

“THE PERFECT MOTHER”

Galatians 5:13-25 May 12, 2026

Once a young man was walking through a **supermarket** to pick up a few things when he noticed an old lady following him around. Thinking nothing of it, he ignored her and continued shopping. Finally he went to the checkout line, but she got in front of him.

"Pardon me," she said, **"I'm sorry if my staring at you has made you feel uncomfortable. It's just that you look just like my son, who I haven't seen in a long time."**

"That's a shame," replied the young man, "is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," she said, **"as I'm leaving, can you say 'Good bye, Mother!' It would make me feel so much better."**

"Sure," answered the young man. So the old woman put her items up on the counter, they were calculated and bagged and put in her cart. She leaned over and whispered something to the clerk and as she was leaving, the young man called out, **"Good bye, Mother!"** She smiled and went on her way.

He stepped up to the checkout counter with his small number of items. The clerk ran them through and when the man got ready to pay the clerk told him his total was \$227.50. "How can that be?" he asked, **"I only purchased a few things!"**

"Yes, but your mother said that you would pay for her," said the clerk.

I. THE UNFAIR QUESTION

Being that it's **Mother's Day** I thought I would ask you mothers in the room the following question. **What kind of mother are you?** That is a personnel question, isn't it? But if you were to rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 10, 1 being worst mom ever to 10 best the mom ever, where would you place yourself? Of course, this is **really not a fair question, is it?**

One, what do we use as a measurement of motherhood? Is it the amount of time you spent with your kids, the ability to make last minute cupcakes that your daughter forgot to tell you until just before bedtime, is it the way your children turned out, is it based upon one's emotional demeanor or do you measure your mom rating by the life skills and wisdom you passed on?

Two, the truth is there is no such thing as a “**Perfect Mom**”. Most women are trying to do their best with what they know. There really isn’t a manual for motherhood which will prepare you for every circumstance or every child’s personality. Even if there were such a complete manual it still doesn’t make raising children easy or come out the way you want them to. Being a mom is hard work which is a good reason to celebrate them on this special day.

II. A MATTER OF FREEDOM

One among many parental challenges is the dilemma of when and how much **freedom** do we give our children and conversely how much **control** do we exert. This is not an easy balance to maintain, and it varies with each child. We get caught in the predicament of wanting to protect our children from harm and at the same time, wanting them to grow into independent adults. Of course, our children, especially in those teenage years, never think they have enough freedom, even though they don’t really know what to do with it when they have it. It doesn’t take long for us to realize that our precious little angels are going to abuse the privileges of freedom. That’s just normal.

It might be helpful to see that the **Apostle Paul** wrestled with this very **freedom dilemma** with his churches. He was attempting to teach them how to live together and use appropriately the freedom they had been given in Christ.

Apparently, the lesson wasn’t sticking. **One group** was falling back into the slavery to the **Jewish law code**. They thought following a bunch of rules was going to set them on the right path. What they failed to see was that no amount of religion was going to make a person right with God. Besides that, strict rule makers are not easy to live with because they often care more about the rules than people.

On the other side of the aisle was a group **abusing** their new found freedom in Christ. They reasoned since we are under grace we can now **live as we please**. They missed the idea they were now free to please God. I have to tell you that Galatians is not a happy letter. Like a frustrated mother, Paul is upset because the church there is not getting the **freedom concept** right and they are busy fighting among themselves like immature siblings. But like a loving mother Paul is not ready to give up on them.

III. THE **BALANCE BEAM**

One of my high school gym teachers was a former gymnast. It was amazing to watch him on the trampoline. The height he got off that bouncy surface, let alone the forward and backflips was incredible. Me on the other hand, looked like a fish flopping on the land. However, I wasn't bad on the balance beam. At least I could move forward and backward without falling off.

Paul wants to give the Galatians some balance in their Christian journey before they fall off and crash. He offers these words. **“For you were called to freedom, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become enslaved to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”**

The balance beam of the Church is **love** seen in our service to one another. Love keeps our freedom, our tendency for self-indulgence in check. At the same time, it refines all the rules of faith down to one; act in love. Do what will bless and serve and benefit others, especially those in the body of Christ. Then your freedom in Christ will balance with the rule of Christ. Even though we are not the Galatians, it is always a great check point to ask, **“Is this love?”** especially before we make a major decision, or reply to an issue at hand. If we can't answer **“yes”**, then perhaps we need to rethink our course of action.

