cancellation. The REB translates verse 47 correctly: "So, I tell you, her great love proves that her many sins have been forgiven."

The *declaration of forgiveness* is the good news that Jesus brings. The profound pronouncement, "Your sins have been forgiven," is the welcomed revelation that God's eschatological forgiveness (hence the perfect passive) is made known in Jesus' wonderful activity. The astounding pronouncement was a source of dissent in Luke 5:20–21; here it is a source of puzzlement for the dinner guests ("who is this who even forgives sins?").

A host invites Jesus to dinner and thoughtlessly receives his guest as a stranger. A woman intrudes and performs a striking display of thoughtfulness that marks the appreciation of a hostess who is especially indebted to her guest. The "normal," routine response to the intrusion is made to seem odd, and the "unusual," affectionate display of gratitude is made to seem natural. In this way the Lukan story illustrates a pattern common to the Gospels: The familiar is made to seem strange—and the strange familiar.

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Galatians 5:1, 13–25

DURING THE SEASON OF PENTECOST, we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church, and reflect on how we as God's people are to live under the guidance and enabling power of that Spirit. It is an extended season in which we examine the various facets of the Christian life and are aided to grow into the measure of the fullness of Christ. It is highly appropriate, therefore, that the Pentecost lectionary during Year B directs our thoughts to Galatians, for in this letter Paul struggles mightily to present his understanding of the Christian life in opposition to erroneous ideas of Christian "fullness" that had arisen within the church. What had happened to make such a letter necessary?

Paul had founded the largely gentile congregations of Galatia. After his departure, however, itinerant missionaries—"full-gospel" preachers—arrived on the scene, arguing that the gospel Paul had preached was deficient and therefore in need of supplementation. Fairly quickly, it seems, the Galatians were hoodwinked into believing that they must adopt the Jewish practice of circumcision (i.e., they must become Jews) in order fully to secure for themselves a place among the people of God. It also seems that in an attempt to embrace a more complete gospel and to secure for themselves the reality and benefits of the Christian life, they began to supplement Paul's

gospel by incorporating elements of the local folk religion (4:9–10).

The Christian beginnings for these Galatians were marked by a tremendous experience of the Spirit (cf. 3:1–5). Why, then, did they come to view Paul's gospel and their own Christian experience as somehow incomplete? What made them vulnerable to "full-gospel" preaching? Perhaps, as H. D. Betz speculates, when the initial period of spiritual enthusiasm passed, the Galatians found themselves struggling with the concrete realities of daily existence, and they yearned for manageable lists of do's and don'ts for Christian living (*Galatians*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], p. 273). Whatever their motives, Paul sees all such efforts to supplement the gospel as a denial of the gospel itself, that is, as an unwillingness to trust the sufficiency of God's saving action in Christ and a retreat into the old bankrupt patterns of do-it-yourself religion. In response, he writes the angriest, the most passionate of all his recorded letters. He vigorously combats the idea that Christ's death and resurrection, that is, "the cross," are an insufficient basis for Christian living. For him, the Christian life is "life in Christ." It is grounded in God's action alone. Indeed, Paul argues that everything the Galatians hope to gain by supplementing the gospel, they already have as a gift of God's grace. That grace is sufficient for their new life in Christ. To suggest that it needs supplementary actions on the part of the believer is to deny the sufficiency of what God has already done, as well as the adequacy of the Spirit's power to sustain and make new their lives.

In Galatians 5:1, 13–25, one of the lections for the sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Paul's point becomes patently clear. This text follows four chapters of intense polemics and marks the point at which Paul begins to draw his conclusion in a positive way. At least five points warrant consideration for our Pentecostal reflection, as we ponder the nature and contours of the Christian life.

(1) First of all, Paul reminds his readers (none too gently) that *freedom is a central characteristic of the Christian life.* Indeed, the emphatic affirmations he makes in 5:1 and 13 are pivotal ones. They summarize the argument of the entire letter: "For *freedom* Christ has set us free" (5:1) and "you were called to *freedom,* brothers and sisters" (5:13). These words give expression to what is sometimes referred to as the "indicative of salvation." Freedom *is* the reality of the Christian's situation before God and therefore before the world. But to what does Paul refer when he speaks of "freedom"? It is important that we not misunderstand or misconstrue him on this point. The freedom of which he speaks is not freedom of speech or choice or self-expression. Neither is it the absence of economic, social, or political oppression nor the right to do as we please (cf. Charles Cousar, *Galatians*, Interpretation [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982] pp. 107–10). The freedom of which the apostle speaks is a divine gift, grounded in the liberating work of God in Jesus Christ. We are free because God in Christ has set us free.

