

SAVING FAITH  
Galatians 5:13-15

William Tweed, known to this history books as “Boss Tweed”, was the third largest land owner in New York City and head of the Democratic General Committee in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Boss Tweed is one of the most notorious political scam artists who has ever lived.

- He would buy land, use the resources of the city to improve the land, then sell.
- In when the city of Brooklyn wanted to build a bridge to Manhattan Tweed was paid \$60,000 cash and half the stock of the bridge building company to secure the Alderman’s vote.
- When NYC new courthouse was being built, Tweed made sure he got kickbacks from all of the contractors. For instance: a plasterer got \$133,187 (\$1.82 million) for two days’ work"

It’s estimated, that when adjusted for inflation, Tweed and his cronies syphoned off as much as \$2.5 billion from the city.

Tweed was a man who used and abused his position. He held a seat of privilege and power, and manipulated the system to his own personal advantage and gain.

And we all know that this kind of corruption isn’t just a relic of the past. In fact, it’s just as prevalent, if not more so today. We are currently experiencing a crisis of trust in American public life. We assume that everyone is using their rank, their office, their corporation—whatever position they have, to serve themselves.

In the passage we just read, the Apostle Paul calls Christians to an opposite way of living. You and I are never to use our position, our freedom in Christ, to gratify our sinful desires. You and I are not to misuse our freedom

Those who follow Jesus are to make up a counterculture in

whatever nation they find themselves. A counterculture-a different kind of people. They are to stand out from the rest of the crowd as different. They are to be marked as different.

One of the ways that they are to be marked and noted as different from everyone is in this: **we do not use our relationship with our God as a means to excuse selfish behavior.**

Instead, you and I are commanded to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who though he had every right to be served, he used his freedom to serve us.

In this passage Paul gives us two commands:

1. DO NOT USE YOUR FREEDOM IN CHRIST TO SERVE YOUR SELF
2. CHOOSE TO USE YOUR FREEDOM TO SERVE OTHERS

First, let’s look at Paul’s negative command:

1. DO NOT USE YOUR FREEDOM IN CHRIST TO SERVE YOUR SELF

*13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh,*

What is the flesh? You say, “I see Paul pitting the Spirit against the flesh here, and in other places. Does that mean that Christians believe the body is bad, or evil and the spirit, or the immaterial is good? Is Paul saying that the goal is to escape the body?

No. Paul is not saying that the body is evil and the Spirit is good. The Bible uses the term “flesh” in a variety of contexts with different meanings.

In the beginning Adam and Eve are created with fleshly bodies but they are both sinless in their original state. So, the Bible begins with a fleshly, bodily physically good world.

There are places in the Bible where flesh means just the body. Jesus is raised in the flesh. Job says, “After my skin has perished, yet in my flesh I shall see God.”

At the end of the Bible, God remakes the earth and then brings heaven down onto earth. He raises all those who died in Christ. He raises their physical, fleshly bodies from the grave. And we will forever inhabit a fleshly, bodily, physically perfect world.

But the Bible also uses the word “flesh” in another way:

*18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. (Ro 7:18).*

The “flesh” here is the part of me that does not want what God wants, my corrupt human nature in all its weakness and depravity. The body is part of that fallen condition, but only a part. “The flesh” refers to the unspiritual life of the whole person, which is inclined to sin. (Ryken)

The reason the word flesh is used to describe this corrupt human nature is because you can most easily see your corruption in the lengths you will go to in order to fulfill your bodily desires. Think of three basic bodily impulses:

*(Illustration)*

- Food (some of you get *hangry*)
- Sleep
- Sex

You can see your corrupted human nature in the physical impulses you have. So, that desires that the body has are a highlighter marking bright yellow showing us our corrupted nature. So, that’s what the flesh is. In this passage Paul issues a warning to us about the flesh.

*13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh,*

The word “opportunity” is a word that was often used in the first century to refer to a base of operations. What Paul is saying is this, “Don’t let your freedom from the penalty of your sins that you have by faith in Christ— don’t let that freedom then become an opportunity to sin.”

It is incompatible to both accept Jesus’ freedom and still have the intentions of serving yourself and disobeying him. In other words, if you’re someone who is saying, “I’ll accept the forgiveness of my sins and the grace of Jesus and that way I’ll be able to sin even more,” then you have missed Jesus altogether.

Do not use your freedom in Christ as an opportunity to gratify your selfish desires.

The fact that God forgives sin and sinners does not license us to sin. Let me put it another way. He’s saying, “You were saved from sin. You weren’t saved so that you can sin.”

Jesus isn’t a get out of jail free card. Christianity isn’t “fire insurance.” You don’t need Jesus to not want to go to hell. But if you are going to freely serve other people, without expecting a return on investment, you must experience the grace of God in Christ.

