

## **Galatians 5:1, 13-25 Stand Firm in Your Freedom! Pentecost 6 June 26-27, 2016**

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Grace and peace from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

God's Word to keep us connected to Christ is from Galatians 5:1, 13-25

These are Your words heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth. Your Word is truth! Amen.

Dear Christian Friends,

I attended our ELS convention along with other pastors and delegates. We heard positive sermons and presentations from missionaries with an emphasis that Christ has brought spiritual freedom to more people at home and afar. Yet sadly, recent surveys show a growing number of people in our country who call themselves “nones.” It isn't just that they don't attend church; they don't have any religion. There are growing numbers of “nones” in all age categories but it is much higher among people ages 18-30. This doesn't take into account the children currently being raised without knowing Jesus or God's truth. We, as Christians, have a great challenge before us. We need to hold firmly to the Christian faith and the freedom we have in Christ. And we are to help godless people around us to know Christ. This is not a time to fall back into sins or to let our sinful nature take us captive. We are to:

### **Stand firm in our freedom!**

**First, we don't want to lose our freedom in Christ.** Paul wrote, *“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.”* (v.1) Paul was concerned that Christians in Galatia were being tempted two ways. One was to return to God's laws to earn His favor. Faith in God is invisible. You can't measure it or show it to someone. It is a matter of the heart. So, we are tempted to look to our actions to determine who we are spiritually. At times if we fail to do good, we're tempted to think that we have no place in heaven no matter what Christ has done. On the other hand, when we do something which looks really good, we are tempted to think that God loves us because of our actions. We need God's Word to remind us that Christ has given His life as a payment for all our sins so that we have eternal freedom as God's people. The works we do will not change our status with God nor can following laws make us better before Him. God already sees us as perfect in Jesus!

The second way of losing our freedom in Christ is to think that Jesus' forgiveness allows us to keep sinning. I'm not talking about sinning and being sorry for it. I'm talking about letting sin take over our lives. Did you ever find yourself saying things that you know that you shouldn't say or doing things more often that are wrong? What is happening? What is influencing us? Sometimes it's the people we're with.

More often, there is a constant battle within us between our old and new natures; both are trying to control our lives. Paul wrote, *“You ... were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”* (v.13) Our sinful nature is like a baby bird in a nest calling for attention and feeding! That nature tells us: “be selfish, show envy, do whatever you feel like doing.” The Bible tells us not to let sin get its foot in the door of our lives. Don't listen to temptation for a moment. But if we do, we must turn from our sins as soon as possible. Don't be like a person on the 25<sup>th</sup> floor sitting on an open balcony saying “Nothing can happen to me!” The fall into sin can devastate us even worse. We are endangering our eternal soul when we get caught up in a sin. Unless we repent and receive forgiveness by faith in Christ, we will eventually lose our faith and be lost forever.

Paul lists examples of types of sin that we are to avoid. He wrote in verse 19 *“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality (such as adultery), impurity (sexual sins of thought or word) and debauchery” (sins connected to drunkenness).* We are to have no part of these, since Christ is our Savior. The sinful nature also leads to *idolatry* (putting a thing or person before God.) There was also *witchcraft.* (v.20) This had to do with superstitions and incantations based on the power of demons. Paul also described troubled relationships with people caused by *“hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy.”* (v.20-21) These are related to the sin of self-centeredness; as if Christ’s love and forgiveness make no difference in our lives. Paul wrote of bad influences when people abuse substances that lead them to *drunkenness and orgies” (which is wild and uncontrolled living).* (v.21) Paul could have included sins of lying, stealing, or coveting. He concludes, *“I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* (v.21) We need Jesus to save us!

**Second, we are free through faith in Christ.** God wants us to turn from sin so the Holy Spirit can work more fully in our lives and we can give a clear witness to others about Jesus. Paul wrote, *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”* (v.24) As believers, we must consider the temptations for us to sin as something dead. They no longer have power over us and, when we know the truth of right or wrong, we can see no matter how alluring a sin might be, it’s death!

At the same time, Paul wrote, *“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”* (v.25) The Holy Spirit can help us as we live by faith in Jesus. *“Faith comes from hearing the message ... of Christ.”* (Romans 10:17) As we hear God’s Word, we pray that the Holy Spirit would daily apply it to us to bless our faith. Also, we are to remember our baptisms because God’s Word promises that in baptism our sinful nature was drowned so that it no longer controls us. Rather, we live as God’s children, with the Holy Spirit working in us. Paul wrote in verse 22, *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.”* These fruits depend on our relationship with God. *“We love because God first loved us!”* (1 John 3:1) God demonstrated His love by sending His Son to save us. Joy comes from knowing the goodness of our God. Jesus has rescued us from sin and restored us as God’s people. God will take us to heaven for Christ’s sake, even though we don’t deserve it. From Christ’s love and forgiveness comes peace.

Paul lists more fruits of the Spirit: *“patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*(v.23) These six express our attitude toward people. Rather than get upset, we pray; rather than respond with unkindness for an evil against us, we do good to others. We will firmly stand in Christ, having the Spirit bring blessings through us instead of bring harm to others by our sinful nature.

The times in which we live are increasing evil. A growing number of people are losing their moral base from God’s Word. We need His Word to clarify our thinking of what is good and what is evil so we can help others understand God’s will. Young man from India spoke at the convention. Persecution is growing in India from the Hindu government. Yet, he is studying to be a pastor. He knows the great need his people have for Jesus’ forgiveness. He knows that the Holy Spirit has given him faith to speak about Christ. When we think of Christ’s love and sacrifice for us, we can’t help but produce spiritual fruits. Christ has called us to receive His power through His forgiveness. When we’re tempted to think that sinning is good to do, we remember we are God’s children in Christ. We couldn’t have it any better in this world than to be connected to Christ and to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Let us stand in Christ and share true freedom! Amen.