

Understanding Christian Freedom

Scripture: Galatians 5:13–16

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We are studying the book of Galatians, and you'll want to grab your Bible and open it to the book of Galatians, to the fifth chapter. There is a text that I want to address to you that, if any text in this book kind of stands alone, it would be this one, and it's in chapter 5, verses 13 to 16. It is a very, very important text. There's so much in just those very few verses that I'm not going to be able to get anywhere near through it, even this morning.

Let me draw your attention to Galatians 5 and verse 13, and I'll read down to verse 16. "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."

This is a defining portion of Scripture on how we understand freedom in the life of a Christian. There has been through the centuries actually much discussion about what Christian freedom is. We have already learned in this wonderful epistle that because of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have been set free. Back in chapter 2, verse 4, the apostle Paul talked about our liberty, the liberty that we have in Christ Jesus, the same as freedom. Chapter 5 begins, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free," and then down in verse 13, as I read, "you were called to freedom, brethren."

Now, freedom in our culture can be a very dangerous word, a very dangerous word. It has become misinterpreted and misrepresented in many ways, even in the evangelical world, and certainly in the church world. And it sort of flows like this: People in our culture want freedom, they demand freedom. They want to be free to think what they want and do what they want. In fact, this freedom is escalating to such a degree that they want to be free from you saying anything about what they're doing.

It isn't that you would really prevent them from exercising what they see as their freedoms, they want to take away your free speech if you decide that what they think they have a right to do is wrong. They want to be free to do what they want and free from any and all suggestions of criticism. This is freedom at its most extreme level, and the culture is demanding it. They want the freedom to feel comfortable about their sin. They want the freedom to be pronounced and validated as a means by which they can eliminate the natural guilt that is built into being human by God.

We're living in a world that demands total freedom. They not only want what they want, they want it to be tolerated. They not only want it to be tolerated, they want it to be celebrated. And they want it

to be propagated. And they want it to be normalized. You might think this is something new and in our culture, it is certainly escalating to new heights, but it isn't anything new at all.

If you go back three thousand years ago, you have a society of people doing exactly this, and it is the Israelites in the day of the Judges, and it says they wanted to do "whatever is right in our own eyes." That, from the book of Judges. "We want to do whatever is right in our own eyes." That's the kind of time we live in today. Now, in order to do that, you have to make sure that you get the Bible out of the way because the Bible condemns much of what people want to do. So there has to be a denunciation of the Bible and the role that the Bible plays.

You need to get the Bible out of the schools, you need to get the Bible out of the public discourse, because if people bring up the Bible, it's going to encroach upon someone's freedom, and if someone quotes the Bible, they're going to be saying something that somebody doesn't want to hear, and that in itself should be considered a crime. Laws are fast being installed that are leading to one goal: To make biblical Christianity a crime - to make biblical Christianity a crime, that's what it is about, to silence the Word of God. The society wants to be free from any moral restraint.

Now, let me tell you what this freedom is. It is not freedom. It is sin addiction. All human beings, apart from the gospel and salvation in Christ, are sin addicts. Everybody has his own assortment and concoction of drugs, but they're all sin addicts. You can pick your poison, you can pick your sin, and you can even pick the level to which you escalate your sinful behavior, but you have to understand this, that the whole human race is made up of sin addicts. And if anything is true about them, it is this: They are not free.

No one would look at a heroin addict and suggest that that person was free. We would suggest that that is probably the worst sort of temporal human bondage that someone could be in. Someone addicted to opioids or someone addicted to heroin or someone addicted to any other kind of behavior that is destructive, self-destructive, we would never see that as a kind of freedom. We would see it as a horrible bondage that needs to be broken.

We need to look at the entire human race, not as people who are free but as people who are addicted to sin, and it's an addiction they can't break, and it's killing them. And the death is not just physical, it is eternal. The whole human race is sin-sick and addicted to iniquity. In fact, Jesus says in John 8:34 - and here's the sum of it: Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin, and everyone does commit sin; therefore, everyone is the slave of sin, everyone is an iniquity addict.

