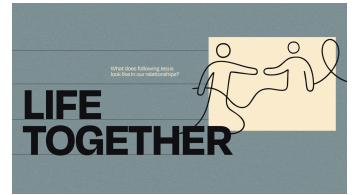


Life Together #1: Set Free to Serve

Galatians 5:13-6:2

Sermon Manuscript



Now that we've wrapped up our sermon series on Christ Community's values, we're going to do a deep dive into one of those values: commitment to community. What does Christian community look like? Why is it important? How do we live out this value in "the real world?"

Today's passage is one of the classic places people go to when they want to see what the Christian life should look like. It casts a striking vision of the contrast between life in the flesh—which we were all born into—and life in the Spirit—which we were given when we placed our faith in Christ. And these two lives look radically different. Life in the flesh is characterized by infighting, back-biting, selfishness, impurity, anger, envy, and, ultimately, slavery to sin. But life in the Spirit is freedom. The tragic irony of freedom is that when we use it to gratify the desires of the flesh, we become enslaved to those desires. The things we thought would make us happy end up making us dependent on them. The most foolish use of freedom would be to walk back into slavery, and in these verses Paul points out a better way: Use your freedom to meet the needs of others.

That can seem paradoxical to us today: "You are set free...to serve." How does that work? It all comes down to the Holy Spirit. If you're united with Christ in his death and resurrection (see Romans 6), then you have the Holy Spirit living inside you. The Holy Spirit enables believers to walk in the newness of life. He points out sin in our lives and gives us the strength to fight it. He equips and empowers believers for Christlike living and service. The more we walk with the Holy Spirit, the better we'll be able to resist the temptations of the flesh, and the more we'll walk in freedom, which then enables us to walk closer with the Spirit. It's a beautiful upward spiral of life, joy, and obedience. The result? You'll produce more and more fruit of the Spirit. And that fruit isn't just for yourself, it's for the good of others (horizontal love) and for the glory of God (vertical love).

That's how serving one another in love sets us free. Love is one of the fruit of the Spirit, so as we keep in step with the Spirit, we will live by the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit lives, he produces fruit. The old you (in the flesh) was enslaved to yourself, consumed by obsession for your own highest good. The new you (in the Spirit) is free to pursue the good of others, with what Timothy Keller calls "the freedom of self-forgetfulness."

The key is the Holy Spirit. We can't fight sin, bear fruit, serve one another, or obey God without the indwelling Holy Spirit. Ask God to help you listen for his voice today, and you'll find it easier to cut through the lies of the old you.

Set Free to Serve

Main Idea: The new you is free to serve others.

- Galatians 5:13-6:2
 - I get the privilege of kicking off a new sermon series called Life Together, where we'll be looking at some of the "one another" commands in the New Testament, and there are a lot.
 - The Greek word translated as "one another" is used 100 times in 94 NT verses.
 - You've heard us in recent weeks talk about the importance of gathering around tables for connection and community. The table behind me is to serve as a physical reminder through this series of the importance of gathering together to share burdens, celebrate joys, and share Jesus with one another.
- The Christian life isn't just hunkering down with our hands in our pockets, waiting for Christ to return.
 - We're not called to put our heads in the sand or circle up into a "holy huddle."
 - No, after Christ saves you, he gives you a job to do. He expects our obedience.
 - That can make us nervous as grace-based, Christ alone Protestants because when we hear "job" and "obedience" we think of wages and earning and performance, like we have to measure up.
 - **Hear this clearly: The Christian life is *not* about working hard enough to earn God's favor. Obedience is not about performance, it's about love. It's about trust. We naturally obey those we love and trust.**
- The Christian life is about experiencing God. He has made himself known, and he invites us to know him, to love him, to trust him. The result is obedience, which leads to joy. Don't get the order mixed up. **It's relationship before obedience. His work before our work.**
 - We just wrapped up a series on our church's values, so if you've been paying attention, you should have an idea of what we care about as a church.
 - We learned that we're centered on Jesus, that we're committed to community, that we are radically generous, and we are purposefully adventurous.
 - But knowing is only half the battle. The other half is: How do we practically live out those values? How do we actually *do* those things? That's what this series is all about.
- As a result, this will be a very practical series, our passages will include some lists of do's and don't's, so it may start to feel heavy at points.
 - Those more prone to discouragement may start to think, "Great, I already feel like I'm not doing enough, and now you're giving me more to do."
 - Those more prone to pride may start to think, "Sweet, a checklist, I can do that! Easy!"
 - So first off, neither of those are the goal.
 - We're not heaping up burdens, and we're not preaching "sanctification by checklist."
- But we are saying that saving faith should look like something. There should be outward evidence of an inward change.
 - The life of a believer should look different from that of a nonbeliever. Not because we're harder workers, or better at keeping our "do's and don't's" straight, but because we have the Holy Spirit.
 - The Bible says that for those who are united with Christ, then when he died on the cross, the "old you" died with him and the "new you" rose with him.
 - The old you was a slave to sin, separated from God and destined to spend eternity apart from God.
 - But the new you is free from sin, reconciled with God and destined to spend eternity with him. Experiencing him more and more fully for all eternity.
 - The old you was dominated by your sinful flesh. The new you is alive and free with the Holy Spirit.
 - With that in mind, let's read the passage, and I want you to look for "the two yous."