IV. THE FLESH

When I was much younger some friends and I used to go **sled riding**. The problem was we didn't always choose the wisest places to do this. One particular park had these narrow downhill hiking trails through the woods. There were trees, roots, and stumps sticking up through the snow and sudden drop offs. It was easy to injure yourself as well as destroy a few sleds. **Of course that didn't stop us.** There we were going down this obstacle course as quickly as we could. I look back and think what crazy nuts we were. But you know living into our Christian faith is not much different. Even with the rule of Love there are obstacles along the way. It is easy to crash.

One of these obstacles, Paul points out, is the problem of the **flesh**. Now when Paul speaks about the flesh here, he is not referring to our physical bodies. He is talking about our mindset, will, desires, attitudes and basically our sin nature which are opposed to God. He is looking at the orientation of the heart, and in the case of the flesh, a heart in **rebellion**. And a

heart in rebellion is seen by the outward results it brings, which Paul names: **sexual immortality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and other issues.** Paul is not creating another do not do list as much as he is telling us the signs of living by the desires of the flesh. Living by the flesh is to live life estranged from and in opposition to God.

The struggle of parenting is in this very area. A rebellious child is very difficult to work with and in some cases nearly impossible. The only thing worse is a rebellious parent. In order for a child to grow up they must give up their rebellion and develop a spirit of cooperation. To be a family, a church, a school district, or a nation for that matter, the parent and child must learn to work together, it's a cooperative endeavor. A parent's job is to teach and train a child so that they might grow into a mature responsible adult. The child's job is to learn. When each is doing their part there is harmony and blessing. But in a house of rebellion there is strife, brokenness and even destruction.

The same could be said for our Christian faith. We might think we gain our freedom, but life in rebellion disconnects us from our true identity in Christ. It produces strife in our relationships. Paul warns us **"If however you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another."** In other words, the end result of rebellion is destruction and death.

V. ANOTHER OPTION

Someone once said, **"I love having options. That way I can spend twice as long making the wrong decision."** I don't know about you all, but I like going to restaurants where the **whole menu** is on **one or two** pages. If there are too many options everything starts to look good and it makes it harder to choose what to eat. Sometimes limited options are actually better.

Well Paul is giving us limited options when it comes to our faith. Either we can live according to the flesh, which leads to destruction and disunity, or we can live according to the Spirit. To Live by the Spirit is to cooperate with the Spirit and live in the fellowship and service with God. When we cooperate, the Holy Spirit develops Christ's character in us, the fruit of which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. All the characteristics that bring harmony, unity, and growth to a church community.

Isn't that the atmosphere we want to have? Choose **Option A** so the freedom in Christ operates in the love of Christ and we convey God's blessing to the world.

VI. **ARE YOU MY MOTHER?**

There is a book I used to read to my young children called **Are You My Mother?** by P.D. Eastman. The story is about a hatchling bird. His mother, leaves her egg alone in the nest and flies off to find food. While she is gone the baby chick hatches. He does not understand why his mother is missing but neither does he know what she looks like, so, he goes searching for her. In his journey, he comes across a kitten, a hen, a dog, and a cow. The baby bird asks each of them, "**Are you my mother?**" They each reply, "**No.**" Of course I would put voices to each of the animals.

The young bird also finds a junk car, a boat, and a plane, calling out to each, "**Are you my mother?**" with no response. Finally, he climbs onto the teeth of an enormous **powered steam shovel**. A loud "**SNORT**" belches from its exhaust stack, prompting the bird to utter, "**You are not my mother! You are a SNORT!**" But as steam shovel rises and grinds into motion, he cannot escape. "**I want my mother!**" he shouts in fear.

However, at this climactic moment, his fate is suddenly reversed. The shovel drops him back in his nest just as his mother is returning home. The two are united, much to their delight, and the baby bird tells his mother about the adventure he had looking for her.

It is in finding his mother that the baby bird discovers himself and where he belongs. His identity comes not in his freedom but in connection with the one who loves him, in this case his mother. Isn't that true for us also? The freedom Christ offers to us only really makes sense, only truly blossoms in our love relationship with God. It is in our connection to the community of faith that we discover the freedom to live out our calling and purpose.

I began this sermon by asking an **unfair question**, "**What kind of mother are you?**" While we could write books on the subject of parenthood, I would hope such a book would include these **three things**. A good mother is one who teaches her children that true freedom is found in loving service to others. A good mother helps her children discover their real identity and home is found in Christ. A good mother, through her character, demonstrates the good life is found in a life of the Spirit, which bears fruit that blesses everyone around her. If

you do those things then you have done very well as a mother. May God bless you on this Mother's Day with all the fruit of the Spirit, now and always. **Amen.**

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, May 10, 2026

Second Scripture Lesson

Galatians 5:13-25

13 For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become enslaved to one another.

14 For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

15 If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

16 Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.

17 For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.

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

19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery,

20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions,

21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

24 And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.