Here’s the difference Paul is making:

Those who serve themselves are empty and they are trying to fill their emptiness.

That’s why he can write in verse 15:

*15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*

If you serve yourself you end up with less. The works of the flesh are motivated by a desire to fill our emptiness.

On the contrary, those who serve others can do so because they are full and overflowing.

If you find that you are serving yourself, you have missed Jesus. Don't use his freedom and forgiveness as a base of operations to fulfill your selfish desires.

Instead:

## 2. JESUS FREES US THAT WE MIGHT SERVE ONE ANOTHER

*but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

What Paul is saying here is this: "Because you have been freed in Christ, and because you have been filled with the love of Christ, now you can go and serve others." Out of your fullness, now you can go and freely give yourself away.

The opposite of self-centeredness isn't self-loathing. He doesn't say, "Walk around with a sad face, always talking about how sinful you are." That's pride too—that's just as self-serving because you are fishing for complements. The opposite of self-service isn't to think less of yourself—it's to think of your self less. The opposite of self-centeredness is service.

Paul uses three terms to refer to Christians in this passage:

### > **Brothers**

Brothers represents the family association between Christians. I've said this before, but it bears repeating. The Bible doesn't say that Christians are like a family. It says we are a family.

### > **Neighbors**

Neighbors represents those who socialize with. You bump into them.

### > **Slaves**

Now, some of you are searching this passage for the word slave. You won't find that word, exactly, but let me show you this:

Do you see in verse 13 where Paul tells us to serve one another? It's the same Greek word Paul used in 1 Corinthians 9:19 when he wrote:

*19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all,*

In fact, Paul tells us that we are freed in order that we might become slaves to one another. Having loosed the bond of sin, we are to voluntarily choose the shackles of self-giving service to one another.

It means:

- Want to feed the hungry as much as you want to feed yourself when you get hungry.
- It means: Want to find your neighbor a job as much as you are glad you have a job.
- Want to help your fellow student get A's as much as you want to get A's.
- Want to help the person stalled on the freeway as much as you are glad you are not stalled on the freeway.
- Want to share Christ with your neighbor as much as you are glad you know Christ yourself. (*Piper*)

**Friend, are you known as an others-serving person where you work?**

- When someone dropped the ball on a project is your initial reaction to help them or to stand and point fingers?

- Does your boss trust that you are going to do your best with integrity because you believe in what you are doing, or does he have the suspicion that you are going to flex every inch of office policy to benefit yourself?
- Are you doing your work for the praise of men, or because God has gifted you to serve others? These are entirely different motivators which produce entirely different products.

**Are you known as a servant in your home, or just a consumer?**

- Do you walk through your home with an eye towards how you can serve your family? Friend, the pile of laundry is there. The dishes in the sink are there.
- Do you offer to cook meals?

**Are you known as a servant in your neighborhood?**

- Do you know your neighbors? What are their names?
- What is going on in their lives right now?
- Are they facing any medical issues?
- How is their family? Do they have any estranged family members?
- Is there a new couple that's about to have a baby?
- Is there an older couple who can't take care of the lawn like they used to?
- Would your neighbors describe you as friendly? Reliable? Helpful?
- When is the last time you invited one of them to come and heard the gospel preached?

**Ways to Serve our Church Family:**

- Scripture Reading
- Closing Prayer
- Testimony—June 14<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday at 6:30

You think, "That sounds like a lot." It is. Why would I want to do all that?

Why? Why would we want to do that?

*5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*

Everything we do begins and ends with Jesus. You need to understand this: we don't serve others simply because Jesus said we should. We love and serve and forgive others because Jesus loved, and serve, and forgave us.

Corrie Ten Boom, a Godly Christian lady tells this story of a time when she was only able to forgive someone because Christ had forgiven her. She writes:

It was in a church in Munich that I saw him, a balding heavysset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken, moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear.

It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives.

It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander's mind, I liked to think that that's where forgiven sins were thrown.

"When we confess our sins," I said, "God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever."  
The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947.

People stood up in silence and, in silence left the room.

And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the

next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones.

It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin.

Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbrück concentration camp where we were sent.

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: "A fine message, *fräulein!* How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!"

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. It was the first time since my release that I had been face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze. "You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard in there." No, he did not remember me.

"But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. *Fräulein*"—again the hand came out—"will you forgive me?"

And I stood there—I whose sins had every day to be forgiven—and could not. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. "If you do not forgive men their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

"Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling."

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!"

The only reason Corrie could extend her hand to someone who was so undeserving, was because Jesus had already done it for her.

Church, let's not use our freedom in Christ as an opportunity for the flesh, but in love, let's serve one another as Christ has served us.

Let's Pray.