- The “old you” in the flesh, and the “new you” in the Spirit. See what you can identify about how the text differentiates between the two.
- Galatians 5:13–6:2
 - [13] For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. [14] For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” [15] But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.
 - [16] But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [17] For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. [18] But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. [19] Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, [21] envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. [22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
 - [25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. [26] Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.
 - [1] Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. [2] Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (ESV)

1. The Old You Served Self

- You probably saw lots of distinctions in there. Differences between the old you and the new you.
 - If we had time, we could probably go around the room and hear a hundred different contrasts.
 - The old you is self-absorbed, constantly comparing, giving in to temptation, conceited. The old you could not inherit the kingdom of God.
 - V 17 says that “the two yous” are opposed to each other. They are constantly working against each other “to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”
 - Sounds like slavery to me. You can’t do what you want.
- So let’s look at the old you vs the new you, starting with the old you, and how you were enslaved to self.
 - V 13 says we were called to freedom. Freedom from what? Sin.
 - And freedom has two dimensions: the way we talk about it around here is that you’ve been set free *from* something and you’ve been set free *for* something. It has to be both.
- **If you’re in Christ, he has set you free *from* sin, sorrow, selfishness, disobedience, death; and he has set you free *for* righteousness, joy, selflessness, obedience, life. It’s a twofold salvation.**
 - Freedom from sin isn’t just freedom from doing bad things, because sin is so much more than our actions.
 - Sin actually starts with dominion. We’re all born under the dominion of sin because our first parents chose selfish disobedience instead of God. It’s like they walked right into prison, and all of their descendents have been born into that same prison.
 - And we feel it. Sin limits us. It frustrates us. We look at the world and we go, “Something feels wrong here. Something’s broken. *I’m* broken.” Sin is that brokenness. It results in our deficiency. We’re unable to fix the world, unable to fix ourselves.

