

Christian Liberty, Part 3

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Edited transcript of message preached February 29, 2004

Now may I encourage you to follow with me as I read two portions of the Word of God. First of all, the passage that I read in your hearing last Lord's Day morning, John chapter 8, where John records the Lord Jesus Christ dialoguing with a group of Jews, and we read in verse 31 these words:

"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 Him, We are Abraham seed, and have never been in bondage to any man. How do you say 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-slave abides not in the house forever: the Son abides forever. If, therefore, the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

And then in Paul's letter to the Galatians, the epistle to the Galatians, chapter 5 and verse 1: "For freedom did Christ set us free. Stand fast, therefore, and do not be entangled again in a yoke of bondage." Slavery, tyranny, subjugation, bondage. None of these words evoke pleasant images or desirable states of human existence. I'm sure if I said this morning, "How many of you would like to be placed in a state that could legitimately be described as one of slavery, tyranny, subjugation, or bondage", I doubt I would have any takers. All men and women love liberty, freedom, self-determination.

We're familiar, most of us, with the words, we hold these truths to be self-evident, whether or not we agree with that, we're familiar with them, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. To men who say that they love liberty, God comes in the gospel of His Son announcing as one of the primary blessings of that gospel that there is liberty in the person and through the work of His own dear Son, the Lord Jesus.

We read from John chapter 8 where Jesus Himself said, If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed. Paul could write to the Christians who have embraced that gospel and say, for freedom did Christ set you free. He set you free to enjoy and to experience true freedom. And therefore, it should not surprise us that whenever the pure gospel of the grace of God is preached, whenever, in whatever period of the history of the Church, that marvelous truth is proclaimed in all of its unfettered glory, that in the person and work of Jesus, sinners can find liberty. They can come to true freedom.

I say it should not surprise us that the doctrine, the truth of a Christian's liberty in Christ becomes a very cherished element of divine truth. And in the light of that reality, I am with you revisiting this biblical doctrine of Christian liberty. For a number of reasons, I believe it is time to do so in the light of circumstances both within and without our congregation. And as I have taken up the subject with you, I have asserted in no uncertain terms that if we are to understand the nature of this liberty that Christ promises to us in the gospel, if we're to understand what is that liberty and that freedom for which Christ does set us free, we must first of all understand two foundational biblical truths. The first is the nature of our real bondage and slavery in Adam, and secondly, the nature of our real freedom and liberty in Christ.

It is useless to talk about Christian liberty with respect to the things that we call things indifferent, matters concerning which the Bible gives neither commands nor prohibitions in which we are free to make conscientious judgments and choices before the face of God in the light of the principles of His Word, I say it's fruitless to discuss those issues until we have come to grips with what the Bible teaches concerning the nature of our real bondage and slavery in Adam on the one hand, and the nature of our real freedom and liberty in Christ on the other.

Now, we took one message to focus our attention upon our real slavery and bondage in Adam. And we saw from the Scriptures, looking at several pivotal texts under each of these heads, that by nature, that is, in Adam, what we are when we are conceived and come forth from our mother's wombs. We are the slaves of sin, we are the slaves of the world, we are the slaves of Satan or the devil, we are the slaves of the idol of self-serving, and we are the slaves of the fear of death.

Then we began last week to consider together that to such guilty, hell-deserving slaves, God comes in the grace and mercy of the gospel, both providing and promising real liberty and freedom in Christ. And when enslaved sinners embrace Jesus Christ by faith, He sets them free. He snaps their chains, and they are set free with a real, not a phantom, liberation.

And so last Lord's Day we began to examine from the Word of God the second major category, our real condition of liberty and freedom in Christ. A Christian is someone described in the New Testament who is in Christ. That is, he has been brought into a vital spiritual union with the risen, living Lord Jesus.

The Apostle can describe a Christian in 2 Corinthians 5.17 in these familiar words: "If anyone is in Christ, a new creation: the old is past; behold, all things have become new." So that when Paul says to these Galatians, "For freedom did Christ set us free", he is speaking of the "us" as those who are in Christ Jesus. They are not merely in the church, in the way of respectable, moral, upright behavior, in the way of some outward conformity to the standards of one's church or society, but they have been brought out of Adam into Christ. They have been brought into Christ from the human standpoint by faith, from the divine perspective, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

And we had time last Lord's Day to look at three of the areas in which that sinner who was previously in Adam, who is now in Christ, experiences a real liberation. And we saw from the Scriptures that we are, first of all, free from the condemning power of the law of God (Romans 8:1). Secondly, we are free from the sin-provoking power of the law of God (Romans 7:5-8). And thirdly, we are free from the enslaving power and lordship of sin (the entire sixth chapter of the book of Romans).