Two verses later, in John 8:36, it says, "Only if Christ sets you free are you really free." So what people in our society think is freedom is simply a more extreme, public, unrestrained manifestation of their addiction to iniquity. In fact, the Bible is so clear about this that it says there is no one who is good, all they are is evil, there's no good thing in anyone, even that which we might see as righteous is filthy rags.

Picture in your mind the worst scene of human drug addiction as it takes the victim near to death, and he sits in rags somewhere in a black alley, waiting to die and sticking the needle in again, and you have an illustration of what it is to be an unregenerate sinner. You can choose your drug, you can choose your sin, you can't break your addiction.

When Christ comes, He sets us free from that addiction to sin. In the past, in our culture, there were some sort of social restraints. There were some limits that society put on people. There were certain expectations. You go back a few decades and there was a kind of general sense of goodness, there was a general sense of the importance of family, for example. I don't know if you know this, 26 out of 27 school shooters had no father. What's the common denominator?

There was a time when people had mothers and they had fathers and they had families and there was a sense of morality. And there were behaviors that had shame built into them, and you didn't flaunt them, you hid them. All that is gone. There was a time when you could say there was a general goodness, there was a general kindness. In fact, there were literally millions of people who went to war for this country and other countries and died for the wellbeing of people they would never meet who hadn't even been born. That was very sacrificial. But that was what people did in a nobler time.

Now there's a mad rush into every imaginable and unimaginable form of iniquity, and it's flaunted. This has become a problem for the church because at the same time the world is running rapidly after this freedom, the church has decided it needs to be the friend of these sin-laden people. So there's a move toward pragmatism. We want to be accepting of these people. We want to welcome these people. We want them to like us.

In the liberal denominations, it's, of course, reached almost virtually a terminal point where the true church is gone altogether, and the false church is now under the control of immoral ministers, homosexual bishops, lesbian pastors offering same-sex marriage, but even in the evangelical church where people say they believe the gospel, there's a very, very carefully constructed method to try to win the world over, and that demands that we not confront their true condition. We can't take their freedom.

So this sinful freedom has gone to church. It's gone to church, and churches don't want to address the issues. They don't want to confront the sins specifically, head-on. The new norm is not to condemn, we don't judge, we don't condemn. If you're going to try to make sinners comfortable in your church, then sin goes to church. And you can't change that when they show up or they won't come back. So any strong, dominating concern about sin and righteousness and holiness and sanctification is absent.

So you have many churches developing today that do not talk about righteousness, holiness, godliness - at any point. They can't really talk to the believers in the church about it, they can't make it an issue for them or it exposes the nonbelievers. So to accommodate the sinners who have gone to church with their sin, many pastors are now calling for a new kind of Christian life, a Christian life where you just don't worry about what your behaviors are. This is called antinomianism - a classic term for it. Those words mean you're against the law, you see no place for the law.

And I told you a couple of weeks ago that this is an old heresy and it says this: Since Christ fulfilled the law for us, we don't have to pay any attention to it. Since He died for us, we don't die for our own sins. Since He lived for us a righteous life, it's imputed to our account. We don't have to worry about what we do, He's already lived a perfect life imputed to us. We are free. This is the kind of freedom that is popular. And if you're going to have a pragmatic church that wants to make sinners feel welcome, this is a perfect kind of doctrine to suit that environment.

Let me tell you how far they go with this. I'm going to read you some quotes. "There is a movement of freedom among Christians, a joyful release from the things that have bound us far too long." Now, I would assume that that statement means that they've been free from what? Sin. Let me say it again. "There is a movement of freedom among Christians, a joyful release from the things that have bound us for too long." What the author means by that: rules and regulations. It goes on to say, "We need to be fully free in Christ."

