

## September 2, 2007 • "Freedom Vs. Narcissim" Matt Chandler

Galatians 5, that's where we're going to be. We won't flip anywhere else. We're going to be there for our whole time together this morning. Let me pray and then we'll get started. "Father, I ask for Your help. I know that the things we'll discuss are really kind of counter-cultural, maybe the most counter-cultural thing we've done here so far. And so, I just ask for Your help. And I think my prayer overall is just that You would give us new lenses by which to see the world around us. I don't want to motivate this morning if I could be honest with You, Father. I just want Your power to be evident and that You change the way we see the entire world around us. So help. I can't preach these things into being. Your Holy Spirit will have to work and move in them. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."

Galatians 5, let me tell you where we're going. We're simply going to walk through this text. We're going to start in verse 13, and we'll end at the end of the chapter. And we're just going to read a line or two and then talk about it, read a line or two and talk about it. This text is going to put two things at odds. One is freedom and the other one is narcissism, and it's basically going to say that you can't get both of them. You can either be free or you can be narcissistic, but narcissism is never going to lead to freedom. You'll see what I'm talking about as we dig into this text, so let's look at it. "*For you were called to freedom, brothers.*" Now, I want to stop here. Basically, this is the gospel saying, "Christ has come, I have invited you into fellowship, Christ has come and bled and died on the cross so that you might be free." And just to be completely honest with you, freedom is the root desire in every man's and every woman's heart. It is the driving force behind everything we do. All of us born into a fractured world feel the weight of that fracture from very early on. And so, we start trying to fix that yearning and that longing inside of us. And so everybody in this room, the reason are driven or you are lazy, the reason that you're pursuing relationships or you're hiding from relationships, the reason you're honest or the reason you're a liar is that you are searching for freedom. Freedom from the things that haunt you, freedom from that gnawing inside of you, freedom from the things that weigh you down, freedom from that inner turmoil, we're all seeking it, we all want it. And the claim of Christ is, "I've called you to it." That's the claim of Christ. And then look at what He says next. "*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.*" So here's where you've got the first division of the two ideas. Here's what he says, that all of you are after freedom, all of you are after wholeness, all of you are looking for the reestablishment of that rhythmic life that God instituted before sin entered into the world. But here's what you've got to do. In the end, freedom has not been given to you and won't be given to you so that it might terminate on you, but rather the true way to freedom is when you can finally give of yourself and give yourself away. This is a very opposite idea than the one our culture operates under, but we'll get more into that momentarily. Let's look at this. "*For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*" Which means, you look at your neighbor and go, "There is just as much human dignity in them as there is in me. They're worthy of service, worthy of love. Now, look at this next line. I read this to my two year old yesterday. "*But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*" Here's what He's saying. The gift of freedom and wholeness and the vitality given to walk in those things is robbed or removed from the man or woman who's absolutely combative about all of life. And listen, the root cause of almost quarrel and all combat is selfishness at the root of the person. This is what the book of James is going to say when it says, "Why do you quarrel? Why are there fights among you? Isn't it because you're just selfish?" So the vitality given to walk in freedom, walk in wholeness, walk in the fullness of life is removed from us when we're constantly biting and nibbling, and you'll see why that is as we continue to read.