That's a brief overview. Now we come this morning to continue our consideration of this real condition of liberty and freedom in Christ. There are more chains that are truly broken when sinners are brought into union with Christ. And this is true--follow me now--of every single believer. This is not some second-tier, higher level of Christian experience.

Sitting here this morning, if you are not still in Adam, what you are by nature, but you have been transferred into Christ by grace and by the Spirit, these things are true of you. You may not always live in the light of them; you may not always appreciate them, but wherever Jesus Christ sets a sinner free, as He Himself said, "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

Not merely in concept, in some theoretical, religious, notional way, but real chains are really broken. And what are those further chains that are broken when we are brought into Christ? Not only are we free from the condemning power of the law, from the sin-provoking power of the law, from the enslaving power and lordship of sin, but, fourthly, in Christ we are set free from the enslaving, governing power of the devil.

When we addressed the issue of our real bondage and slavery and Adam, we saw that there is a horrible aspect of this slavery, and it is the fact that we are enslaved to the devil. When Adam and Eve in the garden believed the devil's lies, they aligned themselves with the devil and placed themselves under his dominion. That's why God came and said He was going to break up that alignment. He would put enmity between the serpent and the woman, between her seed and His seed.

An alignment was made with the devil when our first parents sinned. And by nature and practice, all of us are conceived, born, and act out that alignment. So much so, that as we saw, Jesus could say to very religious people in His day (John 8, 44), "You are of your father, the devil. And the desires of your father it is your will to do." Or in Ephesians 2, 1 to 3: "You hath He made alive who were dead through your trespasses and sins wherein you once walked according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who is actively working in the sons of disobedience."

The slavery is not theoretical, it is real. There is a real devil who works in his real children in order to accomplish his own designs. In 2 Timothy 2.26 Paul speaks of those taken captive by the devil unto his will. John says in 1 John 5 and verse 19, "We know that we are of God and the whole world lies in the evil one." Now that's not pleasant. That's not flattering.

You may have already determined, "I'm never coming back to this. I want to go where people tell me I'm a child of God and God loves me no matter who I am and what I am, and everything's fine, and chuck me under the chin and send me home feeling good. And I come in and this preacher tells me I'm a child of the devil. I'm a slave of the devil."

I didn't tell you that, God did. You've got to complaint, my friend. your complaint's not with me. God's telling you what you really are, that coming to grips with it, you might feel your chains, and the desperation of being in those chains, and see the glimmer of light in the word of Jesus: "Whom the Son sets free, is free indeed." For when any sinner of any age, in any circumstance, at any time, is brought into saving union with Christ, the enslaving, governing power of the devil is broken. The chain that bound us to Him is really and irreversibly broken.

Now I want you to open your Bibles with me to a pivotal text which teaches this in spades. The book of Acts, chapter 26. The other texts I've already quoted come in by the ear gate, but I want this coming in at ear and eye gate simultaneously. Here in Acts 26, Paul, the missionary apostle, the converted persecutor of the church, is standing before King Agrippa.

Notice the first verse of the chapter: "Agrippa said unto Paul, you are permitted to speak for yourself." Paul is a prisoner of the Roman government at this point, and Paul is going to give his defense before Agrippa. Verse 2: "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, that I make this defense before you this day." And then he goes on to give what we would call his testimony.

He talks about his past. He talks about how God dealt with him. And then when he comes to describe what happened on the road to Damascus when the Lord Jesus arrested him. He not only revealed Himself to Paul as his Savior, but He commissioned Paul to be His servant as an apostle.

And here in the passage, beginning in verse 16, we read what the risen Christ said to him, commissioning him to be an apostle. Verse 16 (this is the word of Christ):

"But arise, stand upon your feet, for to this end I have appeared unto you to appoint you a minister and a witness, both of the things wherein you have seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom I send you."

Now, notice what He is sending him to do. He has said, "I'm appointing you. I'm appointing you to be my witness both to the goyim, to the masses of the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews. And as you go, this is to be the function of your ministry." Verse 18: "to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me." And when you look at this passage in the original, there are three aorist infinitives, to open, to turn, to receive.

"Now, Paul, as I send you forth to be my servant, pledging that I'm going to protect you and watch over you until your work is done. As you go to both Jew and Gentile, this is to be the effect of your ministry upon those to whom you go: to open, to turn, to receive. Your ministry will first of all be a ministry of illumination."