Here's a quote: "Freedom and fun must be reinstated into our faith." Why? "So that those non-Christians will be attracted." Here's another quote: "Grace has saved us from sin and freed us from obligation and duty. The living out this freedom is difficult because there are so many grace killers." This a form of the new antinomianism, that grace somehow saves us from sin and freed us from any obligation and duty. But it's hard to live out this freedom from any obligation and duty because there are so many grace killers.

What are grace killers? Here's the definition: Narrow-minded, judgmental, intolerant bullies who impose bondage on Christians and kill freedom, spontaneity, creativity, productivity, and joy. The grace killers are the judgmental, intolerant bullies who impose righteous standards on Christians. They have literally turned this on its head. They think that when they were converted, they were freed from the law of God to sin rather than being freed from sin to obey the law of God. And the reality is that tolerance of sin celebrates bondage, not freedom.

That's what Paul is saying to the Galatians, "You're not going to go back, are you? You're not going to go back to life the way it was?" When Paul says - back to verse 13 - "for you were called to freedom, brethren," does he mean you're free from the commands of God? You're free from the will of God, the law of God, you're free from moral restraint? You're free from responsibility? As that writer said, you're free from duty?

There is a growing force of these antinomians today, but there are some who've been around a long time, and they're fueling this idea. One of them is a man in Florida by the name of Steve Brown, and I'm just quoting him, he said this: "." The good news is that Christ frees us from the need to obnoxiously focus on our goodness, our commitment, and our correctness Really? You are free from the need to obnoxiously focus on goodness, commitment, and correctness?

He goes on. "Religion has made us obsessive, almost beyond endurance. Jesus invited us to a dance and we've turned it into a march of soldiers, always checking to see if we're doing it right and are in step and in line with the other soldiers. We know a dance would be more fun, but we believe we must go through hell to get to heaven, so we keep marching." We must go through hell so duty and responsibility, goodness and commitment and correctness is hell?

Let me be blunt - and somebody told me I'm always blunt, so let me be more blunt. I have never met a person who had that kind of idea who was either not a Christian or a Christian justifying habitual sin. And given enough time, both will be manifest. That is not the attitude of a sanctified believer.

Turn back to where we were last time, and that was in Titus, just to remind you of Titus 2 - Titus 2:11. I've been talking to you, but I want to show you the Word of God to support what I've been

saying. Wonderful statement in verse 11, “The grace of God has appeared.” That’s the appearing of Christ and with Him, the gospel. But driven by the grace of God, for by grace we are saved. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.” Nobody argues with that. Grace brings salvation.

But grace doesn’t only do that because the subject, the antecedent grace does something else. Verse 12, grace - “the grace of God is the subject,” the verb is “instructing us.” Grace instructs us. If you have received the saving grace of God, that saving grace also becomes your teacher, your tutor, and by the way, the word actually means your discipliner, if that’s a word. It becomes the firm hand of God and what does it do? With regard to justification, it brings salvation. With regard to sanctification, the same grace of God has appeared to give us not only the gospel that saves us but the rest of the New Testament intended to sanctify us.

That is a gift of grace, and it is instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires, and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age. The grace of God has brought us the gospel that saves us and the rest of the Word of God that sanctifies us. And the reason for this is down in verse 14. For our great God and Savior Christ Jesus gave Himself to redeem us from every lawless deed in this life and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession in this life, zealous for good deeds in this life, until that blessed hope and glory is appearing, yet to come.

So grace, the grace of God came, and with the grace of God came the gospel of Jesus Christ to save us, and with the grace of God came the rest of the New Testament to instruct us to deny ungodliness, worldly desires, live sensibly, righteously, godly, in the present age. For in this present age, Christ came to redeem us from lawlessness, redeem us from impurity, make us zealous for good deeds. That’s what grace does.

Drop down to chapter 3, verse 8. “This is a trustworthy statement concerning these things. I want you to speak confidently so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds.” Those who have believed in God will be careful to engage in good deeds. Your freedom in Christ is not freedom to sin. Your freedom in Christ is freedom for the first time to do righteous deeds. Your addiction is broken. Do we sin occasionally? Yes, but the addiction is broken. We rather have a heart’s craving desire to do what is right.