Let's look at this. Anyone who's tried to submit to the Lord, these next two verses really resonate. *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 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.”* Now listen to how big this is. Here's what just happened. Inside of each and every one of us, there's this desire to be free, to walk in freedom, to walk in wholeness, to walk in depth and it burns inside of us and we're trying to pursue it and we're trying to chase it but there's this opposite, there's this reciprocity thing happening, there's this opposite pull that's “No, me, self, I'm going to get freedom and wholeness by pursuing what I want and what I'm after and what makes me happy.” And although what we want is freedom and wholeness, we perpetually and constantly buy into an exposed lie that our own pursuits is what's finally going to be that thing that fills us. And so it starts very, very early. I remember having this thought, “I can't wait to get to high school.” And then I got to high school and then I was like, “I can't wait to get a car.” And then I got the car and I was like, “I can't wait to get a different car.” A Datsun Maxima. They don't even make Datsuns anymore. They moved to Nissan. And then, “I can't wait 'til I graduate.” You can fill in the story. You did it too. “Okay, I can't wait 'til I get a good job...okay, I can't wait to find a woman...okay, I want a different kind of woman...okay, I want kids...okay, I want my kids to go to high school and college and leave my house...okay, I want to retire...okay I want...” And here's what happens. The majority of our society, as a whole, perpetually believe that by fulfilling our own desires we're going to finally find freedom and once we can get to this level of life, this level of goal, this level of job, this level of house, this level of relationship, as soon as we can get there, then there's freedom, then there's wholeness, then there's joy, then there's happiness. But when you get to this level, where did the bar go? Up. And so you work even harder and you get to that level, and where did the bar go? Yeah. So what happens is, time after time after time after time, life teaches you that self-seeking does nothing but leave a wake of destruction, in your own heart, in the lives of those around you. Narcissism is this unbelievably destructive force, yet the majority of us are buying into the lie that by being self-created, by being self-seeking, that's our only shot at joy, at depth, at wholeness, at freedom despite the fact that our lives are a screaming testimony to the untruth of that. And this is what this text is talking about. There's this absolute war inside of us where we want to be free, we want to be whole, but this battle inside of us keeps us from doing and getting the one thing we want. And the majority of us will never be able to recognize it, we're just going to keep doing it. And here's the thing. This little battle between the flesh and narcissism and the desire for freedom in the gospel, you have to put narcissism to death not one time but constantly for the rest of your life. And then sometimes, you can put him to death when you wake up in the morning and he comes back at 11:00 with his brother. And then you can put it down again and he comes back with his brother and four of his cousins that night. I mean, it's kind of one of these things that has to be perpetually dealt with, has to be killed, has to be laid down and said, “No no no, You're what I'm after. You're what I want...”

Because look at the fruit of these two ways of living. Look at verse 18. *“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality,...”* So let's just stop and let me prove this to you. Let me show you how sexual immorality is narcissism. God has gifted us with sex. It wasn't the devil's idea. Go back and read Genesis 1 and 2. The devil doesn't show up and go, “I know. I'll throw sex in there and get them.” Nor was it God's gift simply for procreation. And I know this because of the book of Song of Solomon. “Eat and drink your fill, you lovers.” Not “You had better be trying to have a baby. If not, I'm killing everyone.” No, He's like, “Enjoy her. Do you see her body? Enjoy it. Do you see his body? Enjoy it.” It was a gift. “Be fruitful, multiply.” You know how that happens? So you've got this gift, but in the confines of how God created it, it was this very mutually beneficial, intimate, life giving gift from God. Now when you step outside of God's design for it, what you're doing is this. On the male front, we're going, “I don't

care about the woman's soul, I don't care about her mind, I don't care about her emotions, I don't care about her past and I don't care about her future. I care about my needs and my physical desires, and I will use her to get those fulfilled. And then the same thing happens when a woman just says, "I'll use the man just to meet physical needs now." It's narcissism. It's this, "I'm god. I'm god. I decide. I decide who I use, what I do, what I don't do. I decide." Sexual immorality is a god complex. A little g, really crummy god, but that's what it is. And anything on this list, you could do that to. "...*sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery...*" Isn't sorcery you trying to be god? "Forget submitting to the living God. I'll try to do some kind of incantation and pull up a spirit to do my bidding." There's not a lot of sorcerers in here. Let's keep going. "...*strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy...*" Isn't all that narcissistic? It's "They have what I want. I should have it. It's no fair that they got it. They only got it because they're a scoundrel." Isn't that it? Is not the root of envy narcissism? "I deserve that. I should have that." Rivalries. What are rivalries birthed out of? "I should have that. That should be mine. It's unfair that they have that. They got it by some unjust means. I and I alone am the just god of the universe who deserves all the right rewards." Yeah, it's narcissism. It's absolutely devastating. "...*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.*"

I want to stop and say a word here. When I first started coming to church, I would hear passages like these read, and I would always just go, "Alright, I guess I'm out." Because I could find myself on that list. Anyone else? Yeah, just those who can and liars, which by the way, you just found yourself on the list. And so, I could find myself on that list. I would hear, "...those who do these things, you don't get the kingdom of God." So I'd hear that and go, "Alright, I'm out." So I was always wildly confused about why people would sing to the Lord and be so happy about the fact that they were out. But in the end, if you want to know why we're here and want to know why when we sing songs, some people raise their hands...if you're trying to pick up on what's happening there, because I know it's crazy. Is there any other place in our society where people get together and sing songs and lift their hands and clap and talk? It's just a real weird deal. Do you know what happened? What happened is, while we were walking in envious spirits, while we were sorcerers, while we were drunkards, while we were filled with strife and fits of rage, while we were those things, Christ died for us. Every other religious system out there says that God will love you if you do, but God showed up in this one and says, "You've done enough. I got it." And that's a wildly different framework.

