

June 26, 2022

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

“Free to Choose”

How many of you have music start playing in your head if I say, *“Your mission, Mr. Phelps – should you decide to accept it is...”* (Hum a bit of the theme song). You would think it might have been easier – though perhaps less fun for me – to just play you a video clip of the opening credits...but it turns out that for me this week – that really was mission impossible: Life imitating art.

When we attend to our spiritual lives – it sometimes feels ***we have landed in the middle of Mission Impossible without all the tech support.*** And it turns out we are right. We are right it is impossible if we think we can manage life ourselves. In our text today are several things which make our efforts to live life for God feel impossible. Paul would like to help us to choose better.

As we discussed last week, this letter was written to an *earnest congregation* who wanted to do the right thing and feel better connected to God. And in that earnest desire they got caught up with teachers who came in after Paul left and told them *they needed to work harder* at being God’s children by following the Jewish law.

It is a *deeply effective pitch* for those of us who want to do the right thing. It feels right to be told we must try harder. It even feels righteous. But Paul warns the Galatians and us that *such thinking is misguided*. It is misguided because the direction our lives go and *how well we embody God who loves us* is based not on whether we believe you are allowed to play cards, dance with the opposite sex, or become a gourmet cook. *Our future is determined by the power source we rely on for living.*

Only God’s power, which comes through the spirit can help us – we are right to understand life not as achievement but as gift. *Our lives don’t have in them the power to become who we are meant to be. But God’s life does – and God freely gives that power.*

For Freedom Christ has set us free. But set free for what? What does godly freedom look like? What it does not look like, says Paul, is the impulse to take the power given by God and ***use if simply for self-gratification.*** Instead of grasping

for what we imagine will make us happy - ***Freedom means following the Spirit and serving others in love.*** To fulfill the call to live out freedom – *one becomes open to uncharted adventure – whose direction is set by love.* We don't play it safe. We live in love.

Many of us love the part of our passage which outlines *the fruit of the spirit.* But we may be easily confused by the language. "Flesh" and "spirit" are *realities* upon which we choose to base our lives: *Power sources* we draw on for living. They are *not two parts of ourselves.* To live according to the flesh is to think *only we* make life happen and have no trust in God. Flesh is not to be equated with pleasure, physical reality, or good food. Enjoying your dinner is not living according to the flesh. Believing life is nothing more than a good dinner and bully for you for acquiring it by your own power for yourself might be.

As we seek to manage the mission of living as God's children in this life, we will ***avoid the impossible and find success*** when we:

- Remember that *only God's power* gets us where we want to go.
- Accept that freedom is best defined by living *a life of service in love.*
- Avoid imagining human life and physical reality are our enemy. Take care of your body as a good steward of God's creation. *Don't spurn this life.* Know God's spirit is willing to lead us – physical bodies and all.

In the end – it isn't a matter of our ***ability*** but our ***choice.*** *Who we choose to follow* changes everything about us and our journey. The power source upon which we lean determines if we live with energy or get our circuits fried.

Our mission becomes possible when we know *to whom we belong, who we follow* and what *our purpose* is. *For Freedom Christ has set us free.* Let's choose well who we will follow and do good things with that freedom – so that by the grace of God living as God's children will be more than possible.