Look at the text again: "to open their eyes." Here God is assuming that Paul is going to people who are spiritually blind. And the Bible teaches that. In another passage, the Apostle Paul wrote that God of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not. The unbeliever is blinded to spiritual realities. God assumes that reality, and He says,

"Paul, as I send you forth, your ministry will be one of illumination to open their eyes. But then it's going to be one in which those who embrace your message will receive something wonderful. God's saving activity. People will receive something. And what will they receive? They will receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in Me. Paul, as their eyes are opened, and I confer gospel blessings upon them, they will receive immediate full remission of all of their sins and an inheritance [better rendered "a lot", "a portion"] among my people, my people who are identified as those who believe in me. So, Paul, as you go and you preach My gospel, eyes will be opened to spiritual realities. And when there is the internal work [that we're going to see, the middle part--we passed over it], these sinners will actually receive the full forgiveness of their sins, and they will receive a place among all of My people who trust in Me."

But now notice the middle element, the turning. What is it from which they turn if they're to receive forgiveness and apportion among His people? Look at the passage: "to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness." Now, do you feel the pressure of this text? No one, in any place, at any time, under any circumstances, ever receives forgiveness of sins and a place among God's believing people until, first of all, eyes are open to spiritual reality: who God is, who they are, how the bridge between a holy God and sinful men is effected through the gospel. Their eyes must be open and they turn. There is a radical shift of turning from the power of Satan unto God. They come out from under the tyranny and the dominion and the power, the authority of the devil, and they joyfully and cheerfully from the heart, place themselves under the authority and the dominion and the rule of the God who made them.

Now, do you see from this passage how all those things are tied together? so that if you're sitting here today and you say, "Oh yeah, I've got forgiveness; I believe in Jesus", then my friend, it is also true of you that you have turned from the power of Satan unto God and that your eyes have been spiritually opened to see spiritual realities.

As I heard someone say the other day, "You now read your Bible in English. It's not all Greek to you. It's not all Chinese. It's not all Spanish to you if you only speak

English." For some of you Hispanics, you now read it in Spanish. You say, "I see it. My eyes have been opened. This Christ that people get excited about, for me, He was ho-hum. So what? I now see it. I see I'm the sinner for whom He died. I'm the sinner who needs His grace." And with the opening of the eyes, there is the turning from the power Satan unto God, and there is the receiving of forgiveness and a lot among God's believing people.

And when does this happen? When we are brought to faith in Christ. What Christ? that Christ Paul goes on to say he was going to preach. Verse 19:

"Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared both to them of Damascus first, and at Jerusalem, throughout the country of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God. If they won't get forgiveness until they repent and turn from Satan to God, I'd better tell them so."

And he said,

"I did. So everywhere I went, I told them they have to repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance. For this cause the Jews seized me in the temple and sought to kill me, having obtained the help that is from God, I stand to this day testifying to small and great, saying nothing but that the prophets in Moses did say should come, how that the Christ must suffer, and how that He first, by the resurrection of the dead, should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles."

So when he says, "I was to preach and to see people brought to faith in Jesus", what Jesus? the Jesus who died, the Jesus who rose, the Jesus who is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament prophecies. And in the midst of all of that complex, of dense gospel reality, it is clear that when sinners turn and repent and believe on the Lord Jesus and are united to Him, they are set free from the enslaving, governing, power of the devil.

That is why, as Jesus was on the threshold of His death, we read in John chapter 12 these very significant words. John chapter 12 and verses 31 to 33: "Now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out." And how is the prince of this world to be cast out? He tells us: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself. But this He said, signifying by what manner of death he should die." He says,

"As a result of My dying a death in being lifted up upon the cross, I will cast out the prince of this world in such a way that as My gospel then goes forth, men will be drawn into allegiance with Me and no longer with the devil. I'll break his power. [In the language of Luke:] "I will bind the strong man, and then I will go in and spoil his goods. I'll take his willing lackeys and his willing slaves and servants, and I'll capture them for Myself. And I'll Make them My glad bondservants, all through the power of My cross."

By His death He defeated the devil, bound the strong man. So when sinners are united to Christ, they are set free from the enslaving, governing power of the devil.

Now, they are not set free from the harassing, troubling, tempting activity of the devil. The Bible nowhere teaches that. It teaches just the opposite. 1 Peter 5:8. Peter says to true believers who have been delivered from the governing, enslaving power of the devil, "Be watchful, your adversary the devil is a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may swallow down [is a literal rendering of the Greek verb]."