So now listen to what's next. "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love...*" I want to stop here and show you how this is the opposite of narcissism. In the Hebrew, I think there's four words for "love," three major ones. In the Greek, there are three, maybe four major ones. In English, we have one word for "love" that's used interchangeably in any way we want to use it. So we *love* college football, unless we're a Michigan fan. We *love* our car, we *love* the fall, we *love* our wives, we *love* tacos, we *love* fajitas. But surely we're not saying the same thing there. Surely we're not saying, "I love my wife and I love fajitas, and that's the same thing. I'm talking about the exact same thing there...I love college football, I love my wife. I'm talking about the same thing there. That's the exact same thing." No, we just kind of use that word interchangeably, but how we use it most of the time in our culture is in a more self-seeking narcissistic way. And let me tell you just how deep it is. For most of us, love works like this: "I love them because...I love them because they're very attractive. In fact, they're more attractive than all the rest of my crew's girls, so I love her. I love her because she does this...I love him because he's romantic...I love..." Well in the end, our love is a response to some external action being put upon us by another. But that's not what's being discussed in this text. This text is "The fruit of the Spirit is love," period, love that is not based off of an external action but rather one that simply goes out. That's a whole different kind of love. It's the kind of love that says, "I don't love you because you're pretty and I don't love you because you're nice and I don't love you because you're romantic and I don't love

you because you do things, but for whatever reason, the Spirit has stirred something in my heart and I want to serve you and love you and walk with you.” That’s a very different kind of love.

Let’s keep going. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,…” Don’t read “happiness” there but rather joy. And what I would define joy as is just a deep-seated confidence in the goodness of God despite circumstances. Which means things can go really, really dark for us, and you still have this deep-seated, “God is still good.” Let’s keep going. “...*peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*” I love that line. A couple of things I want you to notice. First, these traits that the text is naming out here are birthed out of the Holy Spirit’s work in our heart and not other people’s treatment of us. Now, how free are you, truly free and truly whole if you can operate in goodness and joy and peace and love and all of these things, faithfulness, if you can operate in these things regardless of external circumstances? How free are you? I love the Pauline epistles and the writings of Paul and the Scriptures, and I’ve said this since I got here: he had to be the most frustrating man alive for those who hated the gospel. There isn’t a picture of a more free man than the one we get of the apostle Paul in these epistles outside of God in the flesh. I mean, they literally go, “Uh, quit it or we’ll kill you.” “To die is gain. How are we doing this?” “Alright, never mind. We’ll let you live.” “To live is Christ.” “Alright, we’ll pelt you with rocks and torture you and beat the mess out of you.” “Well I do not even count the light, momentary troubles of this life as worthy to be compared to the future glory. So throw your rocks, baby. Let’s go. I love that. That’s more for me. Let’s go.” “Alright, well we’ll lock you in the prison.” “Well, give me a hymnal. I’ll be worshipping while I’m in the stocks.” I mean, what do you do with that guy? How free is he? You take his stuff and he’s like, “I’ve been wealthy, I’ve been poor. I guess I’m poor again.” I mean, what do you do to this guy? “Let’s kill his friends.” “Praise God, they’re home.” Let me give you this example of the freedom that he walks in. In the book of Acts, as he’s headed towards Jerusalem, at every town he stops in the elders of the church in that town say, “God has told us that if you get to Jerusalem, you’re going to die. They’re going to kill you.” And Paul’s response was, “I know. He told me that too.” Tomorrow morning, I’m hopping on an airplane to Asia. Bright in the morning, I’ve got to be at the airport at 5:00AM, and if like five or six of you came up to me now and said, “The Lord told me to tell you don’t get on that plane,” I would send Patterson to Asia, because we have faith in God. We’ll send and I’ll take another flight. We both can’t go down together. One of us has to live...and I vote me. But you can see, here’s the disjoint. Apparently, I’m not as free. Because Paul goes, “Ah, it’s just death. There’s a better thing coming.” In essence, Paul says this, “There are worse things than death.” And he goes and he got his head cut off, by the way, not until he converts half the palace guard in Rome. This is freedom. It’s not freedom to get to a place of safety or get to a place of accumulation or get to a stature among our peers. That’s what we think is getting us freedom and wholeness, but all the objective evidence says that we’re nowhere near that. In fact, it seems like the safer we get and the more we more we accumulate, the more inner turmoil spirals out of control. It’s really weird.