When we speak of Christian freedom, we should also recognize that from Paul's perspective there is no such thing as an autonomous individual. Human beings are creatures, contingent beings, and as such are always subject to some lordship—if not the lordship of God the Creator, then that of some other, unworthy lord. The human problem is that we have chosen for ourselves other lords who are not worthy of our submission and find ourselves in bondage to them; however, God in Christ has freed us from bondage to unworthy, tyrannical lordships (cf. 1:4; 2:19–20; 3:13, 23–28; 4:1–10). We live no longer as slaves, in bondage to tyrannical masters, either without or within, but as adopted children of God. "God has sent the Spirit of the Son into our hearts crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (4:6).

Paul is quick to note, however, that Christian freedom is not a "possession" but a reality in which we are to live. Thus, in both verses 1 and 13, the "indicative of salvation" is connected with an "ethical imperative." In verse 1, after reminding the Galatians of their freedom given in Christ, Paul exhorts them to "stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." As Paul notes, we have been set free to live in the sphere of God's lordship. We have been set free in the service of God. But if we do not live in that freedom, we may find ourselves in bondage to former masters. Paul recognizes that sometimes we are afraid to exercise this freedom and are even tempted to surrender it. Why? Because freedom entails assuming responsibility for our own actions, so that we live as sons and daughters of God. Because freedom entails risk at the hands of those who feel threatened by our freedom, as the cross of Christ reminds us. Because freedom entails trust of our lives to God, as Paul himself came to recognize.

(2) The contours of the Christian life come into even clearer focus when the call to freedom is connected with a second "ethical imperative." In verse 13, Paul urges his readers not to use their freedom "as an opportunity for self-indulgence" but, through love, to "become slaves to one another." Thus, it becomes clear that *love is the proper exercise of Christian freedom.* It is in serving one another in love that we embrace, concretize, and give true expression to the freedom that has been granted us in Jesus Christ.

The exhortation to "love," however, is so familiar to Christian congregations that it is liable to slide right by. It is therefore important to note that the love of which Paul speaks is more than the warm feeling one has toward another. It is more than that emotion extolled in greeting cards as "the feeling you feel when you feel you're going to feel a feeling you never felt before." The love of which Paul speaks is the kind that seeks the well-being of others and is expressed in concrete efforts on their behalf. This kind of love is modeled on the concrete self-giving of God in Jesus Christ. Paradoxically, Paul describes it as a form of mutual enslavement: "become slaves to one another" (v. 13). The free exercise of love is appropriately spoken of as a form of slavery, but not because it is coerced. Rather, having been freed

from fear and self-concern by the liberating work of Jesus Christ, we voluntarily extend ourselves and devote ourselves to the welfare of others.

Paul's use of the present tense in his injunction to "become slaves of one another" indicates that he regards love as a continuous attitude and activity of the Christian life. He notes, however, that such is not the attitude or activity being manifest among the Galatians (v. 15). Instead, they are behaving like animals! Paul also notes, with rising irony, that if they would but choose to exercise their freedom in love instead of in self-interest and ferocious struggle with one another, there would be no need to "supplement" the gospel with Torah observance—for love fulfills the whole law (v. 14)!

(3) It ought not to be assumed, however, that one extends oneself to one's neighbor in love by the sheer strength of one's own will or by one's own heroic efforts. For Paul establishes, thirdly, (in vs. 16–25) that *the Christian life of freedom and love is guided and made possible by God's own Spirit.* Christians are not left to their own resources, for the Spirit of God dwells within them and produces the love that has been commanded. Thus, Paul exhorts his readers to "walk by the Spirit," that is, to live by the power of God available to them, the very power of God that first gave them life (3:1–5).

When conveying the affirmations Paul makes in verses 16–25, however, interpreters should be alert to two difficulties that have the potential to distort the way in which these verses fall on modern ears. The first is a translation difficulty that afflicts many modern renditions of verse 16. Consider, for example, the NRSV, which renders the two clauses in verse 16 as two parallel comands: "*Live* by the Spirit, I say, and *do not gratify* the desires of the flesh." But as commentators have frequently noted, the second clause ought not to be rendered as a demand but as an emphatic promise: "*Walk* by the Spirit, and *you will not gratify* the desires of the flesh" (cf. JB or NEB). So understood, verse 16 expresses Paul's confidence that if we walk by the Spirit, relying on the power of God that is available to us, then we will not, in fact, gratify the desires of the flesh. We will be able to resist and conquer them.

What does Paul mean, however, when he speaks of "flesh" (*sarx*) and "Spirit" (*pneuma*)? This is the second difficulty to which interpreters should be alert, for Paul's understanding of "flesh" and "Spirit" is easily and frequently misunderstood. Modern ears are likely to hear "flesh" as a reference to the body or to sexuality; and once again, modern translations do not help us when they render *sarx* as "lower nature" (NEB), as "sinful nature" (NIV), or as "physical desires" (GNB). Likewise, "Spirit" may be heard as a reference to a something nonmaterial and ghostly, a reference perhaps to our "higher nature." Thus, the preacher or teacher must be clear at this point, because these are not the associations that Paul has in mind.

