

Christian Liberty, Part 2

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Hear the Word of God from John's Gospel. John's Gospel, chapter 8. And I read in your hearing verses 31 through 36. John 8 and verse 31:

"Jesus therefore said to those Jews that had believed Him, If you abide in My word, then are you truly My disciples, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered unto him, We are Abraham's seed, and have never been in bondage to any man. How do you say that you shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say unto you, every one that commits sin is the bond-slave of sin. And the bond-servant abides not in the house forever, but the Son abides forever. If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

Let us again pray and ask God by His Spirit to illuminate His word to our hearts. Lord Jesus, risen and exalted at the right hand of the Father, present with us according to Your promise by the Spirit, will You not come and be our teacher, opening to our understanding the truth of your words, that whom you set free, that one is free indeed? O Lord, come and be our instructor by the Spirit through the Word we pray.

Now, according to the passage read in your hearing, real freedom and real liberty is to be found only in the words and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. For He said, "If you abide in My word, then are you truly My disciples, and you shall know the truth. and the truth shall make you free." And then in verse 36 he says, "If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." And believing there is no contradiction in Scripture but a beautiful confluence of truth, here we learn that true liberty and true freedom are only to be known in conjunction with the words of Christ and the personal saving work of Christ: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

It is for this reason that whenever the words and work of Jesus as recorded in the Scriptures are taken seriously, the truth of the nature and fruit of Christian liberty becomes a crucial concern to the people of God. And because we are seeking in this place to take seriously the words and the work of Jesus and the liberty that comes in relationship to those realities, we are addressing the subject of Christian liberty. I have entitled this series "A Fresh Look at the Doctrine of Christian Liberty".

And while, as we saw last week, the mention of the term Christian liberty often brings to mind such questions relating to the issues of what kind of movies should I or should I not watch, what kind of beverages should I or should I not drink, what kind of clothing should I or should I not wear, etc., things that are often called the *Adiaphora*, or things indifferent, issues concerning which there is no explicit commandment or prohibition in the Word of God, the doctrine of Christian liberty as a biblical doctrine is

one that does not begin with these issues and certainly does not end with them. It is a much broader issue, and one which we must reckon with in its broader biblical setting if we are to have an accurate answer to those particular questions in that subset of the doctrine of Christian liberty. And so I have suggested the imagery of the foundation of the doctrine of Christian liberty. And that foundation is comprised of two massive pillars, or two massive segments of the foundation, the first being our real condition of slavery and bondage in Adam, and secondly, our real condition of liberty and freedom in Christ.

Last Lord's Day, we focused our attention on the first of these two foundational issues, and I sought to demonstrate from the Word of God our true real bondage in Adam is one in which, according to the Scriptures, these things constitute our bondage, a real bondage. It is a bondage to sin. We are the slaves of sin. We are the slaves of the world. We are the slaves of the devil. We are slaves to the idol of self-serving, and we are slaves to the fear of death.

Now, it is into that situation that God's promise of liberty in Christ comes to us. And so, if we are to appreciate the magnitude and the wonder of the liberty, we must take seriously the horrific reality of the bondage. We must not be like the Jews in Jesus' day when He promised liberty to them. They said, well, we don't need liberty. We've never been in bondage. Why are you telling us if we know the truth and obey the truth and adhere to the Word we'll be free? We'll know the truth and the truth makes us free. Why do we need to be free? We've never been in bondage. Now that could be debated at many levels, but certainly it illustrates the principle that they could not appreciate the liberator and the liberating truth that was before their very eyes because they did not appreciate and understand and feel the reality of their bondage. And so our Lord seeks to bring them to that awareness by saying, whosoever commits sin is indeed the very slave of sin.

And so I say to you in a similar vein, if you have never come to appreciate, come to see and to feel and to grasp the reality of your real condition of slavery and bondage in Adam, you will have no appreciation of what it is to be free in Christ. And nothing is more pathetic than people who have never known the reality of their condition of slavery and bondage in Adam to be talking about Christian liberty when it comes to some of these secondary issues. Because they can only view those issues as the bond slaves of sin, and find some excuse to sin and hide it under the cloak of their so-called Christian liberty. They are still in bondage to the world, and they can only dress up and sprinkle their worldliness with the term "Christian liberty" because they have never seen that they are indeed, by nature, in Adam, slaves of this world system, and so with each of the other strands of that bondage and that slavery.

