the time being, they were successful. Then a couple of days later the news came from Washington, D.C. The highest court in our land ruled that marriage be redefined as a union between two people of the same sex. In quick succession, the sanctity of human life and the sanctity of marriage were rejected and swept away as being irrelevant.

After a week like that, you have to shake your head, wondering what is going on. And what is going on? Are attitudes and actions like those coming from hearts guided by the Word of God and led by his Holy Spirit? Not at all. That is not my judgment of other people's hearts. That is the clear judgment of Scripture and the God who revealed his will in those pages.

So, what does a life guided by Scripture and led by the Spirit look like? We'll find the answers in the Scripture lesson that serves as the basis for the sermon text. And what we'll find out is that people guided by Scripture and led by the Spirit are not perfect people—no, they have their sins like anyone else—but repentance and faith characterize their lives. They recognize the will of God regarding sin, forgiveness and Christian living, and strive with the Spirit's strength, to follow the will of God. This morning, let's consider

What A Spirit-Led Life Looks Like

- I. There is gospel freedom.**
- II. There is internal warfare.**
- III. There is spiritual fruit.**

Picture a slave in the 19th century escaping from the southern part of our country through the Underground Railroad. The person makes it to the north—and freedom—and then turns right around and heads back south to a life of slavery. Unthinkable, right? Who would do something like that after getting a taste of freedom? Well, the people the apostle Paul was writing to had done something even more drastic than that.

The people who first received this inspired letter from Paul—the Galatians—lived in an area that Paul visited on his first missionary journey. Whether they were Jews waiting for the Messiah or people trapped in the worship of a false god, they needed to hear that the Savior had come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And that’s exactly the message Paul preached. He preached that Jesus Christ did all that was necessary for salvation, and that salvation was a free gift through faith in him.

The Holy Spirit worked through Paul’s message and led the Galatians to confess faith in Jesus as their Savior. That meant they were free from the curse of sin, free from the threats of the law, free from Satan’s power and free to serve their Savior with clear consciences. But then people called the Judaizers started bothering the Galatians. The message of the Judaizers was that faith in Jesus was not enough for salvation—no, they said there were still things the Galatians had to do to enjoy the forgiveness of sins, things like circumcision and other parts of the ceremonial law.

Do you see what was happening? The gospel freedom the Galatians had enjoyed through Paul’s preaching was evaporating. By listening to and believing the Judaizers, the Galatians were enslaving themselves to the law of God all over again. And that didn’t go over well with the apostle Paul. Earlier in this letter he told them: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all...You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” And now in the words of our sermon text Paul said: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let your-selves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” When you think about What a Spirit-Led Life Looks Like, you start by recognizing that there is gospel freedom—freedom from the law through Jesus Christ.

That’s a lesson for you and me today. Like the Galatians, we too have been led to see the freedom we have in Christ. We too, by nature, were slaves to sin and Satan, but Christ redeemed us. He bought us back by living the perfect life God demands of us and then suffering the punishment we deserved for not living a life of perfection. The result is that we have far greater freedom than the kind we’ll be thinking about

this Thursday, July 4th. But like the Galatians, there are threats to our freedom. Threats like these: “You say you were baptized as an infant. Well, that doesn’t really mean much. As an adult, you have to make a decision and invite the Lord into your heart.” Or this, “You say you’re a Christian. Well, if you’re really a Christian, you would be able to speak a heavenly kind of language that others—or maybe even you—do not understand.” Or this, “You give back part of your income to the Lord? That’s good, but you have to give a specific amount—10%.” All those statements are threats to the gospel freedom we enjoy. All those statements are throwing another law in our face and telling us we have to do some-thing to enjoy God’s love. All those statements are threats to our gospel freedom. And all those statements and threats from outside sources need to be rejected.

But at the same time we also need to recognize that a threat to our gospel freedom originates on the inside of every one of us. That’s our sinful nature. And that explains why a Spirit-Led Life also means

II. There is internal warfare.

People who study human nature apart from the Bible are puzzled as to the existence of evil in the world. And if they try to pinpoint the source of evil, it is usually someone else’s fault—like this line of reasoning: “Civilization and culture shape the individual. Thus, man is evil primarily because his cultural and social environments are evil, not through any fault of his own—society and culture have influenced man’s actions and have therefore stifled his inherent goodness.” So, it’s somebody else’s fault, somebody else who isn’t good. You have to wonder: “How did that “somebody else” become evil? How did evil enter their lives?” And these people have no answer.