You're adversary the devil. Ah, but you see, you're adversaries now. You were once buddies. You and the devil had a thing going between you. His will, it was your will to do. But now in Christ, you're adversaries. He's not a quiet adversary. He's not a passive adversary, but he's an adversary. Oh yes, a defeated adversary, but an adversary nonetheless. Ephesians 6:12: "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but principalities and powers against world rulers of the darkness." Paul could say in 2 Corinthians 11:3, "As the serpent beguiled Eve, he said to the Corinthians, I am apprehensive, lest as he beguiled Eve, you will be beguiled from the simplicity and single-mindedness that is in Christ."

We are taught to pray, deliver us from the evil one. We are still harassed and troubled by the devil, but it is the troubling of an adversary, not one to whom we yield willing, joyful, hearty submission. In Christ, we are set free from the enslaving, governing power of the devil.

Then there is a fifth chain that is broken every time a sinner is brought into Christ. And it is this: in Christ, we are set free from the enslaving, governing power of the world. When we addressed the issue of our real bondage and slavery in Adam, we established from the Scriptures that one of the chains that binds us by nature is that of the world. And I described the world used in that sense as that system of men and things in opposition to God. That's what the world is. And the Scripture is clear that by nature we walk according to the course of this age. We are worldlings to the core, and the trinity that we worship is described by John: "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vain glory of life is not of the Father, but is of the world, and the world passes away, and the lust thereof. But he that does the will of God abides forever." But now when any sinner of any age At any place, in any set of circumstances, is brought into saving union with Christ, that sinner is liberated from the enslaving, governing power of the world.

Now again, I want us to look at several texts that teach this in space. Galatians chapter 1, verse 3, Paul's greeting to the Galatians: "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, gave himself for our sins in order that he might deliver us [from hell to come]." Now, that's true. Christ gave Himself for our sins that we might be delivered from hell to come. Paul could say in his letter to the Thessalonians--he speaks of Christ Jesus who delivers us from the coming wrath. But that's not what he says in this passage. Notice

what he says. Christ died to do what? "That He might deliver us out of this present evil world, according to the will of our God and Father".

Well, you say, He will deliver us out of this present evil world when the Lord Jesus returns again and takes us to Himself. True! That will be the final, ultimate, consummate, glorious deliverance when Jesus ushers in the new heavens and the new earth. And there will be no more world system in terms of a system of men and things in opposition to God. All the opposition will be forever banished. But you see, The only proof we have that we'll be delivered from it then is that we're delivered from it now.

Christ died that He might have a people here and now, delivered from this present evil age according to the will of God. It is God's will that He will have here on earth a people whose lives demonstrate that this world system is a big fake and a big liar. It says, "You want fulfillment, lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life? Enjoy the things you can feel. Get as much of the things you can see. And be as important as you can be in the eyes of your fellow men." Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life. That's what we live for. That's our trinity that we worship. And God says,

"I want a people who expose the lie of the world's trinity. I want to bring them into loving devotion to Myself and demonstrate that in Me and in fellowship with Me, they are no longer tyrannized by the world, no longer tyrannized with a passion to enjoy things to have things and to be somebody. They have a passion to be what they were made to be: lovers of Myself, who hold loosely to what they have, who are willing to be scorned and despised and rejected like My Son, cast off as the offspouring of the world, I want a people who in this present age demonstrate the emptiness, the vapidity, the nothingness of what this world has to offer."

And Christ will get what He died for. He died to have a people delivered from the enslaving, governing power of the world, not a people who say, "Oh, well, I'm saved by Christ. Oh, yes, I accept the world's standards in entertainment and dress and music and relationships and goals. But that's my Christian liberty." That's not your liberty. That's your chain. That's your chain that says the world still has you bound. Don't call it your liberty. It's your chain. When you cannot with joy trample over your lust and your desires and the things that the world says are important, you're bound. You're not free. A free man can walk over the belly of his lusts in the strength of Christ. A free man can walk over the belly of the passion to have stuff and to be somebody because he's free. He's free. He's free. And this text says Christ died to have a free people.

Turn to chapter 6 in Galatians, where the Apostle Paul, speaking of himself, says these very, very perceptive words. Verse 14: "Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Now notice, he could have said, "Through which my sins have been crucified unto me." Because that's true. That's what he teaches elsewhere in the Scriptures. But he says, "This cross that I glory in is the cross by means of which the world has been crucified unto me and I unto the world."