- And that ultimately leads to selfish decisions. We decide to take matters into our own hands, we take shortcuts, we impose our will on others, we fight, we hurt each other.
- We see it in our passage. Skim through the list of the works of the flesh in vv 19-21.
 - How many of them are attempts to make up for our deficiencies? How many are trying to meet a need created by our limitations? How many are trying to fill “a God-sized hole in your heart.” How many are a result of serving yourself?
 - This is not a complete list, by the way. That’s what “things like these” means (v 21).
 - Our sinful nature means that we’re under the dominion of sin, which makes us deficient, so we make hurtful decisions to make up for our deficiencies. That’s the full scope of sin.
 - And the worst part is that our sin separates us from God.
- But our passage says we’ve been set free from the whole scope of sin: From the decisions, deficiencies, and ultimately the dominion of sin. But how? How were we set free?
 - **It all comes down to this: Union with Christ.**
 - To see what I mean, let’s take a brief detour to Romans 6, which, in a lot of ways, parallels our Galatians passage.
- Romans 6:3–11
 - [3] Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
 - [5] For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. [6] We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [7] For one who has died has been set free from sin. [8] Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. [9] We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. [10] For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. [11] So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (ESV)
- Do you hear the “old you/new you” language here? Do you hear the dominion language?
- Paul’s argument goes like this: When you place your faith in Christ, when you accept him as your savior, when you confess with your mouth that he is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9), you are, in that moment, united with Christ. You are “in Christ.”
 - Think of it like Noah. He was saved from the flood because he was *in the ark*. When you’re united with Christ, you are in Christ in a similar way. You’re saved.
- So the old you, united with Christ in his death, gets on the cross with Christ and is crucified with him. Not because his sacrifice was lacking, but because you are *in Christ* (v 5).
- And your old self, the one enslaved to sin, died with Jesus on the cross, and was then buried with him. That’s what v 6 says.
 - So the old you died and went into the grave.
- But when Jesus rose again, he left the old you in the grave. The old you stayed dead. And the new you rose with Jesus because, again, you’re united with him. That’s what vv 4, 5, and 8 say.
- And the new you is, what does v 7 say? Free from sin! No longer enslaved! Free forever (v 9-10)!
 - So now the new you can walk in the newness of life (v 4), knowing that you are dead to sin and alive to God (v 11), but only if you’re in Christ Jesus.
 - And the good news is that you can be united with Christ today, if you’re not already. All you have to do is ask. Ask him to crucify the old you, with it’s sinful desires, and raise up the new you with new desires. He will. Even when we mess up.

- Sometimes we don't "feel" like we're dead to sin. Sometimes it feels like sin still rules over us, like we can't escape it.
 - Here's how I think of it for myself: the old Taylor is dead, he was crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20) and is still in the grave, but his ghost still haunts me.
 - He can't make me *do* anything, he's just a ghost; but he can whisper. He can lie. He can cloud my vision. He can hijack my imagination. He can remind me of my mistakes in the past. He can ask questions that make me worry about the future, or doubt God's love for me.
 - It's all an attempt to get me to take my eyes off of Christ and look at myself.
 - His goal is to get me to climb back into the grave with him. He knows his time is limited, so he's trying to take me down with him while he can.
 - And sometimes my flesh wants to join him. Resisting temptation is hard work. It's a lot easier to give in and just listen to the ghost.
- But keep this in mind: it's just a ghost. It can't touch you. The old you is dead. He has no claim on you. He's not your master. You're not enslaved to your old self. You don't have to do what he says. You're free! Forever!
 - If you're in Christ, you can silence the ghost. It's as simple as crying out to God.
 - Say, "God, save me from this ghost. Help me ignore its voice. Shine your light through the fog so I can keep my eyes on you and take them off myself and my selfish desires." He will.

2. The New You Serves Others

- But that's enough about the old you. It's dead and gone. Let's talk about the new you.
 - The you that rose to new life with Jesus. The you that walked out of the grave with Jesus. Let's talk about you *now*.
- If you're in Christ, you've been set free *from* sin and death, and you've been set free *for* righteousness and life.
 - Romans 6:12–14 goes on to say:
 - [12] Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. [13] Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. [14] For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (ESV)
 - In other words, the new you doesn't have to obey sin anymore, you're free, so how will you use your freedom?
- Let's look back at our Galatians passage. How does it describe the life of the new you?
- I can see three basic descriptions here:
 - 1. You've been set free to serve one another in love (5:13-15)
 - 2. You've been set free to bear fruit for one another in the Spirit (5:16-26)
 - 3. You've been set free to restore one another in gentleness (6:1-2)

1. You've been set free to serve one another in love (5:13-15)

- Love has two dimensions: vertical and horizontal.
- We see the vertical dimension in how we experience God's love and love him in return.
 - That love looks like spending time with him in prayer and in the Bible. Talking to him, listening to him, trusting him in both the good and bad times.
 - Developing habits of regularly spending time with God to know him better.
- The horizontal dimension is how we love and are loved by other people.
 - That looks like serving one another, sacrificing for the good of another, taking time to listen, support, and encourage one another. Connecting in community.