So we come then this morning with the backdrop of our real condition of slavery and bondage in Adam to take up in one of two messages our real condition of liberty and freedom in Christ. Our real condition. In other words, this liberty and this freedom that is the possession of every believer in Christ is not a religious notion. It is not an idea that something that is another idea called slavery, one idea replaces the other. No, as

really as our chains are about us, those chains that bind us to our sin, to the world, to the devil, to the idol of self-serving, and to the fear of death, as really as those chains bind us, when we are placed out of Adam and into Christ, those chains are really and truly broken. They are not notionally broken, broken in some abstract, detached doctrine of the liberating power of the gospel. No, the hold of sin over us is really, truly broken. The hold of the world over us is really and truly broken. Satan's hold over us is really and truly broken. The idol of self-service is really and truly smashed in our hearts. And the fear of death and its enslaving power is broken. And so I want us to consider then, this morning and God willing, next Lord's Day morning, our real, you see now why I'm using the word, our real condition of liberty and freedom in Christ.

Now let me take a moment to explain why I am using the phrase, "in Christ". I'm using that phrase because it is biblical. And it points to the blessed reality of what we call the doctrine of union with Christ. For example, in Ephesians 1 and verse 3, as Paul begins this marvelous eulogy for a salvation that comes to hell-deserving sinners through the triune Godhead, he breaks out in this expression of praise, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." All of the blessings with which we are blessed are found, they are located in Christ. Hence, as he goes on to describe some of those blessings, this strand of being in Christ comes out again and again. Verse 4: "Even as He chose us in Him, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him, in love having foreordained us." Verse 7: "In whom we have our redemption through His blood [all the way through the passage]" Verse 11: "In whom we were made a heritage." Verse 13: "In whom also having heard the word of truth, in whom having believed you were sealed." It's all through the passage--in Him, in whom, in whom, in Him, in Him, in Him. God's getting the message through, that if we have any spiritual blessings, we have them because we have been placed into Christ.

You see, when God is going to give chosen sinners the blessings procured by the redemption of Jesus, He does not, as it were, dip into the pool of those blessings that are located in Christ and ladle them out and say, "Now let me give you some forgiveness. Let me give you some election. Let me give you some redemption. Oh, yes. Let me give you the gift of the Spirit." No. The Scripture teaches that as all those blessings are stored up in Christ as the divinely appointed reservoir, what God does to sinners is He places them into the reservoir. He places us into Christ Himself.

So when we open our Bibles, we find such statements as these in 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 30: "But of Him, [that is, by God's activity] are you [Corinthians] in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, that according as it is written, he that glories, let him glory in the Lord." By God's activity, he says, "You Corinthians were placed into Christ." He made reference to that earlier in this chapter in verse 9 of chapter 1: "God is faithful through whom you were called into the [shared likeness] of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Galatians chapter 3 and verse 27: "As many of you as were

baptized into Christ did put on Christ." And no fewer than 150 times in the Pauline letters, you find the phrase, "in Him", "in Christ", "in whom". It is the key to understanding the biblical doctrine of salvation. All of the saving blessings are in Christ.

Sinners who by nature are in Adam, in a state of condemnation, as we saw last week in this five-fold bondage, that bondage is broken when those sinners are placed into Christ, when they are put into union with Christ. But you say, how is that union effected? Well, it is effected by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. According to the teaching of the New Testament, when by the Spirit's operation we are brought to faith in Christ, we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit as the crowning blessing of the New Covenant.

Galatians chapter 3: "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Now notice what Paul goes on to say: "For it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree in order that...." Why was he made a curse for us? "In order that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham...." Where? "In Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

And as the Spirit of God takes up His dwelling in us, He unites us to Christ. He is the bond of our union with Christ, so that the Apostle Paul can say, as he does in Romans chapter 8, these very plain and simple words (verse 9): "You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwells in you. If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. And if Christ is in you...." You see the progression? If the Spirit of God dwells in you, if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, and if Christ is in you, Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ, Christ Himself, the Holy Spirit becomes the bond effecting our union with Christ.

So then, when our Lord says, "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed, He uses the verb "to liberate" or "to free" (eluthero), and then he uses the adjective "you shall be free indeed" (elutheros). But in 2 Corinthians 3:17 we read, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (elutheria). Elutheria is the noun form, and so where the Spirit is, there is liberty because the Spirit brings us into union with Him who sets us free. So then, we have a real condition of liberty and freedom in Christ when we are brought into union with Christ by the saving work of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Now then, let's look this morning at three strands of that liberty, that is real liberty. If sitting here this morning, and you are in Christ, if God would make your previous chains materialize, this liberty would cause those chains to be snapped and you'd hear them clanking to the floor. Real, sure enough, bona fide experiential liberty. All right? We're going to look at three, and God willing, next week, another four, possibly a fifth.