Paul is not denying our freedom. We have freedom. We are free, he says in chapter 3, verse 13, we are free from the curse of God. And go back to the book of Galatians. The curse of God is in verse 10 of chapter 3. “Cursed is everyone who doesn’t abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.” You break one of God’s laws one time, and you’re under a divine curse and that means death and hell. James adds that if you break one part of the law, you’ve broken all of it.

But Christ has freed us from the curse. How did He do that? Verse 13, “He redeemed us from the curse, having become a curse for us.” So we are free from the law’s curse. We are free from the law’s condemnation. Romans 8:1. No one who is in Christ is condemned by the law. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ. We are free from the long, fruitless search for liberating truth that every sinner at some point goes through. We’re free from that because when we’ve come to Christ, we’ve found the truth, and we’re free from the search.

Paul says in this book that we’re free from Old Testament rituals and ceremonies that were

designed for Israel. On an external basis, to separate them from other people, we're free from those because all those rituals have been completely obviated, completely set aside. We don't need to go back to what Paul calls in chapter 4 of Galatians, verse 9, the elemental things to which you were once enslaved. You don't go back to verse 10, days and months and seasons and years and all the Jewish calendar, it was all symbolic, it was all shadow. You don't go back to that because the reality has come.

So yes, we're free from the law's curse, we're free from the law's condemnation, we're free from the bondage of the law as we use the law to try to find freedom that's only available through faith. We're free from rituals that were externals in the Old Testament. Those were the things that Jews had come to Galatia to try to impose on the Gentiles. Paul says we're free from all of those things but mark this: You are not free from the holy standards of God. You are not free.

If we were to go back to the Old Testament, we would go back to Ezekiel chapter 36, where you have the presentation of the new covenant of salvation. Listen to what God says through the prophet. This is the Lord God speaking, He says, "I will" - verse 25 - "I will sprinkle clean water on you. You will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols."

There is an actual cleansing going on here. Salvation is a cleansing. It isn't just forensic, it is a cleansing from filthiness and idols. "I will give you a new heart, put a new spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you." What's all of this going to do? What happens when you're cleansed? What happens when you have a new heart? What happens when the heart of stone is gone and you have a heart of flesh?

What happens when the Spirit takes up residence? "It will cause you to walk in my statutes and you will be careful to observe my ordinances." If you are a true believer, you have not been set free from responsibility and duty to God, you have been set free from your iniquity addiction to do what honors God. Freedom for the Christian is freedom from sin and death and hell and all those external religious features.

Listen to Colossians 2:16. "Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or festival or new moon or Sabbath day, things that are mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ." You don't need to go back to circumcision, you don't need to go back to the rituals, you are free. Now, how are we to understand sanctification? We have been set free with a new heart, and the Holy Spirit living in us, to willingly and joyfully obey the law of God. This is our freedom.

First Thessalonians 4:3. "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" - sanctification means separation, separation from sin, that's the process you go through in your Christian life. This is the will of God, that you separate from sin, separate, increasingly separate from sin and conform to the image of Christ. We saw that in chapter 4, verse 19. My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you." Sanctification is separating from sin and becoming like Christ.

So we have to understand what our freedom is. Now, I have several points about freedom that are drawn out of this text. I'll give you a portion of one - frustrating, but that's the way it is. Go back to verse 13. Let's start where we have to start. Here's the first thing. "You were called to freedom, brethren, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh." Stop there. That puts an

end to all antinomian thinking.

What do you mean by flesh? Paul uses the term 91 times. It's the Greek word, *sarx*. Back in chapter 1 and verse 16, he used it to refer to people. He said, "When I was called to ministry, the Lord spoke to me personally. I didn't consult with flesh and blood." So he uses it in a very human sense. Chapter 2, verse 16, he uses it again. "No flesh will be justified by the law." That's just in a general reference to humanity. So flesh could refer to certain individuals or it could refer to humanity in general.