- If you're not in a huddle or a connect group, this is a great way to connect with the people God has placed around you. Talk to Abbey Stanton at the huddle kiosk in the Atrium today! She'd love to help you get connected
- And our church has *tons* of opportunities to serve our community. If you'd like help getting started, talk to Lorinda at the Welcome Center.
- Jesus describes these two dimensions in Matthew 22 when he's asked what the greatest commandment is:
- Matthew 22:34–40
 - [34] But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. [35] And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. [36] "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" [37] And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [38] This is the great and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. [40] On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (ESV)
 - Hear what he's saying?
 - The whole Law, the whole revelation of God to his people, can be summed up as two things: love God and love others. That's the vertical and horizontal.
- Here at Christ Community, we define love this way: "Love is a persistent concern for someone's greatest good and the willingness to serve them to that end."
- You've been set free to love one another, and the ironic twist of v 13 is that love looks like serving. You've been set free...to serve?
- We usually think of freedom as not serving anyone else, right? "I'm free so I can do what I want! Not what you want!"
- But that's the old you talking. The ghost of the self-serving, self-worshiping old you.
- The new you, empowered by the Holy Spirit, can say, "I'm free from slavery to my selfish desires, and that means I can look outside myself. I don't have to obsess about *my* greatest good (which just leads to anxiety), I can be concerned for *your* greatest good, and I can help you reach that good."
- That's love. And it's what we're called to do. Not because we're so great, but because we're united with Christ.
- And the greatest act of love in the universe was Christ's death on the cross in our place.

2. You've been set free to bear fruit for one another in the Spirit (5:16-26)

- I love the contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit.
 - You don't have to wait for works. They're on your schedule.
- But fruit? Any farmers in here? Any gardeners? Harvest isn't on your schedule, is it? Growth takes time! And effort! It's slow!
 - You have to wait for the fruit to grow. You have to prepare the soil, plant the seeds, kill the weeds, deter the pests.
 - But what is easy and quick, and doesn't require any patience? Running to Walmart.
 - I'm not making a value statement here between gardening and purchasing, neither one is necessarily better than the other, but gardening takes time and patience.
 - You have to wait for fruit, or the grain, or the leaf to grow. Purchasing is just a thing you do. It's a work.
 - You also don't cause the growth. You can create the right conditions for growth, but you, farmer/gardener, you don't actually make the plant grow. You can't. If the plant is alive, it's going to grow. If not, it won't.

- Paul uses this same analogy in 1 Corinthians 3:6
 - 1 Corinthians 3:6 - I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. (ESV)
- And that's true for the fruit of the Spirit too. We can plant and water, but God has to give the growth.
- If this said "works of the Spirit," that would not be good news. If this was a checklist, we'd get exhausted pretty quick.
 - But this isn't a checklist. These aren't burdens you have to carry. You can't just *do* patience, or peace, or any of them.
 - It says "*fruit of the Spirit*" because these are life habits you cultivate by keeping in step with the Holy Spirit.
 - That's what v 25 means: He called you to new life, and now he calls you to walk in that new life.
 - The Holy Spirit is like the Sun. We're the garden. We need the Holy Spirit. You can't grow without him. And the more you walk with him and listen to his voice, the more you'll grow.
 - And the more you grow, the more fruit you'll bear, and not just to keep it to yourself! Look through the list. How many will bless other people? All of them?
 - You'll bear fruit for the good of your neighbor (horizontal love), and for the glory of God (vertical love).
 - Listening to the ghost of the old you is like bringing shade into the garden. It can't stop the Sun from shining, but it can slow your growth.

3. You've been set free to restore one another in gentleness (6:1-2)

- When I started working here, almost a year ago, I'd never really heard the question, "Who shares your tough stuff?"
- Obviously I knew about accountability partners and connect groups and support networks and things like that, but I'd never heard the idea phrased in that way.
- We have these 25 outcome statements, which are basically our best attempt at defining what we want for everyone who calls Christ Community Church their home.
- They were the questions on that life-defining survey we took back in January.
- For example:
 - I set aside daily time to study, memorize, and reflect on Scripture.
 - I know the character traits of God well enough to distinguish between his voice and other things I hear or think.
- But one of the statements is, "I share my deepest needs and struggles with trusted believers in consistent two-way accountability."
- In other words, I share my tough stuff with a few trusted believers.
- After being here for a couple months, and hearing that question several times, it finally sank in: I don't really have anyone, besides my wife.
 - And she already knows all my deepest needs and struggles, which is great, but it can be extremely helpful—I'd almost say necessary—to have someone else, maybe one or two people, same gender as you, to open up to.
 - To invite into your needs and struggles. To share your shortcomings. Because the ghost of the old you is going to keep calling you back into the grave, and we need people in our lives who can stand by the entrance and say, "Don't go back in there. Don't do it! Open your eyes!"
 - We need people who can remind us of the truth. Who can point out the lies we're starting to believe. Who can help us walk back into the sunshine of the Holy Spirit.