Number one. First of all, in Christ, we are free from the condemning power of the law of God. God's law says to you and to me, "This do, and you shall live" (Galatians 3:10). God's law says, "Fail to do this and you will die." ("The wages of sin is death."

"Cursed is everyone that continues not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.") Well, if we have come with our clanking chains, in all of our bondage and in all of our guilt, and we have rolled the full weight of our guilty souls and all of our chains upon Christ crucified, buried, and risen from the dead, what has God done? God has, on the basis of the work of Christ, declared us here and now utterly free from the condemning power of the law (Romans 8:1).

I want you to turn there with me and get this through the eye gate as well as the ear gate. Romans 8 and verse 1: "There is therefore now [in your mind's eye underline the word "now"] no condemnation to them that are [now notice the phrase] in Christ Jesus." Whatever is said in this verse is not said of those who have been surrounded with the truth about Christ, born in the family of a Trinity church member, reared in Trinity Church Sunday School, sent to Trinity Christian School, etc., etc. No, this is said of those who are really in union with Christ Jesus. A supernatural, almighty work of grace has been done to take you out of Adam, put you into Christ by the mighty, powerful, saving work of God the Holy Spirit.

"No condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." And that condition is not awaiting the day of judgment. It doesn't say there shall be no condemnation, but it says there is now, here and now, in the present moment, for the one who is in Christ. Get hold of this. As far as God dealing with you in righteousness with respect to your sins, past, present and future, the day of judgment has come and gone. It's come and it's gone. You are now. Do you see that in the text? "There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

You say, how can that be? Paul says, "[I'll tell you]For [here's the rationale lies behind it] the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus [here we are again. This is only for those in Christ, but thank God is for every one of them] has made me free from the law of sin and of death." That law that in naked dealings with justice and what I should have done, what I should not have done, condemns me through and through, over and over. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and of death."

"For what the law could not do...." It could give me no power to obey God. It could not make up for when I did not obey God. "For what the law could not do...." The law in and of itself could provide no way to satisfy the justice of God, the demands that the wages of sin is death. Justice demands that the broken law must be paid for. The law was powerless to do anything about that problem.

"What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of flesh of sin." It's as close as Paul can come to maintain the utter sinlessness of the Lord Jesus, while at the same time saying He did not come and take the flesh of pre-fallen Adam. He came and took the likeness of sinful flesh. He came and took a human condition in our state of weakness and vulnerability. And what did God do in that mighty act? "In the likeness of sinful flesh

and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Whose flesh? Christ's flesh. He condemned sin.

When our Lord Jesus bore our sins, as Peter says, up to the tree, bore our sins in His own body up to the tree, And so, because He has borne all of the weight of the judgment of God against our sins, Almighty God Himself can find nothing in the day of judgment. When the totality of our lives is reviewed, He can find nothing to condemn us. There will be much to commend us, much to give the reward of grace. And whatever else is involved, when we shall all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, we must come to grips, dear fellow believers, with this reality, that in terms of dealing with God in the light of the law that I've broken, there is now, right here and now, no condemnation. Jesus stated it clearly in John 5.24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that hears My word and believes Him that sent Me shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death unto life."

Now, you see, it is when the heart is set free from any thought that I have got to earn some brownie points with God in the court of heaven; when the heart is set free from the tyranny of realizing I yet sin day after day in thought, in word and deed. I do not measure up to the length and breadth and standard of the divine law. It is only the soul of the believer that has come to grips with the truth "there is therefore now no condemnation" that can understand and appreciate and live out in practical experience the blessed liberty that is his or hers in Christ Jesus.

We are set free from the condemning power of the law of God. And the reality of present justification in Christ by faith alone is the cornerstone of true Christian liberty. And rather than lead to license and to carelessness and to covering all forms of worldliness with the tag "Christian Liberty", it is the soul set free from the condemning power of the law that is free to love God and love its neighbor in evangelical law-keeping of the strictest kind, of the most self-denying kind, far beyond anything possible by those who are still seeking to earn their acceptance with God by their own performance.

But then secondly, the nature of our true freedom and liberty in Christ is not only one in which we are free from the condemning power of the law of God, but this is critical to understand this next area of freedom. We are free from the sin-provoking influence of the law of God. Notice I did not say we are free from the sin-exposing influence of the law of God. James, writing to Christians in James 2.9, says with respect to Christians in relationship to God's law these words, "If you have respect of persons, you commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors." No Christian is ever free from the sin-exposing power of the law of God. Some try to teach that they are, but we aren't. Nor are we set free from the righteousness-defining power of the law of God. The law of God defines righteousness. Romans 7:12: "The law is holy and the commandment holy and righteous and good." How do we know what is righteous? You go to God's law. No one is ever delivered from the righteousness-defining power of the law or the sin-exposing influence of the law.