In chapter 2, verse 20, he says, "The life I live in the flesh," and he simply means his physical life. And then in chapter 4, verses 13 and 14, he uses it as a reference to the body - to the body. He talks about his bodily condition, uses the term "flesh." So it is used in a physical way for a certain individual, humanity in general, normal human nature, and the body itself, the bodily condition. But primarily, Paul uses the term "flesh" in a spiritual sense, and that's how it's used here.

What does flesh mean in verse 13? Flesh means your remaining humanity, your unredeemed humanity, the part of you that hasn't yet been redeemed. You're a new creation, you have been born again, you are brand new. In fact, that change is bigger than will occur at your death. The change was transformation when you were saved; your death will simply be subtraction. You don't become an eternal, blessed, new creation when you die, you simply get rid of what restrains that. The biggest change has already taken place.

But here we are, new creations, incarcerated in this unredeemed flesh. Paul says this is very powerful stuff. He said, "I look at my own life and there's something in me that responds to temptation and sin." And he says, "It's not me but it's in my flesh." "The real me," he would say, "loves God." Says, "The law of God is holy, just, and good. The real me longs to please God. The real me would say it is my ambition to be pleasing to the Lord. The real me says that I may die and Christ may live. But I see something in me, that is in my flesh," he says in Romans 7.

And the flesh is that part of us that's not redeemed until we have the redemption of the body that he talks about in chapter 8. Until that day, we have this flesh remaining. In chapter 8 of Romans, verse 6, the mind set on the flesh is death. Verse 7, the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God. Verse 8, the mind set on the flesh can't please God. There is an anti-God, hostile reality in you as a believer. It's in you - it's you, and it battles against the new creature, the new man, the new creation.

You have a war going on inside of you. Go down to chapter 5 of Galatians verse 17. 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. That describes the Christian life. The addiction is broken but there's still in you an attraction to the sin drug. You're weak at the point of your flesh. We all are. It's the unredeemed nature that becomes the attack point for temptation and the bridge to sin. It's the battleground for the believer.

Look at it in verse 17. These are in opposition to one another. That's the battle going on. And what does your flesh want to do? Well, look at a further definition in verse 19. Here's what the flesh does, here are the deeds of the flesh. Immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, and the list could be almost infinite. That's what the flesh wants. That's what the

flesh produces.

And there will always be that battle, although the power of the flesh will decrease as you become more like Christ in the process of sanctification. And one day, the flesh will disappear - Philippians 3:21 - and you'll have a body like unto His glorious body. But in the meantime, how do you win the battle? I'll give you the answer that we'll get back to in verse 16. Walk in the Spirit or walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

What do you mean, walk by the Spirit? What does that mean? It means to walk in perfect conformity to the Holy Spirit. Walk in holiness. So you're free for the first time in your life. The addiction is broken. You are free from the complete bondage of sin. You are not free to sin, but you are free to do what is right. And do not, he says - verse 13 - do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh. Don't make the flesh the base of operations.

Interesting Greek word, opportunity there, *aphormē*, it means a military base, the military base, and it pictures the believer as a military entity and Satan wants to come with all his forces and attack us. Don't make the flesh your base of operations. You'd better be operating in the Spirit - right? - which means you're operating in the Word. Don't make the flesh the base of your operations. You don't want to give the flesh an inch.

Do you understand the urgency of this? You have an enemy, and the enemy is not beside you this morning. The enemy is not around you. The enemy is where? In you. And if you come up with some kind of heretical notion of the Christian life that you are free to sin, there is plenty of reason to ask whether or not you're even a Christian at all because that is not what a true believer desires.

Paul makes it clear: "I do what I don't want to do and I don't do what I want to do." What he's saying is his desire and his behavior are sometimes opposite. But his desire is always right. That's how it is for a believer. The addiction is broken, the desire is right, but as our Lord said, the flesh is weak. Freedom in Christ does not mean freedom for the flesh. Not freedom to let the flesh indulge itself.