- So when I realized I didn't have any "tough stuff guys" in my life, I started praying about it. I asked God to bring someone to mind.
 - And he did! A few months ago, God brought someone to mind, and I went up to him, and I said, "Hey man, would you want to be a tough stuff guy for me?" That's all it took! And we're off to a great start.
 - It doesn't have to be complicated. We have this shared language now, as a church. Even if this is your first Sunday here, we all now know what it means to be a "tough stuff" person. You don't have to explain it. Just ask. God will give you everything you need.
- What's the result? Look back at 6:1-2
- Galatians 6:1–2
 - [1] Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. [2] Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (ESV)
- The question this is answering is: What happens when you listen to the ghost of the old you, and you lose a battle? What do you do then?
- You've got two options: You can hide it, or confess it.
 - Hiding it rarely works for very long. You'll eventually be caught. Even if you're not, it weighs on you. It pulls you down, back... into the grave. With the ghost of the old you.
 - Hiding sin is how the ghost wins. The best place to hide your sin is back in the grave. No one looks in graves. It's dark in there. But it enslaves you. It doesn't let you go. It's a trap.
- The only other option is to confess it.
 - If you're married, confess to your spouse.
 - If you have "tough stuff" people, confess it to them.
- The only way to kill sin is to drag it out into the purifying light of Christ.
 - You do that by confessing it.
- Sin wants us to believe that following Christ is a burden, and getting back into the grave is freedom. But it's just the opposite. Anyone who's ever tried to cover up sin knows the immense burden it places on you. It's unbearable.
- Jesus is the only one who can take that burden. And he puts people in your life who can help you carry it to him.
 - But they can't bear it with you if you don't share it with them.
 - They can't restore you if you don't let them in.
 - You don't have to do this alone. Let people in. Bear one another's burdens.
- Now, there are appropriate and inappropriate places to confess sin, and that requires a little discernment.
 - But two guaranteed appropriate places are with your spouse (if you have one), and with trusted believers in consistent two-way accountability. With your "tough stuff" people.
- I want to invite you to sit for a second, like I did, and answer this question for yourself: "Who shares your tough stuff?"
 - Think about it. Do you have anyone?
 - If no one comes to mind, ask God, right now, to provide one for you.
- If you've been united with Christ, if you're in Christ, then you've been set free from slavery to sin and raised up with Christ to walk in the newness of life by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - He enables you and empowers you to serve, to love, to keep your eyes on Christ, to ignore the lies of the ghost, to bear fruit, to share one another's burdens, to gently restore one another.

- In short, the Holy Spirit enables you to walk in obedience. Obeying God is not impossible. Resisting sin is not impossible. Jesus died to make it possible, and it's the only way to true joy.
- But you don't have to walk alone. God puts people in your life specifically to walk with you and help you grow and bear fruit.
- Brothers and sisters, Christ has set us free. The question is: What will you do with that freedom?
 - Will you listen to the ghost of the old you? And let him trick you into crawling back into the grave?
 - Or will you listen to the Holy Spirit, who speaks through the Bible, through prayer, through the preaching of his Word, and even, sometimes, through the voices of your tough stuff people. He loves to use his children for the good of his children.
- The Holy Spirit's voice gives life to the new you, and silences the lies of the old you.
- Hear God's voice this morning: Come out of the grave. Step into the sunshine of the Holy Spirit arm in arm with your brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.
- God gave us each other. Let's not waste that gift.

Beyond the Sermon

If you have any questions about this sermon or about Christ Community Church in general, please text them to 515-442-4282. Our pastors answer your questions every week on the Christ Community Church Podcast. Subscribe on our website (ccames.org/podcast-churchco) or wherever you find podcasts.