However, if we are in Christ, we are freed from the sin-provoking influence of the law of God. Now, what do I mean by that? Turn, please, to Romans, again. Chapter 8, verse 7, and then we'll go back to Romans 7. Romans 8, in verse 7: "The mind of the flesh [that is, the mindset, the fundamental perspective of heart and emotion, affections and will of those who are not in Christ, because you're either in the flesh, in Adam, or you are in Christ, in the Spirit]." That's the contrast set up in this section of Paul's epistle. He says the mind of the flesh is enmity against God. The baseline disposition of a person who is yet in the flesh, in Adam, who is not in the Spirit, in Christ, is enmity against God. In other words, I want to do my own thing, I don't care what God's thing is, I want my own way. It's enmity against God.

Now notice: "and is not subject to the law of God." The mind of the flesh does not know what it is from the depths of its being to regard God and His law as that which I desire, that which is beautiful, that which is desirable, that which is the regulative standard for my life. No, it is not subject to the law of God.

Now notice: "neither indeed can it be." As long as the native disposition in Adam, in the flesh, is a clenched fist, enmity against God, not subject to the law of God, it can't be. The law of God can only condemn what we do and our awareness of it provoke us to do even more of that which displeases God. So that every time we're reminded of God's "Thou shalt", the carnal mind says, "I will not." Every time we're reminded of God's "Thou shalt not", the carnal mind says, "I will." And Paul indicates this in the earlier chapter. Romans chapter 7, look at verses 5 and 6:

"When we were in the flesh [you see back to that terminology, 'in Adam'. We were not in Christ, yet] "the sinful passions which were through the law wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now that we've been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we're held, so that we may serve in newness of the spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."

He said, when we were in the flesh, when we were over here, still in Adam, still in the state of bondage. What did the law do? Well, when the law spoke and gave its directives, all it did was stir up that enmity against God and against His law. It was a sin-provoking influence. Now, the problem was not with the law of God. The problem is with the sinner's heart. But that law, which should direct him into righteousness, stirs him up to unrighteousness.

Let me illustrate. Years ago, when I used to be in the itinerant ministry, I traveled a lot out through the Midwest. And I shall never forget those times when I was out there in the spring. And I'd go by pig farmers' fields, where all during the winter they had been spreading pig's dung, and drive by the fields in the winter, covered with snow, no big deal. But when the snow would melt, and the warm spring sun would shine down upon all of that dung spread on the fields, now, the problem wasn't with the sun. The sun's rays were clear, pure, life-giving. But they activated the bacteria in the dung. Some of you know, cow's dung is perfume compared to pig's dung. Now, the problem wasn't with the sun. It was with the dung heat. And likewise, God's pure, holy, light-

giving, healthful law shines upon the dunghill of the human heart and it gives forth, you see, its response of putrefying energy and indisposition to obey and honor the God who says, Thou shalt, and thou shalt not."

Or to use a different illustration, you may have walked by a fence or a little lawn chair out close to someone's sidewalk, hundreds of times, never interested to look at it, sit on it, touch it. All they need to do is paint it and put a sign on it. Wet paint, do not touch. And what happens? He can't resist the temptation. That's what God's law does. See, the problem's not with God's law, but because of who and what we are in our bondage and slavery to sin, God's law becomes a sin-provoking law.

But blessed be God when we are placed into Christ; when we are in the language of the New Covenant, recipients of God's mighty work, taking out the heart of stone, giving us the heart of flesh, giving us His Spirit, writing His law upon our hearts, as Paul says in Romans 7.6, "But now we've been discharged from the law in its sin-provoking power and influence, having died to that wherein we were held so that...." What? We serve. We're not set free to do nothing. We're set free "to serve in newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter." So when we come in contact with God's law, now it's no longer, "How can I squeeze around it? How can I get over it, under it? How can I dispense of it, rationalize it away? But we say with the psalmist; we say with our Lord Jesus in Hebrews 10.16, "I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy law is within my heart."

A heart that has been transformed from the clenched fist to the bent knee. No longer the carnal mind, enmity against God, not subject to the law of God, but the mind of the Spirit as Paul describes it in Romans chapter 8, the mind of the Spirit in union with Christ, the disposition of which is one that loves the law of God, that loves the God of the law, that desires to know how it may please Him to the utmost, not how it may push to the uttermost one's liberty, but how one may push to the uttermost his servitude to the God who has loved him and redeemed him in Jesus Christ. And that freedom is real. It's a freedom that makes us at home reading through the 119th Psalm.

