

Christian Liberty, Part 9

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Now let us turn together in our Bibles to 1 Peter. We come this morning to 1 Peter, chapter 2, and follow, please, as I read verses 11 through 17.

"Beloved, I beseech you, as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your behavior seemly [or honorable] among the Gentiles, that wherein they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or unto governors as sent by him for vengeance on evildoers, and for praise to them that do well. For so is the will of God that by well-doing you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; as free, and not using your freedom for a covering of wickedness, but as slaves of God. Honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the King."

Brethren, will you join me in prayer. If ever I have felt that my soul has been made pregnant with a burning word that could well be--and I don't mean to engage in well-meant but careless hyperbol--could well mean the difference between death and life for some of you sitting here this morning. Sitting at my desk, that burden has come upon me. And I need grace to be upheld to discharge it as I ought. And I don't believe it's been laid upon me just for my own benefit. Let's pray.

Holy Father, You know us. You know Your servant. And together we pray that You would uphold his own mind and spirit that he may be able, clearly and convincingly, in the power of the Spirit, to open up the truth that is so desperately needed. Help your people. Give them ears to hear what the Spirit would say to this church through the Word in this hour. O God, we believe that this would glorify and honor You, and to this end we plead for such mercies through our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Whatever liberties we may presently enjoy because of that ultimate sacrifice made by fellow citizens of our country in days past, there is a greater liberty procured for the people of God at an even greater price. It is the spiritual liberty obtained for the people of God by nothing less than the bloodletting of incarnate deity. And because Christ died to have a freed people, the doctrine of Christian liberty always comes into its own wherever the gospel is proclaimed and maintained in its apostolic purity. And because of that truth and because of several very present pastoral burdens, in conjunction with the thought and concern of my fellow elders, I have embarked upon a series of messages entitled, "A Fresh Look at the Doctrine of Christian Liberty".

And I asserted at the outset that we are in no position to wrestle with that subset of the doctrine of Christian liberty that wrestles with such questions as, "What shall I

wear or not wear? What entertainment shall I or shall I not engage in?" etc., etc. That subset, and that's all it is, is a subset of the broader doctrine of Christian liberty, and we are in no position to think and act as we ought with reference to the issues of the subset until we are clear in our understanding and in our experience with respect to larger, greater issues of the Word of God that touch upon the subject of Christian liberty.

And under the imagery of foundation, I have said that there are two massive foundation blocks of biblical truth that we must grapple with if we are to understand the biblical doctrine of Christian liberty. And those massive blocks of biblical truth are the reality and nature of our bondage and slavery in Adam, and the reality and nature of our liberty and freedom in Christ. And we opened up those biblical truths. And then we ask the question, now that our chains are broken, and we see the prison door open for us, why has Christ set us free? If it is true that whom the Son sets free is free indeed, surely the freed prisoner must ask the question, "Why has God broken my chains? Why has He thrown open the prison house?"

And I have suggested that I know of no text that more succinctly yet comprehensively answers that question than does Luke 1, verses 74 and 75, where Zacharias in his prophecy says, "That we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might render worshipful service to Him." That's the essence and the distillation of the goal. We are set free to render a life from morning till night of worshipful service. And the characteristics of that service are, without fear, in holiness and righteousness, before His face all the days of our lives.

But alas! There is no truth, no matter how precious, revealed in the Word of God, appropriated by the people of God, but that our remaining sin and the influence of a devious devil can twist and take the most delicious, wholesome food and make it into poison. And under the imagery of two naughty, devious advocates or lawyers, I said last week, they are continually setting up an office in our hearts seeking to depreciate the true biblical doctrine of Christian liberty.

One of those lawyers is named Mr. Legalism, and he would cause us to depreciate the grace of God with respect to how we are to deal with our sin, whether in forgiveness or in power to overcome it. And he would try to persuade us that we need something beyond the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

But then there's another advocate, another lawyer, who has set up shop in our hearts. That's Mr. Libertinism or Mr. License, and he would seek to degrade the grace of God into a license and an excuse for sin. He would preach up grace until his throat is raw, but in such a way that grace, rather than binding us to a more meticulous life, lived as worshipful service without fear in holiness and righteousness before His face all our days, He would try to persuade us that we never magnify the grace of God more than when we are most careless about a meticulous life of holiness.

And I have suggested that in seeking to shut them out, and all the sophistry and the clever arguments of Mr. Libertinism, there are two texts that we ought to memorize,

we ought to understand them, we ought to pray them in--to change the imagery, two texts that act like sentinels to the left and the right flanks of the doctrine of Christian liberty. And as long as they stand as sentinels protecting that doctrine, we will not fall prey to the sophistical arguments of Mr. Legalism or Mr. Libertineism.

