

"How to Live Fully." – May 14, 2017
by Wayne J. Schneider – Soli Deo Gloria

"How to Live Freely."
Galatians 5:1, 13-18

It is quiz time: How many fruits are there in the phrase 'the fruit of the Spirit?' Some say nine, but they would be wrong. There is only one fruit of the Spirit. Please note the singular 'fruit.' Why is this fact important? Because each "Follower of the Way" is to demonstrate all the fruit in their lives!

The nine you find in the King James version are pieces of the fruit of the Spirit. One fruit with several characteristics. For example, you have an orange in your hand, but it is more than color: it is juicy, delicious, nutritious, and often thick-skinned; like some Christians I know.

"Fruit of the Spirit" is a Biblical way of highlighting the observable qualities of a genuine Christian life. When we allow the Holy Spirit to control our life, rather than the forces of the world, the forces of the flesh; the Spirit produces the fruit that illustrates that we are "Followers of the Way."

With this backdrop, let us look at "The Fruit of the Spirit" today, and in the next two sermons. We see that when Jesus is the center of our being, we are set free to live, to serve, and to transform the world. There is, however, one caveat, one thing that must take place first: we must be freed from our self-centeredness before we can be made free.

If we view St. Paul's idea of the Fruit of the Spirit, we discover that the apostle confirms that it is Jesus who sets us free. This freedom empowers us to surpass the narrowness of the law, that is at the core of St. Paul's message.

But, there is a caution too. If we are not careful, we may miss the prompting of the Holy Spirit. When the apostle uses the term 'flesh,' he is not speaking about

our physical bodies. Rather, he is talking about a person who is living by the standards of the world, listening to the elemental spirits of this world.

Again, to undergo the fullness of the fruit of the Spirit, we need to be set free. In this fifth chapter, St. Paul proclaims "for freedom Christ has set us free." When this happens, when are energized by God's Spirit, and we live, and are guided daily and emancipated, freed, by the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul is annoyed with the Galatian church. On his first missionary trip, he visited the area and assisted the young believers, encouraging them to leave anything that kept them from experiencing Jesus fully. After he left the area, some far-right Jewish Christians, called Judaizers, bullied these believers by telling them that their faith was not correct, until they obey the law of circumcision and other practices.

St Paul contradicts this by brashly declaring "for freedom Christ has set you free." Liberated from all the 'do's' and 'don'ts. In Jesus, our relationship with God has been reestablished not by anything we could ever do, but by what God has done, and continues to do, for us in Jesus Christ.

From St. Paul's point of view, when we grasp this reality then we can then enjoy the freedom to live fully, completely.

As you may know, circuses are being shut down, and that is a good thing for the animals. Maltreatment of animals is heinous and sadly, all too common. If you were to visit backstage in the elephant area, you would find the animals chained by foot. Often, these magnificent mammals will move their chained foot forward and backward trying to break free. Sometimes, you may find one elephant who is doing this, but who is no longer chained. The elephant has repeated this action so long it has become a way of life for him, and he doesn't know he is free.

St. Paul was confident that while we remain selfish, we cannot be free. When we live like this, we are unable to become the person God intends us to be. The

apostle reminds us that you and I were created for freedom; we have been freed not from something, but for something: life, service, and transformation. When accepting this freedom that smashes the chains that imprison our soul, and become free in Jesus, we will be directed by the Holy Spirit, and our lives characterized by the Fruit of the Spirit and set free to live. Alleluia. Amen.