

## **Liberty Is not License**

### **Galatians 5:13-26**

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An old song by Billy Joel says, quite stubbornly,

“I don't need you to worry for me cause I'm alright.  
I don't want you to tell me it's time to come home.  
I don't care what you say anymore, this is my life.  
Go ahead with your own life and leave me alone.”

Another, written by Paul Anka and sung by Frank Sinatra, is equally expressive of autonomy:

“And now, the end is near,  
And so I face the final curtain.  
My friend, I'll say it clear,  
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain.  
I've lived a life that's full;  
I traveled each and every highway.  
And more, much more than this, I did it my way.”

How different than the attitude of Jesus Who cared deeply what God had to say and did it God's way. After requesting relief from the ordeal of the cross, He summed up the essence of submission to the Father, saying, “Not My will but Yours be done.” That submission plunged Him into the abyss of suffering.

People seem to naturally want to be autonomous and self-directed. Unless they are crackpots, people don't intentionally plunge into pain and suffering without a noble purpose. People tend to want the kind of autonomy that precludes discomfort or pain. People seek personal freedom to take the way of least resistance or inconvenience.

When we think about freedom, we include the wonderful freedom for which we are grateful and which we enjoy as Americans. But though I am an American, and grateful and proud to be one, I want to talk about personal freedom. And prior to doing that let me differentiate between Liberty and License.

Liberty is freedom within limits; there are parameters in true liberty Example: liberty is swinging your arms as much as you want to – but liberty ends where my nose begins. Liberty is fire in the stove but license is fire burning down the house. Liberty is a river flowing down its bed. License is a flood. Liberty is driving the car. License is running over people.

For a good view of responsible personal liberty, look to God's Word: "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another." Galatians 5:13-26 (NASB).

We are free within limits:

- I. WE ARE FREE TO CHOOSE OUR ACTIONS BUT NOT THE CONSEQUENCES:**
- A. Paul wrote, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."
1. The flesh is the innate sum of human desires which we must control or they will control us which is sin.
  2. Paul warned, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." Galatians 6:7-8 (NASB) .
  3. The choices of activity really boil down to this: Sin or righteousness. Life or death. One or the other will issue from the choices we make.
    - a. God gives us freedom to choose between the two but reserves the right to determine consequences.
    - b. He said, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, ...." Deuteronomy 30:19 (NASB).
- B. The choices we make always result in consequences: bad choices, bad consequences; good choices, good consequences.**
1. If you choose the action, you must expect and accept the consequences.
  2. Choose "I did it my way," the way of the flesh, and the consequence is death
  3. So, choose conduct in keeping with God's word, will and Spirit and the consequence is life.
- C. Still the pull of human desires for satisfaction wages war with God's desire for our salvation. but, we have the power of choice so let's choose wisely to bring good things into our lives rather than bad things.**

**D. Consider this contrast:**

1. “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21 (NASB).
2. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Galatians 5:22-23 (NASB).

**E. Sometimes we are so shortsighted in this matter, we act regardless of the outcome.** It’s like a pig who ate his fill of acorns under an oak tree and then started to root around the tree. A crow remarked, "You should not do this. If you lay bare the roots, the tree will wither and die." "Let it die," said the pig. "Who cares as long as there are acorns?" Grabbing the instant gratification he overlooked the long term consequences.

We are free to choose our activities, but we do not determine the consequences.

**II.**

**WE ARE FREE TO CHOOSE OUR MASTER BUT NOT THE DEMANDS:**

- A. The flesh or the spirit? Which will rule? Not both; it’s a one or the other proposition.
1. Peter said, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”
  2. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” Matthew 6:24 (NLT2).
- B. Paul said the same thing in different words.** This is The Message Version, “So, since we're out from under the old tyranny, does that mean we can live any old way we want? Since we're free in the freedom of God, can we do anything that comes to mind? Hardly. You know well enough from your own experience that there are some acts of so-called freedom that destroy freedom. Offer yourselves to sin, for instance, and it's your last free act. But offer yourselves to the ways of God and the freedom never quits. All your lives you've let sin tell you what to do. But thank God you've started listening to a new master, one whose commands set you free to live openly in his freedom! I'm using this freedom language because it's easy to picture. You can readily recall, can't you, how at one time the more you did just what you felt like doing—not caring about others, not caring about God—the worse your life became and the less freedom you had? And how much different is it now as you live in God's freedom, your lives healed and expansive in holiness?” Romans 6:15-19 (MSG).

