

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in Saint Paul's letter to the Galatian Christians, the fifth chapter, beginning at the thirteenth verse:

***You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.***

***So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the***

***Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.***

***The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.***

And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

As we prepare for our annual fourth of July celebrations, and even as we prepare our float for the parade that our city hosts, I couldn't help but tie our text into that. The fourth of July is our country's Independence Day... our Freedom Day as it were. The day that we declared we were no longer under British rule. This year, in particular, the idea of Freedom and the fourth of July rings true in our community as our parade has a theme of "Freedom Across America."

I must admit, that is a funny word, freedom. What does it mean? There are many who maintain that freedom means I am free to do whatever I want, whenever I want. So many times in our culture we hear that people are free to do whatever they want, this is a free country after all. I am free to sell myself to the highest bidder because it is just sex. I am free to

kill another person, because it is my freedom of choice. I am free to do what I want when I want because I am an American and I have that freedom; unfortunately, that is not what the Bible says.

The Bible has a very specific message in it's pages for all of us: ***You are free and it is Jesus Christ who has set you free.***

In our text for today, Paul has quite the laundry list of "sins" and he is very blunt as to what happens when we overindulge in these sins: we will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. So let's take a look at some of these sins and see how worthy we are to inherit God's Kingdom of Heaven that He has prepared for His children.

We start with idolatry. Taking a personal inventory of your life I believe that each

and every one of us can admit more often than not how easy it is to place something in the place of God. Money, work, pleasure, ease... you name it and it is so easy to make it into a god. To worship it and to honor it. Make sure that you have time for your work, but maybe not enough time for God. Make sure that you have all your creature comfort met, but the house of God is neglected. You see it is so easy to place something before God, and we are all guilty of doing it.

Hatred: Jesus Himself tells us that if we hate another individual we deserve the fires of hell, have you ever hated someone? Have you ever been so mad that you just wanted to belt someone who did this or that to you? Screaming and damning a person because they cut you off in traffic. Cursing a man because he supported a bill or law you didn't. These

are ways in which we show, not love, but hate for another individual.

Selfish Ambition: In the Apology it states, "Paul says about these things, 'For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit' and vice versa. The flesh distrusts God, trusts the things around it, seeks human help in calamities, and, contrary to the will of God, flees from afflictions that, according to God's command, it ought to bear, and doubts the mercy of God. The Holy Spirit contends with such desires in our hearts in order to restrain and mortify them and in order to implant new spiritual impulses."

No to mention: Sexual Immorality, impurity, debauchery, orgies, and more. All of these are sins that lead us away from our devout life of worshipping God and cause us instead to worship ourselves

or our stuff or, really, anything that is not God. As Johann Gerhard states, “those who manifest no godliness, but rather allow the lusts of the flesh to rule in them through sin, once more fall back into the previous condemned state in which they were mired by nature.” So though we like to talk about freedom and being free from sin and being in a free nation and being free... we’re not. We are trapped by sin. We are forced into the labor of sin and all that does it take us further and further from God. As the analogy has been made, we are a beast of burden and there are only two possible masters for us: God and Satan. When we act in our lives, maybe it is possible for us to ask: who is controlling us at this time? When we “love” our freedom more than we love God are we truly free? When we put something in God’s place and we start to

serve that... well we are either serving God or Satan, so if it is not God...

And as we walk around this world and this life, slaving away, being under the heavy yoke of sin, torturously make our way through life, we know there has got to be something better. For some, the ultimate freedom comes in death; but is death such a release? If we live our lives bound in sin, even Paul says, that we do not deserve to inherit the Kingdom of God. As Johann Gerhard says, “Of course, it is implanted into the nature of all living creatures that they fear death. How is it, then, that a human, who is a rational creature, has no fear of eternal death?” When we die, there will be a release, but if we follow sin it is not the release we are looking for. As Gerhard rightly points out, many people have no fear of eternal

death... And they see this as freedom.  
Freedom to spend eternity in hell, sure.

But, God had different plans for us. God did not want us to spend eternity away from Him. So instead of leaving us to our own devices He sent His Son. He sent His Son, the great warrior, the great Savior, the great Victor, Jesus Christ into this world. Jesus came into this world and had every temptation that we do, and yet He was victorious over them. Jesus suffered throughout His earthly life and He died an innocent death on the cross. But that is not all, on the third day He rose from the dead and He gave us true freedom.

As Jesus (John 8) says, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family...” And that is how it is with us. When we go our own way, we sin. When

we sin we are a slave to sin. We have no permanent place in the family... BUT... Jesus continues, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” And that is what Jesus Christ has done, He has set us free from our sin. He has freed us, when we could not free ourselves. He did not do this with gold or silver or precious stones, but rather with His holy and precious blood, shed for us on the cross of Calvary. This is how Jesus set us free.

This reminds me of King David. Imagine if you will, standing before a nine foot tall man. And he is just standing over you mocking you and mocking God. You see, we are like the Israelites who stood on the far side of the valley hoping that we wouldn't be picked on too much, but not ready to raise our voice against this big nasty Goliath, who we can see as Satan.

And it wasn't until this very unassuming man came along, decided enough was enough and that he was going to stand up for the people and for God. King David fit this role very nicely, and so did Jesus Christ. For so long people were disobeying God and turning to their own ways. Abandoning all that God had taught them and falling victim to the giant Satan. And then Jesus Christ came in and redeemed us, set us free. He took care of Satan for us and freed us, as only He could do.

And thus, instead of running from Him and putting another thing in His place, let us remember that He invites us, welcomes us to Him. He wants us to come into His presence and just be with Him.

Dear friends in Christ, Jesus Christ has set us free. Free from the sin we constantly

find ourselves in. Free from the world and all its wicked ways. And ultimately, free from ourselves and our old sinful nature. Jesus has done all of this for you, and He just asks that you believe, have faith in all that He has done.

As the fourth of July approaches, like Memorial Day and Veterans Day, let your mind wander to all those who lived and died for your freedoms. Think of all those who died making sure that you lived in a country that was not ruled by tyranny. Think of all those who sacrificed so much for you to be able to say "I'm free!" And then remember, that none of them are as close, personal, loving, friendly, kind, caring to you as your Savior, Jesus Christ. Remember all that He has done for you. Remember His sacrifice, His life and death that He laid down, His everything

He gave, so that you can say, “I’m free!”  
and mean it.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and  
to the Holy Ghost. As it was int he  
beginning, is now and ever shall be.  
Forevermore, amen.