Clothed With Christ – Freedom From and Freedom To

1. Our prayers are for all of you on the road, for all who are celebrating and having long delayed family time, and for those who have a hard time with the noises and flashes in the air that bring joy to their neighbors. We will keep our eyes and hearts open for all of you.

2. As in the reading today from Galatians 5, we are warned by the Apostle Paul not to let anyone take away our freedom in Christ. If "church" to you has seemed rigid, formal and full of arbitrary rules, this verse won't resonate with you on first reading. Some churches explain it away – which all humans are quite skilled at doing. – so that words and phrases end up meaning the opposite of what they actually say ("good news", "freedom").

3. We are called to freedom and that is a multi-faceted, inner and outer concept, just as love and peace were when we covered them earlier in this series. You see, our religion is supposed to be inner and outer. What is changed on the inside should change what comes out of us and what we say and do as we work out our faith should change our inner lives.

4. I am a better Christian outside than inside. While some of the room nods in empathy at that statement, I've heard from a great many people that their problem is that they are much better Christians inside than they are outside. I get that. That is the way human behavior works – the inner affects the outer and vice versa.

5. How can I have freedom in Christ in a way that shows I am clothed with Christ, inside and out? The first thing to understand is that our freedom is a freedom from and a freedom to.

6. We are freed from our sins, obviously…but even that is a multi-faceted thing. We are forgiven and that is quite freeing by itself. (1st John 1:3) We are being continually cleansed from our sins along the way, yes, but we are also being cleansed as Jesus draws us nearer to him, nearer to the light, showing us what sin really is. We are being turned away from sin and from even wanting to sin because we see it as he sees it (in time – this is a process).

7. We are freed from trying to find all our joy, all our happiness, and all our pleasure right now, in this lifetime.

8. We are also freed from the law (Romans 7:6). Paul spent a lot of time talking about this and there is no way to adequately cover the subject in this lesson. In fact, I don't think preaching is the way to tackle it. We might develop a class that takes an hour a week to cover it – but that will have to wait until the core team has more bandwidth than it does right now!

9. For now, suffice it to say that people make several errors about the law and our faith community today. They either say it failed and was thrown aside, or that it needs to be brought back in somewhat (trying to make Christianity a hybrid religion), or they ignore it and just hand out the NT and Psalms.

10. We ARE under law. Our law is to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength and to love our neighbor as ourself. Jesus says that fulfills the law and, as we saw when we went over the Ten Commandments, the Old Law was built on love even when that is not obvious at first glance.

11. The right kind of law brings freedom. The laws governing how we drive allow me the freedom to drive with a fairly high degree of confidence that I will arrive unharmed. The law of love is freeing and restrictive all at the same time…but the restrictions bring us freedom as well (from regret, harm to self and others, broken homes).

12. We are also free from goods and stuff. We have been freed from trying to gain all our power, goods and status on this earth in this lifetime. (Consider the lilies of the field… Matthew 6:25-34)

13. We have also been freed TO. Jesus broke the mold and ate with sinners. He served others even though he outranked them. He loved people even when that made other people not love him. As he is our Lord and Savior and example in the faith, we are free to follow him in this freedom.

14. Just as we mentioned last week, clutter seems to show up. It isn't planned, but clutter happens. What happens to our homes, cars,

purses, and lives also happens in our faith. Things are added on. Assumptions are made. Traditions become law. Freedom evaporates. The next generation rebels against the clutter and, often, against the God they think is responsible for it…and that is tragic.

15. So, strip it down. Make it simple. What are the bare bones here? We are free to help someone without meetings, clearances, or checking them for doctrinal correctness.

16. We are free to join with others in feeding, clothing, and caring for others without meetings, clearances, or checking them for doctrinal correctness.

17. We are free to eat with, love and befriend people who we KNOW are not doctrinally or morally correct…all without meetings, clearances or permission, because that is the way Jesus did it and that is why so many of them quit their lives of sin and followed him.

18. It wasn't shame that healed them. It wasn't disdain or distance that healed them. It was patient love and grace given to them freely by one who, themselves, was freed by Christ.

19. Galatians 5:1,6, 13,14.