What's he saying? If the world has been crucified, what's happened to the world? It's been put upon a cross. It has as much attraction to Paul as a writhing, blood-spattered, dying man upon a cross, as much attraction as the dead cadaver with its flesh being plucked out by the buzzards. That's how much attraction this world has to him. The cross on which Christ died through which I have come to the forgiveness of my sins has so stripped away the veneer of what the world is and what the world has to offer that it is no more attractive to me than a dead man on a cross." That's what he's saying. And he says,

"Furthermore, the feeling is mutual. You know what the world thinks of me? I am as attractive to it as a dead man on a cross. You know what the world thinks of me? I live for a world to come. They think I'm stupid. Giving all of my energies, willing to sacrifice, willing to be treated as the offscouring of all things for a Christ."

Yes, he had seen Him, but for a heaven he had not been to. With a set of values that was out of sight and out of reach of the world, the world looks at him like a crazy man. Jesus said this, didn't He? "If the world hates Me, it's going to hate you." You march to the beat of a different drum. You dance to a different tune.

When the world, this system of men and things under the governance of the devil, when it says you've got to have this or you're not fulfilled. This is a must-see movie. Oh yes, you've got to go and see it. What a sad thing for people who say they're liberated to be yanked around by the world. Must dress this way. Bare your belly. That's with it. And you're ashamed that you cover yours, and irritated that mom and dad insist that you not go out of the house dressed like Britney.

What's that show? You've got the chains of the world around you. This world of men and things with its standards of modesty, with its standards of what you've got to have to be fulfilled in entertainment, in music, in relationships. Do you see it? Paul says, "In Christ's cross, my chains fell off. My heart was free. I rose, went forth, and followed Thee." Don't talk about Christian liberty. Hide a whole carload of crass worldliness. It's my liberty. No, it isn't. It's your chains. It's your chains. It's your chains. It's your chains. That's why the Apostle Paul can say, "Be not conformed to this age. but be being transformed by the renewing of your mind." To what end? "That you may prove the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

You see, the alternative to worldliness is the will of God. The same alternative John puts out in 1 John 2: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him, for all that is in the world, lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." Now listen: "And the world passes away, and the lust thereof, but he that does the will of God abides forever." There is the antithesis: the world or the will of God. Do you see that? Be not conformed to this age, to this system of man and things under the governance of the devil, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove, work out in your experience, the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.

It is never the will of God for you and me to be worldly. It is the will of God for us to be the counterculture. Do I mean that I need to come with ties that are made of polyester and six inches wide like some of those I saved in my closet for fun? I'm not going to be worldly. "I'm going to wear six inch wide polyester ties." Now that's what some people think. That's stupid. I could say a lot more, but just say that much: that's stupid. No, we're not talking about that.

We're not talking about dressing in such a way that people look at us and say, "Where'd that cook drop out of a tree somewhere?" Or Rip Van Winkle: "He's been stuck in a cave somewhere and dressed like they did 20 years ago." I've got pictures of me in some of my polyester plaid suits, and I said, "Oh man, did I wear those things?" Yeah, I wore them here in church. It was the in thing, you see? I was blending in. So we're not talking silly here, folks. Don't let anyone say, "Oh, we need to talk about that." No, we're not talking about that, and you know we're not. Don't cop out with this silly business.

We're talking about what framed the way you lived this past week. Was your life framed from Monday through Saturday by the overarching thought when you got up in the morning, when you went off to school, went off to work, went off to college, wherever it was, in all your relationships until you lay your head on your pillow at night and got up the next day? Was it your passion that every facet of your life be framed by the revealed will of God in Holy Scripture? Or did you just drift along with the system of things of men and their perspectives about what's important, what's acceptable, what's unacceptable in what you listen to, what you watch, where you go, how you relate? Or were you just in your chains, chained by this world system? Or were you passionately, consciously seeking to do the will of God? That's the antithesis. The world or the will of God.

And the Scripture says, "If the Son has made us free, we are free indeed", not only free from the condemning power of the law, the sin-provoking influence of the law, not only free from slavery to sin, free from slavery and the dominion of the devil, but we are free from the enslaving, governing power of the world. James states it in crassly blunt language when he says this in James chapter 4 and verse 4: "You adulteresses." And he's not talking about physical adultery, but spiritual adultery. "Do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore would be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." That's it.