You see, if you're still in Adam and in the flesh, you can't feel any comfort reading the 119th Psalm. "Oh, how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day. Thy word is a lamp to my feet, a light unto my path. I count your precepts more precious than thousands of gold and of silver, etc." You can't breathe. No. It leaves you dead. You get more excited about what's the latest must-see movie. Yeah, that gets you excited. That gets you turned on. Somebody calls you on the phone and wants to talk about the latest hip-hop star, or wants to talk about the latest--oh boy--you're turned on! That answers! If someone were to call you up and say, "I've got to share with you what I got in the Bible today. Conversation's dead. Over with. Why? You've got a heart that's not at home with God and His law! That's your problem. And don't you slop over that the term "Christian liberty". Call it what it is: Carnal bondage to sin, slavery to your disposition of rebellion against God. No, Christian liberty rests down

upon the marvelous truth that in Christ we are free from the condemning power of the law of God.

Secondly, we are free from the sin-provoking influence of the law of God. But then, thirdly, we are in Christ free from the enslaving power of sin. I did not say we are free from sinning. I did not say we are free from temptation to sin. John says anyone who claims those things is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 1). But we are free, really free, from the enslaving power of sin. And no chapter in the Bible is more crucial in making this truth known in space than Romans chapter 6, and I want you to turn there with me. This is the foundation of Christian liberty.

If what Paul says in Romans 6 is not true of you, don't you go to Romans 14 and talk about Christian liberty. Paul assumes that everyone to whom he's giving principles to guide them in the exercise of Christian liberty in chapter 14 of Romans, he assumes Romans 6 is true of them. And unless it's true of you and true of me, we're in no position to be talking about Christian liberty in matters of what we call things indifferent.

All right, what's the question Paul's going to deal with in Romans 6? Having opened up our free justification in Christ, having demonstrated the marvelous fruits of that wonderful blessing of being justified by faith, having demonstrated that this blessing comes to us in Christ, even as our condemnation and guilt came in Adam. Now he backs off and says, "What should we say then? Since where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. What should we say? Should we continue in sin that grace may abound?" He has just said, "Where sin abounds, grace super abounds."

Okay, let's take that logic. If I've got a mountain of sin 10,000 feet high, and grace raises a mountain 15,000 feet, then let's raise a mountain of sin 20,000 feet, so God will raise a mountain of grace 30,000 feet. Alright? Where sin abounds, grace does more abound. So let's do more sin, there'll be more grace. What's the best way to magnify grace? Sin. That's the devil's logic added to the truth of free justification. We're not saved by what we do or don't do. We're saved by the doing and the dying of another. Oh, if that's so, then what we do doesn't matter. So let's sin that grace may abound.

Now, Paul's going to answer that question. And his immediate response is, "May it never be." The word "God", the translation "God forbid", is really paraphrastic. The word "God" is not there. It's "meganoito", "May it never be", in a strong rejection. Now he's going to tell us why it cannot be that those who are really in Christ and justified and freed from the sin-provoking as well as the condemning power of the law cannot be committed to sin more that grace may abound. And he's going to do so under two very powerful images. In chapter 6, verses 2 through 14, it's the reality of our union with Christ In death, burial, and resurrection, the central truth is we died to sin. How can we live in it? Then in verses 15 to the end of the chapter, he's going to change the imagery to that of slavery. And he's going to demonstrate that every one of us is

somebody's slave. We are either slaves of sin in our original state, in the flesh, in Adam, or we have become the bond slaves of God and of righteousness.

There's not a free man or woman in this place this morning. You're somebody's slave. And Paul presses that in verses 15 to 23. Now let's catch the drift of his argument without any attempt at a detailed exposition. Let's look at the drift of his argument. We are free from the enslaving power of sin. How do we know that? Look at the passage. "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin...." And one could give it a more literal rendering, "We who are such as have died to sin, we who in our fundamental identity are such as have died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?" If we died to sin, if we are dead men and women with respect to sin and its mastery and its dominion, how in the world do dead men live in the realm from which they died?