Well, we looked at the first of those texts last week (Galatians 5:13), in which the apostle says, "For you, brethren, were called for freedom. Only use not your freedom for an occasion to the flesh, but through love be slaves for one another. There is the glorious affirmation: "For you, brethren, were called for freedom." You were made Christians to be Christ's free men. But then the necessary exhortation, negative and positive: only do not use that freedom as a staging area, as a platform to indulge your flesh, your remaining sinful tendencies and desires. But use that very freedom so free from self-will and self-interest and self-preoccupation that when your Master, your true sovereign Lord says, "Relinquish your rights, relinquish your liberties for the good of fellow believers and for the good of sinners." You can make yourself a slave for their sake. You are so free by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Your toys don't enslave you. Your appetites don't enslave you. Your likes and your dislikes don't enslave you. You are Christ's free man, so free that you can make yourself servant to others for their sake.

Now, we come to sentinel number two this morning, 1 Peter 2 and verse 16: "As free, and not using your freedom for a covering [or cover-up] of wickedness, but as slaves of God." Now let me take just a few moments to sketch in the context. We have a number of new believers. For you who are new to Bible preaching, you will often hear us preachers say, "Now let's consider the context." What do we mean by that, and why do we do that? Well, by the context, all we mean is, what's the setting in which God gives us those particular words?

With but few exceptions, the Bible does not come to us as a jumbled-up bunch of spiritual snippets. When you read the book of Proverbs, often you have little sententious statements that can be understood without much reference to the immediate context. But for much of the Bible, you must look at those individual statements when someone's quoting them to you and say, "Wait a minute, what is the universe of discourse?" Just as you cannot understand our world if you think it's at the center, as people did for centuries, but you must back off and see its relationship to the sun and to our solar system and to the little part that we occupy on the edge of one galaxy, then you begin to understand the proper relationship. So likewise, when we would zoom in on the little earth of the statement and ignore the solar system within which God has placed it, we'll end up thinking wrong thoughts. So let me take just a few moments to sketch in both the larger and the more immediate context of 1 Peter 2 and verse 16.

And for you who are knowledgeable in the Scriptures, you're just going to have to be patient. God has been answering our prayers and bringing people who have been totally ignorant of biblical truth--no knowledge. And I'm going to be doing more and more of this for their sake. And if you get irritated, you're a slave to yourself. You

need to get free, to rejoice that for their sake--and it just might be you might learn a thing or two. Okay, good, all right.

What's the larger context? Well, Peter was writing to first century Christians in Asia Minor, the present land of Turkey. They had come to faith, most of them out of a totally pagan background. And now they were facing real opposition. One of the recurring themes in 1 Peter is suffering, suffering, suffering, suffering. And Peter writes as a pastor, fulfilling the mandate the Lord Jesus gave him in John 21: "[Shepherd my lambs.] Feed my sheep." And Peter, by his pen, is doing just that. And he writes to these saints to comfort them in their suffering, to instruct them as to how they are to respond to their suffering for the good of their own souls, and to validate the gospel before their pagan people around them who are persecuting them. That's the overall thrust of Peter's purpose.

And how he goes about this is simply this. In the beginning of his letter, there are cycles of telling believers what they have in Christ and then what they are to do in the light of what they have. He gives them the indicatives of Christian privilege. Now you know what an indicative is. It's simply a statement of fact. I am standing here behind this pulpit. That's an indicative. If you were to say to me, get out of that pulpit, that's an imperative. So what Peter does is he gives these cycles of indicatives. He says these believers need to stuff their souls with the wonderful realities of what they are and have in Christ. And so in chapter 1, verse 3 to verse 12, he just tells them all the goodies, all the good stuff they are and they have in Christ.

Then in verse 13 of chapter 1, he begins a string of imperatives. And he says, "Now in the light of what you have and what you are in Christ, this is what you are to do and to be because of what you are and what you have." You see, the Christian life is a constant call, be what you are. Do what you do because you are who you are and because you have what you have. Now, that's not hard to grasp, is it? I hope not. So, he gives a cycle, then, of imperatives.

Then, in chapter 2 and verse 5, he says, now it's time to go back to the goodies. So, from chapter 2, verse 5, through chapter 2 and verse 10, he gives some more indicatives, some of the wonderful things they are and they have. They're a spiritual temple, they're God's elect race, chosen people, all this good stuff.