It's a tragic thing when enemies of God, when questioned about their lifestyle, say, "I'm just exercising my liberty." Do you have liberty to be God's enemy? Where do you find that liberty held out in the Scriptures? If you are a child of God, you are to be passionate about being the friend of God. And the friends of God want to do the will of God. And that means they are determined to stand against every form of worldliness from the inside out. Not the outside alone or the inside alone. I chose my words carefully. Every form of worldliness from the inside out.

And if you are passionate about the will of God, you will be able to sit here this morning and say, "Oh God, by Your grace, I don't want the world to be shaping my thoughts about what's important, what should have my time and my interest, what should bring me delight and pleasure and the kind of people that I will choose in my voluntary friendships. Lord, I want all of that governed by a heart that pants to know You and to enjoy You and to glorify You.

And then you'll be concerned that it works its way out in your dress, in your speech, in your demeanor, in the places you go, in the places you don't go, in the things you'll allow your eyes to watch on the television, the VCRs you will or will not pick up at Blockbuster and pop into your videocassette player. It will touch every single facet of the outside if it's really gotten hold of you on the inside. For the Scripture says, "Guard your heart above all that you guard for out of it are the issues of life." Life in all its externals are the streams that flow out of the heart. Guard your heart. Guard your heart from the incursions of the world. It will seek to take hold of you. It will seek to influence you and only constant watchfulness and resolute determination to lay hold of the grace of God in Christ will keep us living in the way of liberated slaves.

Well then, very quickly, I touch on one more this morning. We have time only for one more. And it is this: in Christ, we are set free, not only as we have seen this morning, from the enslaving, governing power of the devil, enslaving governing power of the world, but we are set free from the idolatry of the worship of self.

Again, I remind you that when dealing with our real slavery and bondage in Adam, we saw from the Scriptures that we are all by nature slaves to the idol of self. Self-importance Self-will, self-determination, self-justification, self, etc., etc., etc. Isaiah 53:6: "All we, like sheep have gone astray." That's the generic broad-stroke description of the whole human race. But then the prophet gets very specific in the next phrase. "We have turned every one of us to His own way." We've turned into a course in which we worship the idol of self.

Now, when any sinner, at any time, in any place, is brought into saving union with Christ, that sinner is set free, radically and fundamentally set free from the idolatry of living for self. Again, a key text I ask you to turn with me to look at. 2 Corinthians chapter 5. In the context, Paul is describing what makes him tick as a man and as a minister. And he says in verse 14:

"For the love of Christ constrains us [that is, it presses us in, it holds us in its grip]." He says, "When I contemplate Christ's love, I don't do so in a cavalier, light, occasional way. But it's the thing that I constantly feel pressing in upon me. Christ's love for me, love unto death, has a constraining influence upon the totality of my life."

And he said it operates in a rational way. You see, here's one of the complaints with those who were not in the Sunday School lesson last week. Oh the complaints that I have with the whole perspective of Mel Gibson and the producing of his film. He says as a boy, he was greatly moved by the mass in Latin. He said, "I didn't understand any of the words, but I felt and knew what was going on [that is, Christ was being

offered up aflesh by the priest and by the consecration of the host, etc.]" And his great concern is that his religious experience to which he came back and had some kind of conversion, I think about 17 years ago, was in terms of that same nonrational, mystical, subjective confrontation of a bloody Christ upon a cross.

You see, Paul's experience of the constraining love of Christ in conjunction with the cross was not mystical and irrational. Look at the text. It was very rational. Notice what he says: "The love of Christ constrains us because we thus judge.... [It constrains me because I think a certain way in connection with it]." And what does he think? Look at the passage: "The love of Christ constrains us because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died."

If Christ is our substitute, died in our place, we died in Him and with Him. All right? And He died for all in order that, to what end? That those who live, those who receive life through His death, those who receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life based on His death--what death? A death He died in our room instead, a death which was God's judgment upon living for ourselves, living to ourselves.

We were a flock of sheep that went astray from God and His law and His ways and His glory. And God judged it all in the person of His Son. He said, "This is what I think of living to yourself. I'll put it to death in the death of My Son." And Paul says, "We thus judge that if one died for all, therefore all died under the judgment of God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, any who live, should no longer henceforth live unto themselves." It's irrational to think that they would continue to live in the pattern which God sentenced and judged in the person of His Son. That's stupid. That's irrational. That makes mockery of what God did in His Son. "We thus judge, if one died for all, therefore all died, and that they who live should no longer live unto themselves. but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again."