It is important to understand that, to Paul's way of thinking, "flesh" and

"Spirit" do not designate two parts of human nature but rather represent two ways of living. Both "flesh" and "Spirit" are ways of characterizing the *whole* self in relation to God. *"Flesh,"* on the one hand, describes human nature as a whole when it is dominated by sin and thus has broken away from God. It denotes a self-centered existence, in which the entire perspective of the human being is turned in upon himself or herself, so that the self becomes the center of all values. Life in the *"Spirit,"* on the other hand, is life set free from bondage to self, sin, and law. It denotes life in bondage to the Creater, life which freely acknowledges God's lordship and God's son Jesus Christ. Moreover, when Paul speaks of the "Spirit," he refers not to a human spirit but to God's Spirit, an eschatological gift of power. "Flesh" and "Spirit," then, are each domains of power, spheres of influence in which one lives.

The radical opposition between these two ways of living, these two orientations, these two spheres of influence is sharply stated in verses 16-25. Indeed, the human creature is caught in a tug-of-war, a pitched battle, between the two. Paul boldly contrasts the chaotic "works of the flesh" (vs. 19–21) with the "fruit of the Spirit" (vs. 22–23) in hopes that his readers will be persuaded to entrust themselves to the all-sufficient power of God. Notice Paul's language. "*Live* by the Spirit," he writes. "Be *guided* by the Spirit." Let God's Spirit reap its "*fruit*" in your lives. These are not new rules of the road. These are the "fruit" of life lived in the domain of the Spirit. In fact, Paul assures his readers that "those who belong to Jesus Christ," those who have shared in his death in baptism, have been empowered to embrace a new way of life: They "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (v. 24).

(4) In the catalogue of the "works of the flesh" and the "fruit of the Spirit" (vs. 19–23), another aspect of the Christian life comes to the fore: *Christian existence is essentially corporate in character.* To Paul's way of thinking, there is no such thing as a freelance Christian. To be a Christian is to be incorporated into a community of faith. Thus, it may be observed that the "works of the flesh" and the "fruit of the Spirit" are detailed in largely communal categories.

It is generally acknowledged that Paul draws upon a traditional catalogue of virtues and vices in verses 19–23. Lists of this sort were popular in both Jewish and Hellenistic ethical instruction. However, Paul has modified these traditional lists in significant ways. It may be observed, for example, that the chaotic "works of the flesh" can be divided into subgroups: The list begins with what appear to be three sexual practices followed by two religious aberrations, and the list concludes with two forms of excessive behavior. In between, Paul has augmented the traditional catalogue with a long central list of eight "vices" that detail offenses against the internal peace of a community: "enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy" (NRSV). These are sins against community. The self-centered orientation of the "flesh" manifests itself in ways that are destructive of *koinonia.*

The catalogue of "fruit of the Spirit" is also social in nature, but it enumerates graces that nurture *koinonia*, that build up community and enable its people to deal with conflicts in a constructive way. Paul has no doubt seen to it that "love" heads the list, for it is, in his view, the "chief" Christian virtue (cf. I Cor. 13; Gal. 5:13–14). Indeed, as Victor Furnish has observed, "This list may be regarded as a description of the concrete ways in which love is expressed" (*Theology and Ethics in Paul* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968], p. 88). It should be noted, however, that the manifestations of love are not described as "works." To the contrary, Paul avoids any suggestions that they are human accomplishments. Instead, they are described pointedly as the "fruit" of the Spirit. They are to be understood as the result of the transforming power and presence of God's own Spirit, which dwells within. They are manifestations of the gift of God in human lives.

(5) Finally, Paul's discussion reminds us that the *Christian life requires imagination and risk.* It is interesting that as Paul speaks of the Christian life, he studiously avoids providing the Galatians with a comprehensive list of rules and regulations, even though this perceived "deficiency" on his part may have given rise to their attempts to supplement his gospel in the first place. Paul indicates the contours of the Christian life with broad sweeping strokes: "Stand fast in freedom" . . . "through love become slaves of one another" . . . "walk by the Spirit." But the demands of freedom are not detailed there. The limits of love are not prescribed. Why? Because as free and trusted sons and daughters of God, we are to fill in the gaps. Because we are free in Christ, we are to discern the concrete shape that freedom and love are to take in the midst of our ever-changing cultural contexts and in the midst of the varied circumstances of our individual lives. Because God has made us free, Paul trusts that God's Spirit will guide us—stirring our imaginations and emboldening us for new risks of faith and obedience.

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