Then in verse 11 he says [now here come the imperatives], "I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims [that's what you are; here's what you've got to do now] to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your behavior honorable among the Gentiles, that wherein they speak against you as evildoers, you may by your good works which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." Here's the generic imperative of this section. He says, "You are pilgrims and sojourners." This world's not your home, you're just passing through. Your home is not somewhere laid up beyond the blue. It's the new heavens and the new earth in the presence of God and of the Lamb and all the perfected saints.

Now, he says, in the light of that, "What in the world are you doing playing around at the flesh pots? Abstain from every fleshly lust which wars against the well-being and the health of your soul." That's the internal prong of the imperative. And he said, "Furthermore, these pagans are looking at you. Live in such a way that your life will shut their blaspheming, opposing mouths. And in the day of visitation, either when God visits them in mercy or visits them in judgment, they will be forced to say, 'I don't know about the rest of the world, there's a lot of religious phonies, but those people I watched, they are real.'" See? That's the imperative. Don't muck about in the old flesh pots of Egypt. That's no good for your soul. It's no good for your witness. That's the general directive.

Now he says, as though the people say, "But Peter, give us some specifics. We're practically minded people. In what areas are we to abstain from fleshly lusts? And how are we, in what areas, to so live honorably that we commend the gospel?" He says, "All right, I'll tell you. Let's start with the whole issue of submission to constituted authority." Verse 13: "Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." And so he gives directives about being submissive to civil authorities. Then verse 18, to domestic authorities: "Servants be in subjection to your masters." Chapter 3 verse 1: "In like manner you wives be in subjection to your own husbands." So you see, the broader context of 1 Peter, the more immediate context of this second cycle of indicatives, imperatives, and under that heading of abstaining from fleshly lust, living in such a way as to commend the gospel, he is telling them that they are to live lives of voluntary subjection of themselves to constituted authority.

Now, what comes to your mind the moment you think of hupotasso? That's the Greek verb for ranging yourself in submission under a constituted source of authority. You say, "To do that is to give up my freedom." Peter says no. In all of this--now we come to verse 16--you do this how? "As free, but not using your freedom for a cover-up of wickedness, but as slaves of God." All right? So we spend a few minutes to look at the larger and more immediate context.

Now we come to the text, and I want to open it up under its two obvious headings. We're going to see in the text, first of all, the spiritual condition of every real Christian, and then, secondly, the spiritual danger facing every real Christian.

First of all, then, the spiritual condition of every real Christian. Would anyone who knows his Bible at all object if I were to say these are some of the things that mark the spiritual condition of every real Christian? He or she is a justified man or woman. All their sins have been forgiven, and they are reckoned as righteous in the sight of God on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Christ. They are as faultless and as virtuous in terms of legal responsibility as Christ himself. I hope you'd say, Amen! That's me! As a Christian, I'm justified. You're adopted. God has legally taken you into His family. Not only dealt with you in the courtroom, He's dealt with you in the living room. You have access to His knee and to His ear, and to the intimacy of the love of His heart. You're adopted. You're justified; we could go on. You're redeemed. All of these things, they describe every real Christian.

But now look at the text. As Peter describes the spiritual condition of every real Christian, he does so in two ways. Look at the text: "as free [and then put a bracket in your mind around the next clause], and not using your freedom as a cloak of wickedness." And let's connect the two descriptions: "as free...but as slaves of God." He isn't saying, "as though you were free." No, he says, "as being free, while at the same time being slaves of God." Now do you see that with your own eyes in your Bible? He's not telling them to do anything. He's not telling them to become anything. He says this is what you are. "Pastor, that's bad grammar." Yes, I hope it gets your attention. This is what you are: free slaves. The spiritual condition of every real Christian is at one and the same time that of free and yet a slave. He says you are free.

They experience that nine-fold freedom which we examined some weeks ago. All the way from freedom from the condemning power of the law to freedom from the crippling power of the fear of death and everything in between, he says to these Christians,

"As you set your heart to abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul, seeking to have an honorable life that commends the gospel, and as I now direct you that a part of that kind of a lifestyle involves being submissive to every category of God-instituted authority, never for a moment forget you are Christ's free man. Never let any human being bring you into bondage. Never let any human cord of authority cripple your sense of your blessed liberty in Christ. It's blood-bought. Don't yield it. Do everything I'm telling you to do in the consciousness of your identity as free men and women. Your chains are broken, the door is open, and anything I'm telling you to do in being obedient to kings and governors and servants to masters and wives to husbands in no way creaks the door of the prison half shut. It doesn't put one manacle back on your hand. It is all done in your identity of free men and women."