Scripture has the answer. The perfect people God created in the Garden of Eden listened to the tempter and fell into sin. They lost the image of God and became sinful human beings. Their children were conceived and born in their image, and now a sinful nature is passed on from one generation to the next—and that involves you and me.

And look what that sinful nature is capable of producing. “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.” Here’s the reason for evil in the world and an explanation for why people do what they do: there’s a part of all

people, including us, that is an ally of Satan and an enemy of God that doesn't want to do anything good or godly. Instead, it wants to do only what is evil because it is thoroughly evil. And here's how serious the situation is, after listing some of the acts of the sinful nature, the Bible says: "Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." It can't get any more serious than that, can it?

So what do we do? We fight against our sinful nature. And it's not just a little pushing and shoving match. No, the language of our text is graphic. It speaks about our sinful nature being crucified, being put to an excruciating method of execution. We do that by saying "no" to sin when we are tempted. We do that by confessing our sins if we have given in to temptation. We do that by preaching the message of the law to our sinful nature. And it's no surprise: expect trouble when we do that.

In the early years of my ministry, I ran into a man who had grown up in our church body, but then joined another denomination. When asked what led to his change of membership, he admitted, "I got tired of hearing week after week that I'm a sinner." Have you heard that before? Have you shared those feelings? It would not be unusual. Our sinful nature does not like hearing the message of the law or the gospel, and so it rebels. And what do you with a rebel? You put it in its place. You fight against it. You do what this same apostle wrote about in Romans chapter 7: you engage in internal warfare. And you do that not by relying on your own strength, but on the strength provided by God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us ammunition to put down the sinful nature. But he does even more than that. The Spirit works in our lives so that when people wonder What A Spirit-Led Life Looks Like, they see clearly that

III. There is spiritual fruit.

The greatest work of the Holy Spirit, of course, is planting Christian faith in our hearts, making us children of God. That work enables us to benefit from everything Jesus Christ did by his holy life and sacrificial death: we have full and free forgiveness for every sin, we live right now in a peaceful relationship with God as his dearly-loved sons and daughters, and we can count on being in the presence of God once this life ends. There is no doubt about any of these blessings—they are guaranteed to be ours through Spirit-worked faith.

By creating faith in our hearts, the Spirit also creates the new self—that part of us that is opposed to the sinful nature, that part of us that wants to follow God's will in loving him above everything and everyone else and loving our neighbor as

ourselves. It's the new self that is engaged in the internal war with the sinful nature, and it's the new self that is built up through the use of the gospel in word and sacrament.

And so when we use the word and sacrament, look what happens: spiritual fruit blooms and blossoms and grows. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." These are the attributes and attitudes the Holy Spirit works in us as we read and hear the Word, and receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion. And so it's not rocket science, if you would like to be more "joyful" or "peaceful" or "patient" or "gentle," use the means through which the Holy Spirit instills these attitudes. Give more time for God to speak to you through his word; be a frequent guest at the Lord's Supper. Through word and sacrament the Spirit deepens our trust in Jesus and produces fruit—fruit that other people can see and fruit that can influence them.

After the discouraging news of last week, maybe you're wondering what Christians like us can do and are to do. I can't address what we "are to do" because that would be placing another law on you and threatening your gospel freedom, but I can speak about what we can do. Do we just wring our hands and say, "Well, what do you expect? The Bible paints a picture of the last days in which we go from bad to worse. We can't do anything about these things." Do we hide in a corner someplace and wait for the end of the world? Of course not. We continue to speak out for God, knowing that in the process we will get flak for that. But that's simply a cross for us to carry. Speaking out for God means that we'll point out sinful attitudes and actions, not because we pretend we can look into other people's hearts or that we ourselves are without sin. No, we point out sinful attitudes and actions because that's the loving thing to do. Those who live according to the sinful nature "Will not inherit the kingdom of God." If we understand that and care about other people, we will speak out about attitudes and actions that are contrary to God's word.

But more than speaking out with a message of the law, we want to speak the gospel to others and tell them the good news about Jesus the Christ. After all, neither God nor we are interested in simply changing behavior. Behavior is changed when hearts are changed, and hearts are changed by the Holy Spirit when he works through the gospel. So "Stand firm...live by the Spirit...and keep in step with the Spirit." When that is done, there are untold blessings—blessings that are ours to enjoy and blessings that can be seen by others who wonder What a Spirit-Led Life Looks Like. Amen.