You're sitting here this morning. This is your realm, this building. You're going to go back to your home. That's your realm. You're going to get in your car and hope to come back tonight. That's your realm. You're cut off from that realm. You're not going to be sitting in that pew. You're not going to be sitting at your home table. You're not going to be in that car. When you die to the realm in which you live, you ain't in it no more. That's the end of it. Paul says, we who are such as have died to sin, how shall we exist and live and carry out our life in that realm anymore? But then he says,

"Or are you ignorant? that all we who were baptized [here we are, into Christ, all of us who have been truly united to Christ] were baptized into His death. We were buried, therefore, with Him through baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. If we become united with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man [the totality of what we were in Adam, that's our old man] was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away, so that we should no longer [here's the key now] be slaves to sin."

All this that God has done in uniting us to Christ, and bringing us into the virtue of His death and burial and resurrection is to this end:

"That we should no longer be in bondage to sin, for he that hath died is justified or released from sin. But if we died with Christ, we believe we shall live with Him, knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dies no more, death has no more dominion over Him. For the death that he died, he died unto sin once for all, but the life that he lives, he lives unto God. Even so, reckon [count it to be true] that you also yourselves are dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus."

You see, the gist of his argument is that in union with Christ, what happened to Jesus has happened to me. He was crucified, buried, raised from the dead. When I am united to Christ, the virtue of His death for sin and to sin becomes my death in Him. It is my death to sin. His resurrection to life is my resurrection to life. To what end? That I might walk in newness of life, a life that is no longer characterized by slavery to sin.

Then he says, in the light of this, verse 12 to 14, "Let not sin therefore reign [exercise lordship] in your mortal body, that you should obey the lust thereof." The lusts are still there. The lusts will still be active. And when they cry out for obedience, what are you to do? You are not to let it reign. You are not to "present your members unto sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves unto God as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God, for sin shall not exercise lordship over you. For you are not under law, but under grace."

You are no longer in that realm where the law tells you what to do and what not to do, and gives you no power to do it. You are now under the orbit of grace. Grace that has united you to Christ, united you to the virtue of His death, burial, and resurrection, and endowed you with the capacity to look sin in the eye and say,

"Sin, you are no longer my master. You ask for my hands to do your bidding. You ask for my feet to do your bidding. You ask for my ears, my tongue, my eyes. No, I have a new master. I own Him. I am alive from the dead, that I should no longer be in bondage to you. I am going to count it to be the reality, and on the basis of that reality, I am going to present my members, my eyes, my hands, my feet, my stomach, all of my faculties, my sexual organs, everything that was once put into your service. Sin, as my master, you have been deposed. No longer. I present myself unto the God who in Christ has redeemed me. I present my members as instruments of righteousness unto this God."

Sin's dominion has been broken. It's a real breaking, a real breaking of that dominion.

Then he goes into the imagery of a change of masters, verse 15: "What then? Shall we sin because we're not under law but under grace? [Shall we be indifferent to standards of righteousness and morality?] May it never be." Now notice: "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves as slaves to obedience, his slave you are whom you obey, whether of sin unto death or obedience unto righteousness?" He said,

"Now look, a man gets up in the morning and he goes to a certain place, bows before another human being. You see some kind of verbal exchange. He leaves, and you ask, 'What was that verbal exchange?' And the person says, 'Well, I'm his master. Here are my directions.' And you watch him. He goes out, and he fulfills those directives. You say, 'That man is slave of the other man. He is slave of the one whom he obeys.' Now, you may touch the man's shoulder in the middle of the day and say, 'Who's slave are you?' And he says, 'Oh, I'm a slave of so-and-so.' You say, 'Wait a minute. That wasn't the man I saw you talk to this morning. That's not the man that gave you directives.' 'Oh, yeah, but I'm not his slave.' You say, 'Well, wait a minute. You are the slave of the one you obey. You're carrying out His will. You're His slave. And no amount of talk is going to convince me you're the slave of Mr. Jones over here. You never go and get your orders from him. If you do get any orders, you don't obey them. You're always going to Mr. Smith, getting your directions from Mr. Smith.

You do what Mr. Smith tells you. I know that to whom you present yourself a slave to obey, that's the one of whom you are a slave."

Paul says everybody knows that. You don't need to get a Ph.D. You don't need to have MABB--nothing--an ordinary human being that can think. See what Paul says? "Don't you know? To whom you present yourself a slave to obedience, his slave you are whom you obey." And there's only two masters: sin, which leads to death, or obedience, which leads to righteousness. No middle ground. We don't like lines drawn so finely, do we?