But, that's only half the description. Peter assumes that every true believer there in Asia Minor has as his essential identity not only free, but a slave of God. A slave of God. To describe a real Christian as free, and only free, is to give only one half of the description of his true identity. According to this passage and many others, as we shall see, a real child of God is a slave of God and of Christ in the fullest sense of what it is to be a slave stripped of all the negative connotations of brutality and cruelty so often associated with slavery. And that means, scripturally, at least two things. We are God's slaves in this sense. First, we are God's purchased property, and we are the objects of God's radically transforming grace and power.

First of all, we are God's purchased property. When people are talking about slaves and slavery, what's the term they often use? Do they say, "He was a slave holder" or "He was a slave owner"? What's the term most frequently used? It's the second. Because the very nature of slavery was that the master had property in the person of his slave. His slave was regarded as his property as much as his horse, as much as his house, as much as his land. Now, was he to treat his slave differently from his land and from his horse? Yes. But his slave was his property. And when Peter writes

and identifies these believers in Asia Minor as slaves of God, he has clearly in mind this understanding: they are God's redemptively purchased property. Look back to chapter 1, where he makes this very clear. Verse 17:

"If you call on Him as Father, without respective persons, judges according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear [Luke chapter 1, rendering worshipful service to Him without servile fear, but not without the due fear of God], knowing that you were redeemed [you were bought, you were purchased], not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life, handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ."

He said, "You are Christ's blood-bought property, and you are to know this." When you get up in the morning and look in the mirror and say, Who's looking at me? You're to be able to say, "Purchased property is looking at me, marked with blood, even the blood of the sinless Son of God." That's why Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, can use similar language. In 1 Corinthians chapter 6, he says these words in verse 19, "Do you not know? Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God, [now notice] and you are not your own." You're not your own property. "My body is my own." Oh, is it? Not if you're a Christian. It's nobody's. God has it all by right of creation. But this is speaking of a right that goes beyond mere creative rights. You are not your own. Why? "For you were bought with a price." God purchased you unto Himself by the blood of His own dear Son.

But in becoming His slaves, we are not only God's purchased property, thereby made His slaves But furthermore (and without this, it would not be true that we are slaves of God) we are the objects of God's radically transforming grace and power. When Peter says to these Christians, "as free, yet slaves of God", what has he already said about their personal, inward, individual spiritual experience? Well, look at just a sampling of it. Turn back to chapter one. He's writing to people in chapter 2 and verse 16, of whom he believes the following things are already true.

Verse 3 of chapter 1: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy begot us again into a living hope..." He regards them as a people who have been born again. They have been begotten again in the virtue of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He regards them [verse 8] as those who do truly love an unseen Christ: "Whom, not having seen, you love; on Whom though you see Him not, yet believing, you rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory." In verse 22, he regards them as those who have purified their souls in an obedient response to the gospel: "Seeing you have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth..." Verse 23: "having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible..." He regards them as a people who have been begotten again.

Chapter 2 and verse 2: "as newborn babes..." We come back again, they have had a deep, real, internal, spiritual experience called a divine begetting, a begottenness again. Verse 9: "an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's

own possession..." Verse 25 of chapter 2: "You were going astray like sheep, but are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

You see, these are not experiences parceled out to some, but these are true of all the real people of God. Any real Christians in Asia Minor, Peter could say all these things of them, therefore he could say of them "as free, yet slaves of God" because the work of grace that gives us all of these marvelous blessings is also a work of grace, that in releasing us from slavery to sin, the devil, the world, and the worship of self is grace that enslaves us to God. And no grace releases us from condemnation and hell while not at the same time enslaving us to God and to Christ. Never, never, never!

And if you cannot say with joy, as Paul could say (Romans 1:1), "bondslave of Jesus Christ"; if you can't look in the mirror and say your name, "John Jones, bondslave of God and of Christ", you are not a Christian. Just that simple. Everyone who is made free is made a slave. All who are made a slave are made free. So Peter can say, "In these directives I give, you carry them out as free and as bondslaves of God."

And I couldn't root around in this concept without my mind going back to Deuteronomy 15. I want you to turn there with me.

As we look at the very method by which God makes us His slaves in grace, does He get us outside the open prison door and get us in a hammerlock and say, "I'm going to keep squeezing up?" Not a hammerlock. What do you call it when you get the arm behind the back? I forgot what you call that. Whatever it is, you know what it is. You get the arm behind you and start lifting, lifting, lifting: "I'll keep pushing until you say uncle." "Uncle, uncle, uncle, uncle. Let go." Does God get us outside the prison house and say, "Look, now I've broken your chains, I've opened the door, and I'm going to get you to say uncle." He gets us in the hammerlock. And against our desire and against our will, He just keeps the pressure until we say, "Okay, God, uncle, uncle, uncle, I cave in." No, no.

