

“Why Can’t I Do Whatever I Want?”

Galatians 5:14-23

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¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Keep in Step with the Spirit

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.

Introduction

In this generation, happiness has become an idol in our lives. We want to follow our dreams. If you interpret it in our way through biblical ways, we are seeking for our pleasure. We are seeking for fulfillment of our desires. We want to fulfill our dreams and often there’s nothing wrong with that because we could have good desires and dreams. But I’m sure at one point you have said, “Why can’t I do whatever I want?” That might have been when you were six to your parents. That might have been when you couldn’t get into a school you wanted to get into. Or you couldn’t date or have relations with someone you wanted. You might say this frequently in your life. Any human being would say this, “Why can’t I do whatever I want?”. A philosopher once said how he wished that just for one day, he could be somewhere where no one knew him, and do whatever he wanted to do. We probably have those kinds of dreams in our lives or desires. So, let’s answer this question, “How harmful could it be if you were to do whatever you want?”.

I. Because we have conflicting desires [17]

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.

It is impossible to do whatever we want because of conflicting desires. We have more than one desire operating at a given moment, and often they are not in alignment. Human beings by nature are constantly seeking for the fulfillment of our desires. We seek for pleasure by wanting maximum pleasure or minimum pain. This is one of the essences of a human being.

Think about right now. What do you want right now? Do you want to breathe? Just don’t breathe for a couple minutes, you would want to breathe. Some of you want to have better grades. Some of you want to

eat right now. Some of you want the sermon to end quickly. Some of you want somebody to like you or dislike you. At every moment, we have so many desires. They could be in alignment but also, sometimes they are in conflict with one another and at that moment, you can't have both. We can't have everything that we want. It is impossible to do whatever we want. We often need to choose between several conflicting things. Therefore, we need wisdom in life for our choices. So be close to wise people especially when you need help. This means that there has to be guidance to our choices and pleasure in our lives.

The question is, what should guide our choices in our lives? We always have to choose between desires, so wisdom is needed. We must live for the highest and lasting pleasure often at cost of temporary pleasure. Temporary pain and hardship must be chosen for eternal pleasure.

If you have one piece of toilet paper, nobody is going to jump at it like it's a thousand dollars. It's not that important. However, it could be very important if you are in Africa, like some of our mission teams. African bathrooms don't have anything, you only have your hands. If it is a choice between your hand and this single piece of toilet paper, it becomes an incredibly important commodity. You must think about how to utilize it maximally. One is important if it's all you have in a given context.

If one hour is all you have, what you choose to do in that hour is important. You can do so many things but if one hour is all you have, then in that hour, you must make choices. If one day is all you have, then what you do in that day is important, so you have to schedule things accordingly because that day is never going to come back. The Bible says you have one life to live so what you do is important in your life. We always have to choose what is best. In your daily schedule, there are so many things to do, you have to schedule the important things first. If you can't finish the least important thing, that's still better than doing the least important things without being able to do the most important things. If you had two hours to watch a movie, the movie that you choose is important because it determines whether or not you will be enjoying those two hours.

Our choices are important because we have conflicting desire and out of all the desires that we have, we have to choose what is best. In one sense, choose what would be maximum pleasure. That's why we can't do whatever we want. We have conflicting desires and our choices matter. How can we choose what is best for us for eternity? A key to answering this is realizing that we are created beings, not creators.

II. Because we are created beings [18]

¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

We are under the Creator. Another way to describe it is that we are under the law. "Law" is talking about the law of God, the Bible. It's talking about two different kinds of law.

A. Because we are not God, we have limitations – natural law

God has implanted the natural law in this world. There are desires we are not allowed to fulfill in our lives. Often, we desire what is outside of our limitations. If God made you as a fish, you can't

live outside of water. Fish can't live outside of the water but they can live freely in the ocean. There's so much freedom but there are limitations because you are a created being. Another example is if you're Batman, you can't be Superman. If you try to fly, you die. It is a blessing for us to freely live in the contentment of our limitations as created beings.

The question is, why didn't He create us to be God? The simple answer is because He can't. Only God can be God. God cannot be created, He can only create. He can only exist. When there was nothing, there was God. So, God did the next best thing: He created us to be as close to Him as possible, better and above any other created things. He made us in such a way that even though we cannot be Him, we can still grow to be more and more like Him, even to represent Him. How can we grow? The key is the law of God. Through the law of God, we can grow closer to become like God.

B. Even though we are not God, He created us to desire to image Him – written law

¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Even though there are limitations for us as created beings, there are things we can do because we are created for a purpose, which is what written law is about. There are desires that we are allowed to fulfill. For us to understand this, we need to understand the desires of our heart.

What is *heart*? It's the essence of who we are. It's the core part of how God created us. The heart operates to image Him, to become like God and grow in Him, and it operates through desires.