Everyone who is sitting here is a slave. You got up and paid homage to your master this morning. You're paying homage to your master sitting here. You're going to pay homage to your master when you go home. You're going to pay homage to him tomorrow morning. You're going to pay homage to him throughout the day. You're going to pay homage to him come Wednesday. You're going to pay homage to him when you reach for your CDs. You're going to pay homage to your true master when you reach for your video. You're going to pay homage in what you think, in what you mumble under your breath when mom and dad give you directives and you're walking back into your room. You're paying homage to your master continually, and there's only one of two masters. You are a real, bona fide, sure enough, obedient slave of righteousness, as we'll see from a parallel passage, and that means of God Himself. Or you're a slave of sin. There is no non-slave in this place.

Read on with me. Verse 17: "Thanks be to God that whereas you were the slaves of sin [every one of you, that was your condition in Adam] you became obedient from the heart to the form of teaching whereunto you were delivered." I love that passage. You became obedient from the heart. That's repentance in faith. And to what were they responding? To that morphe, to that form of visual impact of Jesus crucified? No. To that form of teaching. That's what he calls the gospel, a structure of thought conveyed intelligently. And he says, "When you became obedient to that form of teaching...." Now notice, look at the text. It shouldn't, if your Bible reads, "which was delivered to you." That's a poor rendering. It's "the form of teaching unto which you were delivered." What a beautiful picture of conversion.

Someone sitting under the proclamation of the gospel, and it has apostolic form and substance. It is speaking about the issues of God in His holiness, and man in his sinfulness, God in His righteousness and His just demands, and the threats of law against sinners. It is speaking of incarnate deity, the Word becoming flesh, living that life of obedience under the law, going to the cross and there dying, the just for the unjust, receiving into the depths of his soul the outpoured wrath and fury of God. And on the basis of that, this holy God whom you have offended has come to you, offers you in Jesus Christ full pardon, justification from all of your sins. He offers you the gift of His Spirit, the status of a son or a daughter, pledges Himself to keep you in life, keep you through death, raise you at the last day, and take you with all of His redeemed into the new heavens. and the new earth where you serve Him endlessly, without any weariness or distraction forever. He says, "That form of doctrine, when it

was delivered to you, you were delivered unto it. That form of teaching unto which you were delivered." In other words, when God saves sinners, He throws them into the mold of the gospel.

I don't get you excited. I can barely keep soul and body together thinking about it. If God's going to save anyone here this morning, you know what He's going to do? He's going to break down all your stinking, stubborn pride and resistance, and He's going to throw you right into the mold of the gospel. And you just say,

"I wouldn't want the gospel any other way. That God would do anything other than send me to hell is a marvel. That He would send His Son to die for me is a marvel. That His Son would tell me to stack arms and turn away from serving myself and the world? That only makes sense. Self and the world and sin can only take me to hell. Who wants the stuff? Lord Jesus, I want You and Your salvation, Your way, Your will."

You're cast into the mold of the gospel. And what happens? Well, look at the passage. Verse 18: "And being made free from sin, you became servants of righteousness." Nobody gets thrown into the mold of the gospel without having the dominion of sin broken. It's plain. You became, not you ought to be eventually if you grow in grace, no, you became slaves made free from sin.

"You became slaves of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh. For as you presented your members as servants unto uncleanness and iniquity, even so now present your members as slaves to righteousness unto sanctification. For when you were the slaves of sin, you were free in regard of righteousness."

What's he saying? He said, "Well, when you were in Adam and a slave of sin, righteousness personified, God through His law, could bark out orders, "Do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that." And you looked up at that master and said, "Hey, I'm a free man regarding you. You've got no claims over me. I belong to this master over here." He said, "When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness."

Verse 21: "What fruit had you then at that time in the things whereof you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." One of the clearest evidences a man's converted is that he can't think of his past without shame. That's what he said of these Romans: "But now, having been made free from sin and become slaves to God, you are having your fruit unto holiness [or sanctification], and the end, eternal life." Change of masters: you were made free from sin and became slaves to God. Change of practice: you are having your fruit unto sanctification. Change of destiny: the end, eternal life. And what God hath joined together, don't you separate. Nobody gets eternal life in its consummate glory except along the path of sanctification. No one gets into the path of sanctification without a change of masters. Change of masters, change of practice, change of destiny.

And I'll tell you what is burdening me is people sitting in this church and in our sister churches who know nothing of the change of masters are not manifesting any passionate commitment to a change of practice, saying they are on their way to heaven exercising their Christian liberty. And it is sickening. And it will be death to our churches in the days to come. Don't talk about your Christian liberty in these things (movies, dress, music, entertainment) until you've been liberated from servitude to sin and made the joyful bond-slave of righteousness and of God. If I was sitting there, I'd say a loud amen to that. That's the issue, folks. That's the issue. And that's why I said we've got to take a fresh look at this doctrine of Christian liberty and back off and see it in its biblical broader context.