Look at Deuteronomy chapter 15, verse 12. "If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, be sold unto you..." Sometimes if you're in debt, the way you try to liquidate your debt was to sell a relative to be a slave. He became the property of the one to whom you sold him. There's that biblical concept. "If he be sold unto you and serve you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free." You will say to him, "Look, you're no longer my property, man. You're free. You want to go? Split." "And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty." You send him out with a big pack lunch, all right? "You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, out of your wine press. As the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give unto him."

Now look what happens. "And you shall remember you were a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you, therefore you shall do this thing." Now notice, here you said to the man, "Look, I'm going to give you half a dozen of my sheep. I'm going to give you so many bushels of my fruit of my ground, and all the rest. "You're free to go man, here's all your stuff." But he turns around and he says to

you... "And it shall be if he say to you, I will not go out from you, because he loves you, and your house, because he is well with you." See what happens? He says,

"Wait a minute. I've been in this house, and this master, instead of kicking me around, beating on me, spitting on me, kicking me, he treats me like his brother. He treats me like his son. He treats me like his daughter. I never had it so good. I don't need to worry about who's going to buy the food. The master does; puts it on the table. And the work requirements are reasonable. He treats me well, and you know what's happened? I've come to love the dude. I love him. He treats me well. Now, if he sets me free, what's out there? I don't know. I mean, I might not make it in my own enterprise. I mean, I might go bust. We might have a famine next year, and all the burden of famine can fall on my shoulders, not the Master's. I've had it too good with him. I've seen his heart, I've seen the generosity of his hand."

If he shall say, I will not go out from you, because he loves you and your house, because it's well with you, then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be your slave forever." So you've turned him loose, and he comes back and he says, "Master John, I don't want it out there. I've come to love you. I love the way you treat me. I see your heart in the provision of your hands, in the climate of the way. You respect me. Master John, I want to be your slave forever." He says, "You sure?" He says, "Yes, sir." He says, "Come over here." And he takes him to the door of his house. He says, "Come on, present your ear." He takes his earlobe, stretches it down, and he takes his oar, pierces his ear. This is your mind forever. Why do you do it? Because the Master's heart and the Master's hand won the voluntary subjection of his will. You got it? You got it?

And that's what happens every time God saves a sinner. How does a sinner get saved? When in his sin and lostness, He sees the love and mercy of God in Christ. And in Christ, God comes to rebel sinners with all their chains and all of their bondage and says, "Through the blood of My Son and the grace of My Son, I'll break your chains and set you free." And in the embrace of repentance and faith, we see the heart of God. All the rotten thoughts we had before that He's a hard master and His laws aren't good. They're restrictive and constrictive and all the other nonsense of an unregenerate blaspheming heart. And now we see the heart of God and we see the hand of God in giving of His only Son. And we say, "Oh God, such a heart and such a hand. Here's my ear. Nail it to the doorpost and pierce it. Jesus, Master, whose I am, purchased Thine alone to be by Thy blood, O spotless Lamb, shed so willingly for me."

Do you see it? Do you see it? In this Old Testament ritual, God's showing you what the gospel does. As free, but as slaves of God, made His slaves by the constraining power of His grace and of His mercy. That is why Paul could say in Romans 6, "And being made free from sin and become slaves to God, God be thanked that you have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching unto which you were delivered and having been made free from sin and become slaves to God." He assumes that whenever grace is operative, as surely as it frees, it enslaves, never one without the

other, always together in the marvelous complex of God's saving grace. And that's what Jesus meant when He said,

"Come to Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I'll give you rest. [I'll take all of the galling chains of an accusing conscience, all of the horrible, binding, galling, biting chains of the dread of death and of judgment, and all the other chains, I'll break them.] Come unto Me, all that labor and are heavy laden. I'll give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me. For I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest to your soul. [I'll take the burden, I'll give the yoke]."

My friends, listen to me, listen to me, listen, listen, listen, listen with six ears if you can find them. All this controversy a few years ago, some of you are aware, called the lordship controversy--a dear and esteemed champion for truth in our generation, Dr. John MacArthur, produced a book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, and you would have thought that the man had become a heretic. People wrote books to attempt to refute it. Then he wrote *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, demonstrating this simple truth I'm preaching this morning: grace never frees without enslaving. Never! Never! Never!