You see, he's describing how God smashes the idol of self-serving through the cross of His Son. When I behold, by faith, based on the Scriptures, not by visual images, but by the Scriptures, Jesus Christ, incarnate deity, bruised and battered, immolated and hung on the cross by men, and then beyond that, plunged in the darkness of His soul by His Father, shrouding the heavens in blackness, plunging His soul into the blackness of hell until He cries out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" No word about the Jewish authorities, about the Roman soldiers. No, no, those things He bore, the Scripture says, as a lamb before its shears He was dumb. But when His Father bruised Him, when His Father plunged Him into the darkness of outer darkness, and gave a symbol of it by shrouding the heavens in darkness, His soul cried, "Why have you forsaken Me? What was God doing? God's showing us what He thinks about living unto self. That's what God thinks about living for yourself. He judged it. He judged it in His Son.

Therefore, if I say, I have forgiveness and life through what He bore, isn't it unthinkable that I'm going to continue in the path that caused all of that? That's to be insensitive to His love. That's to be a travesty of the returns of love. And Paul says,

this is what is true of me. This is what is true of all who have embraced it, that we should no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him who for our sakes died and rose again. You see, if Christ set you free by the power of His gospel, He set you free from living for yourself.

Now you are free to live for two people, for God and for others. Does that sound familiar? What is the great commandment? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul, and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself. I am free to keep the great commandment, not perfectly, but principally and by the power of the Spirit. I am free now to love God and not myself. I am free to love my neighbor above myself.

It's very interesting (and we'll open this up in much greater detail when we come to the principles that must guide us in the exercise of our Christian liberty in those secondary issues that we talked about, and we'll talk about in length down the road) that one of the great principles that Paul emphasizes again and again--I want you to take your Bible and look at them very quickly and see how crucial this is, and you'll see why I'm making this point. Look at Galatians 5:13 to validate what I've just concluded from the Corinthians passage: "For you, brethren, were called for freedom. Only use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love [oh, look at this] be slaves one to another."

I'm free to be a slave. Isn't that beautiful? You say, "No, that's not beautiful. I don't get it." Well, you think about it. I'm free to be a slave. You see, as long as I'm living for myself, I don't care two hoots about whether what I do grieves you, makes you happy, offends you, helps you on your way to heaven or hinders you. I want to please myself. It's my liberty. He says for freedom did Christ set you free. Use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh. But now you're free to truly love.

The chain of self-love and the idolatry of self has been broken. I'm now free to voluntarily make myself your slave for Christ's sake. Now that doesn't mean I'm ready to make myself your mindless slave so you can ask me to do anything: "Go out there and chew marbles. for half an hour and spit them out to prove you love me." You know, that's stupid. That's nonsense. But it means whatever I can choose to do to help you on your way to heaven, whatever I can choose not to do that will help you on your way to heaven, I am so free of the idol of self, I can be your slave for Christ's sake. You see it? That's what he's saying.

Now look at several other passages. 1 Corinthians 9.19, May God the Holy Ghost give us light and sight on this crucial issue. Here in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul starts out, "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle?" He says, "I've got a right to do this. I've got a right to do that. But I don't use those rights." Why? Because he's free. He's free. If he was in bondage to self-serving, he'd said, "These are my rights. I'm going to stand upon them. I've got a liberty. I'm going to use it. Who are you to tell me not to exercise my liberty." Paul said, "I've got a right to do this, a right to do that. I forgo all of those things."

Now, look at the summarizing statement in verse 19: "For though I was free from all men...." As we will see, God willing, next week, in Christ we have our freedom from the doctrines, rules, and regulations of men. Paul understood that: "Though I was free from all men, I brought myself under slavery to all that I might gain the more." He was so free he could be everyone's slave. You see it?

You say, I don't understand that. No, I'm sure some of you don't. Because you're still worshipping at the idol of self, and you don't have a clue what this is. And you have learned so conveniently to hide all of your carnal self-centered indulgence under the guise of Christian liberty, you cannot resonate with what Paul is saying. You can't remember when you said no to anything you wanted for the sake of the well-being of the soul of another.

1 Corinthians 10:23 and 33, "All things are lawful, not all things are expedient. All things are lawful, but not all things build up." Paul says, "I don't measure my life by what the full extent of my liberties are. I measure it by the full extent to which I can build up others. Verse 33, "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me as I am of Christ."