What are *desires*? It's what the heart *does*. When we talk about the heart, the essence of our being, it's in a metaphorical sense because the heart is a physical object. One of the things the heart does is pump blood. Pumping blood is not the heart but what the heart does. In the same way, desire is not the heart but what the heart does. What do the lungs do? It helps us to breathe. Breathing is not the lung but what the lung does.

The heart expresses itself through desires. Jonathan Edwards said this, "*In the essence of our heart, we always desire for highest pleasure at that moment.*" The common factor of our choices, as we desire things, is we always choose for the highest pleasure at that moment.

When Galatians 5:18 says, "*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law,*" it does not mean that we have no relationship with the law, but it means that we are not under the condemnation of the law. That's why a few verses before in Galatians 5:14 it says, "*For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,'*". The law is telling us to love. If we become who God desires us to be, we will love others and love God. In doing so, we are fulfilling the law. All the laws in the Bible point towards this so that we can become more like Jesus. As we love others, we represent God. The Law guides us to image Him if we take the law of God with our spiritual nature. If you rent an AirBnB or a

car, you are responsible for taking care of it. If you mess things up, that's not what you're supposed to be doing. God created us so we need to live according to His desire. We do this by living according to the law, and this will lead to our greatest pleasure.

We are all limited, however, we can overcome our individual limitations with our togetherness. We were not made to image God alone. Our individual differences image a small part of God. Our limitations are inevitable but purposefully used in our uniqueness to display the vast and infinite beauty of God together if we live according to His law. Therefore, we need more people in the Church of Jesus Christ.

We are each like a different instrument. We are limited because a tuba cannot make the sound of a flute and a flute cannot make the sound of a piano. However, when we put our unique sounds together it makes beautiful music. As a result, people outside the room hear and the music and enjoy it as well. Not only do they enjoy it, but they want to join in as well, bringing their own unique sound. When the people of the world hear our music and want to join, it is a depiction of evangelism; when we teach them the tune of our music piece orchestrated by our conductor, it is an illustration of discipleship through the Bible and to Jesus Christ.

The Church of Jesus Christ pictures God by playing beautiful tunes of salvation and redemption and drawing others in. Together, we can picture the beauty and greatness of our God as we glorify and image Him.

III. Because it will hurt us [17, 19, 22]

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.

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

What complexifies this argument is that there are multiple desires that can be categorized into two different kinds of desires. Every desire comes from a nature that exists within our hearts. Unbelievers have one sinful nature that says, "I want to be God and be exalted." However, believers have two kinds of nature because the Holy Spirit gives you new birth. A new supernatural desire is born within us to love because of Christ love in us. According to the passage, our sinful nature is our flesh. If we do according to the desires of our flesh, it will destroy us. However, if we follow the desires of our spiritual nature it will build us up.

According to the Bible, our sinful nature will be gone one day. Therefore, the essence of who we are is our spiritual nature. In verses 19 and 22 there is a comparison of our actions and our natures. Verse 19 says, ¹⁹"*Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,*". The desires and acts of the flesh, our sinful nature, is described as "works". Then we see in verse 22, how

the desires of the spiritual nature are expressed as “fruit”, ²²“*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*”.

Why are the desires and actions of the two natures described with these two words: “works” and “fruit”? It’s because of the source. Works of the flesh is the result of our hearts doing things: our works. The reason why it doesn’t say, “works of the spiritual nature” because our spiritual nature is connected with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers our spiritual nature. Therefore, whatever good we do, it is never out of our own will, it is done with the help of the Holy Spirit. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

We are never alone. We are always held by our God in Jesus Christ through the help of the Holy Spirit. Everything we do is because of God’s grace, mercy, and power that is implanted in us. We can never live independently of God. John 15:5 says, “*Apart from me, you can do nothing.*”

When we do whatever we want, and often it’s our sinful nature operating within us, it hurts us. What happens when you eat whatever you want? Or when you decide not to obey traffic laws and run stop signs or through train tracks while there is a moving train? Human beings are pleasure seekers, meaning we are addicted beings because of the existence of sin nature.

People think if they do whatever they want, they are free. However, it leads to bondage, not freedom because you become in bondage to doing whatever you want. You can’t do the things you need to do. Those that do whatever they want (drug addicts, food addicts, sex addicts, emotional-attachment addicts, game addicts, etc) are trapped in their addiction of selfishness and self-destroying pleasure.

Freedom on the other hand, means that we can choose less pleasure in order to choose what will build us up, not what destroys us. Freedom is being able to say “no” to sin and “yes” to spiritual nature. Freedom is a different addiction: being addicted to the best, eternal, and often delayed pleasure. While bondage is choosing pleasure that will ultimately lead to less pleasure, more pain, and ultimate destruction.