I could marshal text upon text, but I want to come to application. We've looked at the text, and what does it say? It says this is the spiritual condition of every real Christian. Now, if this is the spiritual condition of every real Christian (he's both a free and a slave), let me ask a very simple question. Is this you? Is you both free and a slave? Very simple question, isn't it? Very simple. Are you free and are you a slave? That's the question you've got to ask--each of us. John Brown, preaching on this text, realized that question needed to be addressed to his hearers. He wrote,

"It concerns us all seriously to inquire if the condition which has been described by Peter is ours. Are we experimentally, that is, in our own experience, acquainted with this liberty of the children of God? Are we slaves of God? The question should not be a difficult one to answer. On this subject I believe there may be presumptuous confidence, and I fear there is more than a little of it in this place this morning, where there is not only no evidence for but very much evidence against a favorable answer. There are men who speak great swelling words of vanity about their Christian liberty while their whole character and conduct proclaim them to be the servants of corruption. The only permanent satisfactory evidence that we are God's free men and women is habitual gratitude for our emancipation showing itself [and then guess what text he quotes, Luke 1:74 and 5], 'serving Him without fear in holiness and righteousness, walking before Him in love.' The only permanent satisfactory evidence we are God's slaves is that we're doing God's work."

"His slave you are", Paul said, "whom you obey." Not the One you point to on Sunday morning and say, "He's the master!" The One you obey on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday and Friday.

You see why I say you're in no position to talk about "What movies shall I go to? What movies shall I rent from Blockbuster? What music shall I listen to? Shall I not

listen to? What meat shall I eat? What drink shall I imbibe?" Mixed bathing, makeup, pierced ear, earrings, hairstyles. You're in no position to talk about those issues until you can look in the mirror and say, "I'm free! I'm a slave of God." That can be answered with judgment day honesty in the light of the Bible. Now we can sit down as we shall see in subsequent lessons, and we can take the stuff of Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8-10 and responsibly handle it when we talk about what meats and what music and what movies and what this and what that. But until you see yourself with judgment and honesty and this identity, don't talk about Christian liberty, for you're still a slave of your lust of sin, of the world, and of the devil, and of your own self-seeking. That's the identity of every true Christian, according to Peter.

Now, less time, but nonetheless important before we come to final application. Heading number two. So much for the spiritual condition of every real Christian, according to Peter. Now then, secondly, in our text, the spiritual danger facing every real Christian. In spite of Peter's confidence that all true believers are free and slaves of God, he does give this very poignant warning. Look at it: "As free and not using your freedom for a covering [or cover-up] of wickedness."

Two key words for to understand this danger facing every real Christian. He had already given the general call in verse 11: "Abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul." And among those fleshly lusts he now describes in more broad terms wickedness, the Greek word *kakia*. It has what the professional Theologians and expositors call a broad semantic range. Doesn't that sound fancy? You know what that means? It's used in lots of ways. A word with a broad semantic range is a word used lots of ways. Now why these guys just can't say it's used lots of ways? I don't know. They've got to call it a broad semantic range. Sounds scholarly, doesn't it? You didn't know I was a scholar, did you? That didn't sound scholarly. No. All kidding aside. It is a word that has many usages, and context must determine usage. And in some context, it's a general word that means anything that's morally base, the opposite of good, that which is corrupt and corrupting.

Peter had used it earlier in this very chapter, verse 1 of chapter 2: "putting away, therefore, all [*kakhia*] wickedness..." And then he gets more specific: "all guile, hypocrisies..." In other words, anything that is contrary to that to which God's people are called in chapter 1, verses 13 to 15, comes under the heading of wickedness. Peter wrote, "girding up the loins of your mind, be sober, set your hope perfectly on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Christ, children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lust in the time of your ignorance, but like as He who called you is holy, so be yourselves holy in all manner of living, because it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy." Holiness in every facet of my life. I am set free to render worshipful service without crippling carnal fear in holiness and righteousness before His face all the days of my life. And anything that doesn't fit that orbit is *kakia*. It is wickedness.

Now, notice what Peter says: "not using your freedom as a cover [or cover-up] for wickedness..." The only time in the New Testament where this word that I'm

translating "cover" or "cover up" is found right here. But the root of it is the standard word for veil or covering. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek and they were translating where it says that such and such a kind of ram's skin be used for a covering of the tabernacle, this is the precise word that was used in Exodus 26:14. Then in 2 Samuel 17:19, it speaks of a covering over a well. Some women were trying to hide a well from their enemies, and it says they put the cover over the well, so that when you walked by, you wouldn't see a well, but you would just see this cover.