I'll remind you of a text we looked at last time. Go back to 1 Corinthians 11. This is a serious word from the apostle Paul. The Corinthians were coming to the Table of the Lord, sinful. They hadn't thought about the things they were doing. They were still engaged in some pagan activities and their bodies were not totally given to the Lord. They hadn't done what Romans 12:1 says, "Make your body a living sacrifice." And so Paul says to them in verse 25 of 1 Corinthians 11, "You're coming to the Lord's Table, you're coming to the covenant of my blood, you're coming to proclaim my death."

Then verse 27, "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord." That is serious. That takes the guilt at a personal level that's against Christ. So you'd better examine yourself - verse 28 - verse 29, "For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he doesn't judge the body rightly." You'd better judge what's going on in your flesh. And for this reason, the reason that there are people who didn't do that, many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

People were physically weak, physically ill, and dead because they came to the Lord's Table fulfilling the flesh. That would have been a sort of example of the death of the antinomians. John

says in 1 John 5:16, there is a sin unto death. It's not a specific sin categorically, it's just the final sin in the life of a believer where the Lord says, "I got to get him out of there because he's having an evil influence."

So Paul talks about freedom in Christ. We are free from the bondage of sin. Free from the condemnation of the law. Free from the disappointment of a hopeless search for truth. Free from the penalty of sin. Free from the Old Testament's complex ceremonies and rituals established for Israel. But not free from the moral law, but rather free to obey that law because it's merely a reflection of the God we love. And this freedom is in the power of the Holy Spirit. He is the One who empowers us to live this freedom.

Listen to 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 13. "Prepare your minds for action. Keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior because it is written you shall be holy for I am holy." It's a call to holiness.

Look at 2 Peter, also in chapter 1. The Lord, verse 3, has granted us everything pertaining to life and godliness. Through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." We're called to godliness. He gave us great, precious, magnificent promises so that by them, you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." Your freedom in Christ is to be free from the addiction driven by the lusts of your flesh.

How do you live this out? Verse 5. You apply all diligence in your faith and you go after moral excellence and knowledge and self-control and perseverance and godliness and brotherly kindness and love. For if these qualities are yours and increasing, that's how sanctification works. It's progressive. They render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." It's just about pursuing holiness.

In Romans 6, it says you were the slaves of sin and now you've become slaves of righteousness. Romans 6:16 and 17. You were the slaves of sin; now you've become the slaves of righteousness.

I want to close with one other passage because I want you to know where this comes from, so turn to 2 Peter chapter 2. This is a powerful chapter, and I want to kind of move through the chapter, so keep your eyes on the text. This is about false prophets, false teachers, both mentioned in verse 1, who arose among the people. False teachers rise up within the confines of Christianity. They're around. They did in the past arise and they will also in the future. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies. One of those destructive heresies is antinomianism.

And they will deny the Master who bought them. He uses that word, *despotēs*, on purpose. It's a despot, it's a term that refers to the absolute, sovereign authority of Christ. They will deny the sovereignty of the Lord. Many will follow their sensuality. They are sensual; that is, they appeal to the feelings of people, to the senses of people. They malign the way of truth, they exploit people for money. Now, just to get a further description of them, go down to verse 10. They indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority.

That's a definition of freedom. They indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and don't want anyone

to render a verdict on that behavior. They despise authority. No one can take authority over their freedom.

Now let's learn more about people who say things like this. Here's a characterization, starting in verse 12. They are creatures of instinct to be captured and killed like unreasoning animals. Or verse 13, they are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions as they carouse with you. Their eyes are full of adultery, they never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, they're accursed children. They're like Balaam, who prophesied for money and loved the wages of unrighteousness.

Verse 17, they're springs without water, mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. They have no substance. Here's the key, verse 18. Speaking out arrogant words of vanity, they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error. Now, back in verse 14, it talked about them enticing unstable souls. The world is full of unstable people. They're miserable, discouraged, disillusioned, unhappy, unsatisfied.