Freedom is choosing Jesus. He becomes our pleasure for His glory. If you are a parent, you understand this. If parents let their children do things only when they feel like it, it will destroy the child. Often when parents tell their kids to do things or not to things, kids feel in bondage to these rules. However, in the big picture, he is being led to freedom from selfishness to selflessness so that he can be a contributing member to the family as well as society.

If we continually say “yes” to God and “no” to sin, Psalm 1 says we will be on the path to righteousness. 1 Corinthians 13 says we will go from being a child to a man or woman of God. Every choice we make can either lead to bondage that will destroy us, or to freedom that will build us.

In a movie called “Bruce Almighty,” the main character Bruce complains he’s not getting what he wants. One day God appears before him and allows him to become God. Bruce goes on his computer and sees that there are a billion prayers that were prayed just in one town. Overwhelmed with the amount of prayers he needs to answer, he pushes a button that answers “yes” to every prayer. Bruce

believes that everyone will be happy, however when he leaves his house, the entire town is in destruction.

Think about what would happen if everybody got whatever they wanted. If you do whatever you want, it will not only destroy you, but it will also destroy others as well.

IV. Because it will hurt others [14, 19]

¹⁴ *For the wholelaw is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*

¹⁹ *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,*

Why does verse 19 talk about “*sexual immorality*” when the verses before talks about love? It’s because sex, in the context of marriage, was made to express your love to your spouse. However, when we have sexual immorality, we use sex for our own pleasure. When you are in pornography or masturbation, you’re growing in your selfishness. Your capability to express the Gospel in marriage is destroyed, therefore you have less capability to love in marriage. As the body of Christ, we are to picture the Trinity- God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus the Son, who are constantly pouring fourth love onto one another.

But when we do whatever we want because of our sinful nature, it hurts our capability to love others and image God. We are hurting others by hurting ourselves. The whole world is like this. That is why there are secular laws, otherwise we would destroy one another by seeking whatever we want. In the Bible, there are also laws to guide us to not only restrict our sins, but also help us to love. Through love, we can become like our God.

The Bible says in John that if we love one another, the world will see Christ through us. They will know we are his disciples. How we need to love one another is that by our love, they will see him. Together, we give more and *are* more. Philip Yancey said this, “I left the church because I found so little grace there. But I came back because it’s the only place I found any.” Pray that CFC [the Church] would be full of His grace so that when people walk in, that they would want to join the tunes of grace that we sing, songs of salvation.

V. Because there are external consequences [21]

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.*

People ask, “Isn’t it too much judgment for people to go to hell?” But if we examine our own hearts, we can understand this. In our lives, there are some people we don’t want to forgive. We want judgement on that person for eternity. We want pain on them as great as the pain they caused us or the pain they caused in other people. We want their pain to be as great as their pleasure, because there is pleasure in sin. That is what eternal judgement is apart from Christ. Sinners have caused pain in so many others, but infinitely

towards God. The sinful desires of your hearts will be carried over to hell. Only in Jesus Christ can we be forgiven because He takes that eternal destruction on the cross.

When we say “judgement,” there are two aspects of judgement: location and degree of pleasure or pain. Location is either heaven or hell. It depends on your faith in Jesus Christ. But your degree of pleasure or pain depends on your love for Jesus Christ on this earth. Our hearts are like bowls. Whenever you sin, your bowl grows. Whenever you live for God, your bowl grows. Our sin nature will go away and heaven will be how much we love Christ. There is a degree of a reward difference in heaven. God is going to pour His grace and He wants to give us more, but it is how much we can receive, and that capacity is determined on how we live on this earth for Christ. It is how much our love for Christ grows in this world. Judgement is coming. Everything will be evaluated; therefore, we cannot do whatever we want.

Conclusion

This piece of toilet paper is important because this is our life, but it is not everything. Life goes one and on into eternity, and that depends all on our life on earth. What you choose now and how you live in this world is important. Sometimes you need to deny yourself of sinful pleasures that will destroy you in order to choose pleasure that will be eternal for God’s glory.

God has conflicting desires. When we need help, God wants to help us, but He also has to choose what is best for you. Don’t judge Him in a simple way. We’re thinking about three things but He’s thinking about a billion things. God’s ultimate desire is our eternal happiness and His eternal glory. God gives just enough and takes away just enough for our good and for His glory. He says just enough “yes” and “no” to our prayers for His glory.

The conflicting desires of God are ultimately shown on the cross. Though we deserved wrath, God wanted to save us so He poured His wrath on His own Son so that we could receive His eternal love. As God restrains Himself to help us and save us at times so we can grow and glow for His glory, are for our eternal happiness and joy for His eternal glory.

This ought to be our life principle. If you want eternal happiness, eternal joy, eternal pleasure, deny yourself in this life and your selfish pleasures. Take up your cross daily and follow Him. Your life will be filled with displaying of His glory.