Now, get Peter's image. He's saying, "Now, you believers, here's your identity. You are free, but I want to give you a warning. You need this warning because you have got a very persuasive advocate within your breast, just as Paul recognized." Peter and Paul are on the same page. He said "There will be a tendency for you to take the reality of your freedom and use it as a cover-up for wickedness."

Now let's put the idea together. While contemplating what it means to render worshipful service to God all of my days in a context of holiness and righteousness, seeking to be holy as He is holy, having no area of my life cordoned off and saying, "Well, we can feed a little bit of fleshly lust here, and a little bit of fleshly lust there, and a little bit of the world's dictates about what's right and what's wrong over here." No, no, no. Every area--holiness unto the Lord. That's the passion of our hearts. And if you're a true Christian, that is the passion of your heart. How poorly you may attain it, how sporadically you may feel its strength and its power, that's who you are if you're a real Christian. Why? You're a bondsman of God, and you know that God's rule is a rule unto holiness.

So what happens? Here you're wrestling with an issue, an activity not blatantly and universally recognized or condemned as sin. Now, let's get specific. Here's a particular TV program. Everybody's talking about it. And it's not one that, as far as you know and what people say, there's actual pornographic scenes of people hopping into bed together. There's not a lot of cursing. There's a lot of funny things. And it's not an issue that is so patently and blatantly evil that you say, "No, no, no, as a Christian, that's off the charts." It's questionable. And you're wrestling with the thing. Or maybe it's a purchase you're going to make. And God has blessed you. You have the money to buy this given thing. It would not be blatantly sinful, self-indulgent to do it. You're wondering, should the money go there? Should it go for some of these benevolence projects for the suffering church? You're thinking about the issue. And as you think about the issue, you have a sneaking suspicion that if you go to that place, if you watch that program, if you rent that movie, if you make that expenditure, you've got a sneaking sort of haunting suspicion way back rumbling somewhere back in there. You know, you have that, you know, way back there, but is there. "This may dull my conscience. I'm not sure if I'd want to be plunking out that money if at that point Jesus were to return and look at me and say, 'Inasmuch as you did it not unto the least of these My little ones, you did it not unto Me.'" You're not quite sure you'd want to be plunking down your card at Blockbuster getting that particular movie if Jesus were the cashier. Huh? You got a little bit, huh? You follow me?

Or you're sitting with a group of your friends in their home watching a given movie, and you're increasingly uneasy. And in that uneasiness, you know if Jesus walked through the door, you'd be embarrassed sick. But it's not that screeching, screamy wickedness. And you're not sure what to do. Now it's crunch time. What are you going to do with that thing that's back here saying, "Oh, whoa, wait." It's at that point you will be tempted to manufacture a thick, downy blanket. Oh, it's very thick. It covers up the lumps and the contours of whatever you want to throw it on. You know those nice big, thick, downy comforters? Am I talking to myself? You know what I'm talking about? And you know what you do in your soul? You hang it up on the wall. It's amazing you can make it so quickly. And suddenly at your side is a big five-gallon bucket of bright red paint. And not a little two or three-inch paintbrush, but it's a big old wallpaper brush about twelve inches across. And you stick it in there, and you know what you start to paint on your big, thick, downy comforter? Watch me. You start painting something. You dip it in, and you start painting a big C, a big H. Dip it in again--a big R. Now to make it backwards, dip it in again--a T, then an I, then an A, and then an N. Then you go back here and underneath it you put an L. Dip it again. You put an I. You put a B. You see where I'm going? And you paint on your blanket the words "Christian liberty"; you yank it off the wall and throw it over that movie. You throw it over that piece of clothing. You throw it over that expenditure. And you've turned your liberty into a cover-up for wickedness. And Peter says, "Don't do it as Christ's and God's slave."

And that is being done by people in this place, because I hear it at times ad nauseam. "As free, [yes, but] not using your freedom as a cover-up for wickedness..." Your freedom is such, as a slave of God, that you can say, "Though my flesh might like that movie, it is laced with wickedness. I'll live if I don't see it. I may destroy my soul if I dull my conscience, make myself estranged from the place of prayer, make my spiritual appetite shrivel." Anything that dulls the conscience, makes Christ distant, kills our appetite for prayer and for the secret place is wickedness. I don't care how many Christians in this place do it. That's what Peter is saying.