**C. Each master has a set of demands.** Some demands are oppressive and harsh. Some are benevolent and reasonable. But those who serve the master have no voice in the demands.

**D. Think about it:**

1. If we choose as our master that which is addictive it will demand more and more of our money, and energy and life.
2. If we choose as our master that which is immoral, it will demand the forfeiture of our conscience, our character, and our soul.
3. If we choose as our master the material riches, they may demand that we surrender our health and integrity and personal relationships to attain them.
4. If we choose as our master the Living God, the demands are to love Him and to love one another. He is benevolent and kind. "Loving God means keeping His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome." 1 John 5:3 (NLT2). The commands of God are for our good.

**E. We must recognize the authority of the master we choose.** Shortly after joining the Navy, the new recruit learned that when he asked his officer for a pass so he could attend a wedding. The officer gave him the pass, but informed the young man he would have to be back by 7 p.m. Sunday. "You don't understand, sir," said the recruit. "I'm in the wedding."

"No, you don't understand," the officer shot back. "You're in the Navy!".

We are free to choose our master – that which rules our lives, but the demands of that master are out of our hands.

### III.

#### WE ARE FREE TO CHOOSE OUR LEADER BUT NOT THE DESTINATION:

A. Let the Holy Spirit be your leader walk in the Spirit and in His way and be led by Him because

1. If you "walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."
2. And, "if you are led by the Spirit, You are not under the Law." We are thus led out of legalism and its bondage and into grace with its freedom.
3. "If you are led by the Spirit, you are led away from "immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these."
4. If you are led by the Spirit, you will be led to "this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT2).

**B. To follow the Spirit is demanding:**

1. We must know the Word of God as a litmus — not every spirit is from God and if the leading differs from the Word, reject it! John said, "Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world." 1 John 4:1 (NLT2).

2. We must be willing to go where He leads, as did Abraham, of whom we read, “It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going.” Hebrews 11:8 (NLT2).
  3. We must follow Him quickly, like the fishermen. “One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, ‘Come, follow Me, and I will show you how to fish for people!’ And they left their nets at once and followed Him. A little farther up the shore He saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And He called them to come, too. They immediately followed Him, leaving the boat and their father behind.” Matthew 4:18-22 (NLT2).
  4. We must follow Him exclusively as did Joshua who said, “But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.” Joshua 24:15 (NLT2).
- C. Notice the immediacy and the sacrifice and the definiteness of the choice.** No hesitation; no foot-dragging, no business concerns got in the way.
- D. Jesus said,** “If any of you wants to be My follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow Me.” Luke 9:23 (NLT2).
- E. When we were children about 6 or 7 years old, my nephew Bill (6 months younger) and niece, Cynthia (14 months younger) were frequently at our house.** One day we were playing Follow The Leader. Of course, being oldest and most intimidating, I got to lead. We marched around the room on top of the couch cushions, by the table – and this is the best part – onto the piano keys. The noise alerted my mother who came in to see what was happening but she was slow enough that I had time to get off the piano and fast enough to catch them. I said, “I told them not to do that!” Be careful who you follow.

To be truly free, make choices with consequences in mind; choose the right master prepared to do his demands; and follow the leader who is headed for the right destination.

Jesus said, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” John 8:31-32 (NASB). And, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:34-36 (NASB)

Surrender all to Him Who surrendered all for you.

PRAY AND INVITE