When Paul takes up these matters, things in different, in chapter 14, he's writing to people of whom he can say, "You were the slaves of sin, but you have become the slaves of God and of righteousness. You are having your fruit unto holiness." That's their pattern. That's their passion. They're not asking the question, "What's wrong with it?" They're asking, "What's right with it?" They're not asking, "Well, what harm will it do?" They're asking, "What good will it do?"

It's all the difference in the world, folks. For the man who's a slave of righteousness wants to do the things that he's at liberty to do or not to do in terms of, "Will they promote a life of holiness? Will they promote my pursuit of righteousness? Will they indeed validate to me and those around me I am no longer a slave of sin and of the world and its standards and what pleases it, but those things that it knows nothing about?" And while I quote, strictly avoid the things they think are necessary for pleasure, they see me happier than a clam. And they know I ain't drunk.

"People ever ask you, "Why are you so cheerful? Why are you so happy?" They ever ask you that? They ought to. You get up in the morning and go, "No condemnation, I'm in Christ. Let the earth and the heavens fall down upon me. God in Christ will vindicate me in the last day and say, 'This is one of my own.'" I mean, that's enough to make you dance. You ought to go out of the house. Go like this to give your cheek muscles a little relaxation. That's where we ought to be. That's what gets people asking,

"What do you think of the movie?" "I didn't go see it." "You didn't go see it?" "I didn't need to. I have Christ crucified nearer than the screen at the local theater. He's in here. He's in here. He's in here. He goes to bed with me. He wakes up with me. He walks with me. He talks with me. I meet with him. I don't need him on the screen. I've got him in my heart."

"What are you talking about?" "Oh, I'd love to tell you." And you tell him. You see, Christian liberty is a wonderful thing. It's poison in the hands of those who know nothing of this threefold liberty.

And I must close. We are free from the condemning power of the law, we are free from the sin-provoking power of the law, and we are free in Christ from our bondage and slavery to sin. I want to ask you a simple question. Are you free? Are you free?

Are you free? You pillow your head, knowing that if in God's providence your heart should beat its last, and in the language of the hymn writer, "you wing your way to worlds unknown." Your soul leaves your body into the immediate presence of God. The body will be put in a grave somewhere, awaiting the day of resurrection. Do you pillow your head confident there's no condemnation? Because I'm in Christ. And what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned my sin in His flesh. And I stand before Him accepted in the Beloved. Are you free from the condemning power of the law? Do you know freedom from the sin-provoking power of the law?

See, that's what concerns me, especially with some of you young people. You don't like the do's and don'ts. You dig your heels in. I could see some of the looks on some of your faces in the previous hour. You didn't like what I was saying. That bothers me. Not because you didn't like what I was saying, but because of what I believe it reveals. God's law is still a sin-provoking law.

Rather than sit there and say, "Oh, God, thank you for a man of God helping me to think clearly, because the world sure ain't helping me, and much of the church ain't helping me. Thank you, Lord Jesus!" That was the attitude of many of you. Bless God. But I can see the look on some of your faces. I was not your hero. Nor your champion. I was your chump. Why? I think of that Old Testament passage: "They've taken away my gods and I don't know where they put them." Did I put my hand on one of your gods this morning? I did it because I love you. I don't want you worshipping idols.

If you are not free from the sin-provoking power of the law, if you are not free from the dominion of sin, so that you know what it is to have God in Christ your Master, and it's your joy to present your members' instruments of righteousness unto God as surely and as really as you presented your members instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, oh, my friend, go to Christ, because He said, "Whom the Son sets free, is free indeed." You go to Him and say, "Lord Jesus, I've got the chains on me. I've been all around chain-dissolving, chain-snapping influences, the instruction of my parents, my teachers, my pastors, but Lord Jesus, I've still got my chains." Go to Him with your chains. Don't take the hacksaw of self-effort and try to cut them yourself. Go to Him and say, "Lord Jesus, You said, 'Whom You set free is free indeed.' Set me free, Lord Jesus. Set me free." And He said, "Him that comes to Me, I'll in no wise cast out." Go to Him. Go to Him with your chains and ask Him to free you. And for you who can say, "Yes, He has freed me", will you not pray,

"O God, so instruct me that my thinking about my liberty and my freedom will be founded on these blessed, great realities, that when I come to talk about things indifferent, the adiaphora, I won't think in terms of categories that have no place in the Bible, but in terms of the categories of who I am as a free man, as a free woman in Jesus Christ."