



## \*“FREEDOM IN CHRIST”

**Biblical Text: Galatians 5:1, 16-18**

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\*Last weekend’s 75th Anniversary Block Party and Worship Services rank up at the top of the most inspiring events of my ministry and Old Mission’s history. \*Our hearts were touched and our souls inspired, as we celebrated our past and embraced our future!

I loved Ed Peterson’s comment last Sunday, *“I am tempted to say, well, it’s just a regular Sunday at Old Mission!”* \*But more than anything else last Sunday reflected the power of God to transform what is ordinary, into something more than we can try to explain by our human efforts alone, something only God could have done. Thanks be to God!

That’s what this new series called, *“Fruitology,”* is all about. For five weeks, we’ll explore the elements of a truly transformed life. \**“Fruitology”* is as important for the Christian as biology is to the life sciences or kinesiology to athletic trainers. Just as there are observable characteristics in other disciplines, it’s that way with our life in Christ.

\*Way back in the days before ministry altered my life path, I was a science fanatic. I was a biomedical engineering major at Louisiana Tech, well on my way to a degree and career in that discipline. And I still remember some of the things I learned. Like...

\***sci-en-tif-ic meth-od**, which is a procedure by which one systematically observes and measures, and only then comes to conclusions or a hypothesis based on the data.

\*For Christians, and for the world around us, the scientific method holds true in the expression of faith. Robert Bellah’s reminder hold true that, \**“If you want to know about a religious tradition, don’t ask what they believe, observe what they do!”*<sup>1</sup>

\*People often draw a false dichotomy between science and religion which does a service to neither. I love the words of former President Jimmy Carter who once said it this way, *“I find no incompatibility between the existence of God and discoveries human beings have made through the intelligence God has given us.”*<sup>2</sup>

But this series is not about science and religion. **You just got that for free!** \*What these messages **are** about is the characteristics that can be observed in the life of a Christian.

Just like the **118** elements on the \*Periodic Table of elements<sup>3</sup> that all have observable characteristics – \*so do our lives, when we are transformed by grace. Fortunately for you (*and also for me!*) this series is not about 118 characteristics, but just 5!

<sup>1</sup> *Habits of the Heart*, by Robert N. Bellah, et. al, Copyright © 1985, Harper-Collins Press, first edition.

<sup>2</sup> Jimmy Carter, "America Veering Toward Theocracy," *Stanford Medicine* (Summer, 2006), pp. 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> "Chemistry: Four elements added to periodic table." Copyright © 2016, BBC News. (Aired January 4, 2016.)

\*We are set free by grace to live with “*Freedom in Christ.*” We are each equipped to demonstrate “*Fruitful Christian Living.*” We are “*Filled with Spiritual Gifts.*” And we each function best when we “*Find our Ministry*” so we can “*Fulfilling Jesus’ Calling.*”

\*The first verse of our Biblical text from Galatians 5:1 sets the foundation for the entire series. \*Galatians 5:1 says: \***“For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”**<sup>4</sup>

For the Christians at Galatia, this verse was the heart of their spiritual struggle. They had believed in the freedom and forgiveness that comes from trusting in Jesus Christ. Whatever their old life had been, they were forgiven and free! As Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 5:17: \***“Anyone in Christ is a new creation, the old life has passed away and all things have become new!”**<sup>5</sup> But something happened to threaten their new life.

Other beliefs were out there. Some taught that we must prove our worth by following every letter of the law. Others taught that we can live however sinfully we want, because it’s already taken care of. **And those mistaken ideas are still alive today.**

\*I have said many times over the years that if I could only find a way to set people free from guilt, and regret and their bondage to their past, I’d make a million dollars.

I also wish that I could set people free from other things - overwork, worry, addictions, fears that we won’t have enough, always trying to prove that we are good enough.

And Paul develops that theme in our text. Galatians 5:16 says: \***“Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.”**<sup>6</sup> When we hear “*desires of the flesh*” our minds just immediately go to all the “*Jerry Springer Show*” sins – don’t they?

In fact, just after our text in Galatians 5:19-21, Paul lists some of those, \* *“fornication, impurity, adultery, drunkenness, carousing...”* But he also lists others that make us a lot less comfortable, \* *“bitterness, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrelling, envy...”*

In the Greek, the language in which Paul’s letter was written, a better translation than “*desires of the flesh*” would be “*natural inclinations*” or “*natural desires.*” That translation makes Paul’s next words a lot clearer.

There is a battle in us between our natural inclinations and what will help us lead the life God has set us free to live. In Galatians 5:17 he says: \***“For your natural desires are opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to our natural desires...”**<sup>7</sup>

Left on our own, we revert to what comes naturally to us – our natural inclinations.

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 5:1, New Revised Standard Version Bible, Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>5</sup> II Corinthians 5:17, paraphrased by the author.

<sup>6</sup> Op. Cit. Galatians 5:16, New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>7</sup> Op. Cit. Galatians 5:17a, paraphrased by the author.

I used to think that our biggest problems were what we call the *“sins of the flesh.”* And those are sometimes a struggle. If they are for you, God will help you resist temptation, if you ask him. But I see people struggle every day with other things, equally deadly.

Even the most successful among us struggle from still trying to prove something. And for the rest of us it’s even worse. We incessantly compare ourselves to others, and feel inadequate, or a failure or *“less than.”* We remember every error, or failure, or falling.

Maybe it’s because of our persistent feelings of not being good enough that we are sometimes so unforgiving and intolerant of one another, as well as so hard on ourselves.

But that’s not how we really want to be, not deep inside. And that’s not what God wants for us. Look at the rest of verse 17: *“...yielding to your natural desires will keep you from doing what you really want.”*<sup>8</sup> And here Paul comes with Good News.

Look at verse 18: *“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.”*<sup>9</sup> We are not subject an impossible set of expectations, or to someone’s idea of who we are created to be, or our own our own idea that we must achieve perfection.

We can be free. Forgiven of past or present failures or sins. We can be free. Free of the feelings that we are always failing to measure up. We are forgiven for failing to achieve impossible standards of perfection, or trying to squeeze 72 hours of responsibilities into a 24-hour day. We are set free in Christ from all of that.

Romans 8:1-2. Remember those verses? I taught on Romans 8:1 just a few weeks ago. It says, *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*<sup>10</sup> But it’s Romans 8:2 that has the further message most of us need: *“For the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”*<sup>11</sup>

You are set free by the forgiveness that is yours in Christ Jesus. Living a transformed life begins by not allowing anything else to come before the life God has given you the freedom to live. Don’t allow all the things that can consume your time, or energy or self-esteem to get in the way of that.

**At the bottom of the sermon notes for today, you’ll find a single word. *\*Forgiven.***

Take it home with you. Put it in your wallet or purse. Get it out and read it once in a while. Believe what it says. Don’t substitute anything for the free and forgiven life that is yours in Christ Jesus. You are set free, redeemed for a transformed life.

Remember - *“For freedom Christ has set you free...”* Don’t settle for less. Amen.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Galatians 5:17b, paraphrased.

<sup>9</sup> Op. Cit. Galatians 5:18. New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>10</sup> Op Cit. Romans 8:1, paraphrased.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Romans 8:2, paraphrased.