And that takes us right to Romans 15 where he says, "Christ pleased not Himself." Be like the Savior whom you profess to love and by whom you say you are saved. He did not seek his own. You see, that's why when the Lord Jesus was calling people to follow Him, what was the first requirement again and again of discipleship? If any man will come after me, let him what? Deny himself. Himself! Himself! Self-centered self!

That's his term in Mark 8:34 and 35, Luke 9:23 and 24, John 12:24 to 26. The same emphasis: "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground. It abides alone, but if it die, it bears fruit." You say that's speaking of Jesus. Yes, but then he goes on to say, "He that would save his life will lose it, but he that will lose his life shall save it." The way in which He procured salvation is the way in which we come to possess it. That's the teaching of the Bible.

And I trust that by the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon this series of sermons, all of this shallow, unthinking, carnal talk about my Christian liberty that is shot through with bondage to the world, bondage to self, bondage to the devil, will stick in the throat of anyone who attempts to use it. It is a tragic manifestation of the very thing Paul told Timothy he could expect to see in the period that he calls the last days.

And with this passage, I close. 2 Timothy chapter 3: "Know this, that in the last days grievous times shall come." Verse 2: "Men shall be lovers of self." "Lovers of self", and growing out of that, lovers of money for what it can give to themselves. "Boastful": parading themselves. "Haughty": putting up themselves. "Railers": they've been abused so they're going to cut you up with their words. "Disobedient to parents" because they want to do what they want to do. "Unthankful" because they feel

everything's owed to them and therefore they don't have a grateful heart. "Unholy without natural affection. Implacable, slanderers."

Now notice what it says in verse 5: "Holding a form of godliness but having denied the power thereof." The day this church holds the form of godliness in its external activities and in its doctrinal purity, but harbors self-centered, self-indulgent people who parade their selfhood under the guise of Christian liberty, it's all over. The power will be gone. Why? because true, vital religion is gone. For when Christ touches us, He says, "Whom the Son sets free is free indeed." And we are freed from these chains that bind us.

And if you are sitting here this morning and Christ has set you free, your heart is full, and you say, Lord Jesus, how wonderful to be free. How wonderful to be free. I'm so glad I'm a free man. So when the world gets all hyped up about this, that, or the other and says, you've got to get on board, I look at it and say, who are you? You're not my master. You don't call the shots for me. My God and my Savior call the shots in this book.

When the world says you've got to have this much in your retirement fund If you're going to be responsible, I say, "Who tells me that? I've got a Bible that says, 'Lay up treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt and thieves do not break through and steal', 'Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things be added unto you.'" The world would tell me I'm a fool for my giving to the work of God. No, they're the fool. "I'm putting it where nothing can touch it." Bust their bubble. "Can't touch it. Hallelujah. It's going where it's getting interest. And it's going meekly when I see my Savior." It's wonderful to be free. Let the world tell you you've got to do this, got to be that, got to go here, got to see this. Are you free? Are you free? Do you know that liberty? Do you know what it is to be free?

I speak to you young people. You see, this is really the issue with some of you, isn't it? This is the issue. The world has got you. And if you're honest, you'd go home today and tell your parents, "You know, I'm sick and tired of all the constraints you're living as those that are free from the tyranny of the world and the tyranny of the devil and the tyranny of self, and I regard it as bondage imposed upon me." That's true of some of you, isn't it? You'd love to kick the traces. You have mom and dad and their stinking do's and don'ts and regulations and checking what you wear and don't wear. Ah, dear young people, you're to be pitied in your chains. And I plead with you. Go to the Lord Jesus and say, "Lord Jesus, I'm all chained up, and life is miserable. I can't get out from under the chained life imposed upon me by my parents." You're in a miserable place. You think the world's got something out there that's really going to be wonderful. No, it isn't. You look at the blasted, burnt, disillusioned: "We've had it all."

I remember Tozer one time saying something I'll never forget. He spoke of those who have given themselves over to every sensuous pleasure, thinking they would find their fulfillment, and he said, "They're now blasted and burnt out and unable to feel."

He said, "They can no more feel than if you stuck an ice pick in a man with a wooden leg." You want to be like that? Then you go on loving your chains. Oh, dear young people, Don't love your chains. Go to Christ and say, "Lord Jesus, set me free. I'm so sick and tired of being all uptight with what my peers think about me and how they're going to look at me and how they're going to evaluate what I wear and what I don't wear and whether I measure up. Lord, I'm tired of it. I want to get free." Go to Christ and He'll set you free. He'll set you free. "For whom the Son sets free is free indeed." He means it. You go to Him. He'll set you free. Join the ranks of the free men and women in this place.

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