They don't like their job, they don't like their marriage, they don't like their face, they don't like their place in the world, they don't like their circumstances, and they're looking for a way out. They're looking for a skyhook, they're looking for some kind of thing that's going to change their life. And they are unstable. They're also defined, down at the end of verse 18, as those barely escaping from those who live in error, so those who live in error means the world as it lives in the midst of its deception. They want to escape. They want to get out.

They want to get out of their circumstances. They want to get out of their dilemma, their disappointment, their discouragement, their anxiety, their fears, their dreads, their doubts. They want to get out. Those are perfect targets for false teachers. And false teachers will come to those people, and what will they give them? Go to verse 18. Speaking out arrogant words of vanity. What is vanity? Nothing. They say words that are flowery and fancy, and they mean nothing. Empty words, enticing by fleshly desires, appealing to the fleshly desires of people who want somehow to escape their circumstances, appealing to them on the sense level, how they feel.

They promise them, verse 19, what? Freedom. "Oh, God wants to free you from that, He wants to free you from all the disillusionment, He wants to free you from all the disappointment. You know, you have a right to whatever you want, health, wealth, prosperity, a car, a house - whatever it is. A better circumstance, a better job. This is what God wants to do for you." You can find those kinds of churches packed in the thousands and thousands and thousands of those people who are defined here as unstable souls seeking to escape their circumstances, being seduced by false promises of being freed from all that binds them.

They feed the sensual desires that are the basic desires of sinful hearts. They're offering the sinner what the sinner wants rather than condemning the sinner and all that the sinner wants and calling him to turn to Christ. There's no narrow road, there's no narrow gate, there's no repentance, there's no self-denial, there's no cross, and there's no follow me. Freedom. You can have health and you can have wealth and you can have prosperity and God really likes you and He'll give you a purpose on life and He'll make your marriage better and you'll have liberty and prosperity and happiness.

And the people offering this, by the way here - interesting. Promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption. Wow. Promising freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption. They're promising someone a freedom that they themselves don't even possess. They're bound by sin. And what happens to people who buy into this? I'll tell you what happens. Look at verse 20. They have a momentary escape. They're looking for an escape, so they escape some of the defilements of the world.

They come into this group of people, they feel like they're religious, they're participating. There's a lot of talk about the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ but soon, because there's no transformation, they're again entangled in the defilements of the world and are overcome again, and the last state has become worse for them than the first because they've tried Christ and it didn't work. And now they've been vaccinated without ever having the truth. It would be better for them - verse 21 says - if they hadn't known the way of righteousness than having known it, turned away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

The holy commandment. The Christian life is described as a holy commandment. What happens to them? Well, they're like that proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit" and "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire." That is a devastating way to describe this situation. There are a lot of unstable people, there are a lot of people languishing in the difficulties of life who are being offered freedom.

And time and truth will go hand in hand, and they will wind up entangled even worse, like a dog going back to its vomit or a pig back to the mire. Freedom is not freedom to indulge the flesh. It is freedom from the flesh.

One final and critical point is in Romans 13 and verse 13, we'll start there. Let us behave properly, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity of any kind, and sensuality - and that covers a lot of ground. Not in strife and jealousy, that's not how we live, that's not how we behave. How do we behave? Verse 14. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

To be like Christ. So we obey and we do this - and we'll say more about this next time - we do this not out of fear but out of love. Not out of fear but out of love. Faith works by love.

Father, we thank you again this morning for such a wonderful time of worship, fellowship. Thank you for gathering us all together to hear your Word. We thank you, Lord, that you have given us ears to hear. Natural persons do not understand the things of God. They're foolishness to them. But to those of us who are believing, this is the power of God. We thank you for the supernatural experience of listening to the preaching of the Word of God. This is a Holy Spirit experience of the highest kind. Now we thank you, Lord, that because of this, we know you better, we know your purposes better. We understand your truth more clearly. May it translate into faithfulness on every level. We thank you in Christ's name, Amen.

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