So let’s keep reading. I don’t have much time to talk about this, but it says, “*against such things there is no law.*” If you’ve ever watched any Christian movies, and I never recommend them, if you remember the old ones in the 70’s about the tribulation, if you ever see some future version of what the U.S. looks like, it’s always like they’re killing all the Christians and they won’t let us meet anymore and somehow the guillotine is back. Anyway, that’s a really weird deal, but if you watch that, there’s this, “Oh we’re in trouble. There’s all these laws against us.” And there might be some days where there are some laws against us, but let me tell you what there will never be a law against: Love, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control. But there might be a day where it’s illegal for us to meet, there might be a day where we’re actively persecuted. It’s hard to imagine, but it’s swung like that before. But there will never be a law against me patiently and kindly serving my neighbor, ever. And one of the things that the church had better wake up and realize as we quickly approach a post-

Christian society is we've got to get our head out of evangelism and get our head into service and witness. Those are two very different ideas.

Let's finish this text out. *“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”* Sometimes they do it multiple times a day. *“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”* So let me tell you how this works itself out at the Village. I know a guy here who moved into his house and it's actually here in Highland Village. And at the house next to his, the yard was just bad, like Amazon Basin bad. And so, he was like, “What in the world? I pay like \$42,000 a year for the H.O.A. Why aren't they managing this? They're complaining about my trashcan in my backyard being visible from the street somehow, and here we are with this. I can't get this person to mow their lawn.” Well, he comes to find out it's an elderly widow who's got limited resources. And so, he's like, “Oh, I'm an idiot.” And now he mows her lawn. The first time he did it, he had to get a group of friends and a chainsaw or two, but they got in there and they worked and they cleaned it all up and they plant her flowers now and they take care of her beds and they do all those things for her. And this is one of the ways this works out. Love, joy, peace, patience...this is a transformed life saying, “This woman has dignity. I'm going to serve her.” There's another group that I've already told you about that goes downtown and hands out cheeseburgers and toothpaste and toothbrushes and socks and shoes. And there's another group that feeds the day laborers breakfast burritos once a week. And then there's a thousand other stories of simple service, simple love, believing that something's bigger than us, seeing the world through lenses of “My money, my home, my family, these things are not mine. I am a steward of these things for God.” And then people have done really crazy things here, like insane things, very unsafe things. Like do you know that there have been men and women here who work at this house for abused women, and they've taken women from that house and housed them in their homes? I mean, do you know what kind of people they might be? They might steal some stuff. God forbid the abusive husband find out where we've hidden them. I mean listen, she's got issues or she would not have married somebody who's abusive. I mean, that's pretty insane, isn't it? So you've got the gospel going out, going, “Ah, yeah this is a risk. Yeah, they might steal my stuff. Yeah, the husband might show up, but I'm going to serve, I'm going to love, I'm going to give. And I could go on and on, but here's where it gets even crazier. What's happened is that, not only has this happened locally, but some people have taken this thing globally, and not professional Christians. Because there's professional Christians, most of them are lost. But they're just people, doctors and coaches and businessmen. All of a sudden, they start doing insane things like using their vacation to go to Zambia. Who does that? There's a million orphans in Zambia. 25% of the population has AIDS. Who takes their family to Zambia? Who goes to the Amazon on vacation? Well I know...22 year old testosterone filled morons, of course. Who takes their family there? Well, people from here. These are certain things we didn't start, we didn't do, no program of ours. Some of this will be, but some of this is just people being moved by the power of the gospel and finally getting bored. I'll let you watch it. They say it a lot better than I can.

[Video]

For some of you, it will be hard for me to convince you, but I promise you there are things better in life than safety and trinkets. I've seen this video tons now, and I think the haunting part for me is little Hannah talking about watching that little boy lick his shoes coming in and then the little girl jumping up and down going, “I can't believe it...I can't believe it...I can't believe it.” Because I can't think of anything that my daughter or son owns that they feel that way about. In fact, new shoes to them simply mean that they are probably getting an outfit to match them. It's definitely getting asked for. So how do I teach Audrey, how do I teach Reid, how do I teach them that this is such a tiny piece of the world

that they live in and the majority of the world doesn't get what they get? I think you have to take them. And then, can we be honest for a second? I know this is church and not the place for that, but you've got to admit, you're bored. And with every new device and every new pair of pants and every bit of new flooring or new car or vacation, that continues to drive that deeper and deeper because you were created for bigger things, riskier things. So at war in your soul and in mine right now is the war for freedom and the costly mistake that narcissistic desires will get us there. My hope is that here at this place, He would put to death self-gratifying fleeting pleasures and that He would continue to call us to freedom and that the Spirit would create love in us, joy in us, peace in us, patience in us, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. These are the fruits of the Spirit.