I will not, in the language of Paul, offer my members instruments of unrighteousness unto sin. I am so free in Christ that I don't care if I'm the odd guy out and the odd girl out and everybody's talking about the latest group and the latest CD and the latest video and the latest DVD or anything else. I am so free in Christ I don't care a hoot if I have to look him in the face and say, "I don't have a clue what you're talking about and I could care less. Let me tell you what I've got in my Bible this morning." See what that does to your pseudo-Christian friends, loving their Christian liberty when they know nothing of heart love for my Jesus that causes them to want to be like Him with all their heart.

Well, that's what the text says. Now I've got two points of application that I want to get through before I'm done.

Number one, the Christian who does not believe he is in danger of using his liberty as a cover-up for wickedness is in the greatest danger of doing so. The Christian who

does not believe he is in danger of using his liberty as a cover-up for wickedness is in the greatest danger of doing that very thing. What did Jesus say in Matthew 26:41? "Watch as well as pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

The word "watch" is a military term--keep alert. I've got this dangerous, persuasive, sophisticated lawyer in my breast who is also on the side an excellent downy comforter maker. And he's always got his big pale or red paint in his 12 inch brush ready to go to work. Would God, I could say, I don't know much about him. I've lived with him for 52 years, and one of the longings for heaven is I'll kiss him goodbye when I breathe my last. I'll kiss him goodbye.

1 Corinthians 10:12: "Let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall." We are never more unsafe than when we feel most safe. You hear me? We are never more unsafe than when we feel most safe. Let me illustrate. There's going to be lots of parades on Memorial Day. Crowds of people milling, and in them there could be wretched pedophiles and kidnapers. And so a daddy's going to take his son out for the first time to that kind of setting. He said, "Now son, at no point does daddy's hand and your hand fail to keep contact. If I lose my grip on you, you grip on me. We're locked together. There's all kinds of dangers out there, son." Now, if that boy believes his daddy, he's going to make sure, no matter what sights dazzle him out here, if he doesn't feel daddy's hand squeezing his, he's going to go to squeezing daddy's. And when he gets so confident that he relinquishes, because he's been safe--nobody's come and bothered and tried to grab him away--when he is most sure that he is safe, he is most unsafe.

Got the message? He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. If you do not incorporate into your prayers a serious regard for Peter's words, "O God, I am free. I am your slave. But I know I'm in danger of using my freedom as a cover-up for wickedness. God help me. Keep me close to you. Keep me sensitive to the first whisperings of that voice way, way back there, and make me deaf to the voice of my peers in society."

That's my first application. Now my second one. And God knows, I realize this is going to cut very close to the bone with some of you, but I've got to be faithful to your soul. Here it is. The most effective way to avoid falling into this sin is to weigh my contemplated issues of Christian liberty in this light. Here I am wrestling. Shall I eat or not eat? Shall I drink or not drink? Shall I watch or not watch? Shall I go or not go? The most effective way to avoid falling into this sin of using the liberty that puts you in the place where you do have to make the choice, because God hasn't given you a big, long checklist, and you can look up alphabetically. "No, that's a forbidden, this is a forbidden, that's an okay, that's a..." No. Here's the most effective way to avoid falling into the sin of using your liberty as a cover-up for wickedness, and it is this. Will this activity validate or compromise my true identity? Simple question. Will this particular activity validate or compromise my identity? What identity? I'm free, and yet I'm Christ's and God's slave.

Let me get specific. Summertime's coming; with summertime sand and surf, and bare flesh on the beach. And if you're a Christian woman or Christian man, you believe the Bible has something to say about modesty. It doesn't give us a manual with inches and square inches and square centimeters of flesh that need to be covered to be called modest, but it does talk about modesty. And when it talks about a woman with the attire of a harlot, that means she was showing off her wares to get some action! Right? You hang your shingle out to get some business. Women dress in modest apparel, Paul says.

All right? So now you're wrestling with the whole issue: "Shall I put myself in a place of indiscriminate mixed bathing?" I'm not talking about families on vacation or in their backyard pool, husband and wife and children and siblings in a family context. I'm not talking about that. I said indiscriminate mixed bathing. Listen to the old man. He uses his words carefully. All right? Don't go out and tell your parents, The pastor said you can't even go to the pool." Come on. Don't do that to me. That's dirty pool, kids. Don't do that to me. I'm not that stupid. All right? Come on. Let's get honest. Let's get real. If I can use your terminology, let's get real. When you're wrestling, "Shall I go in a setting of indiscriminate mixed bathing, that is, bearing my body according to current bathing suit standards before men other than my dad or my husband or my brothers? I'm free!" Free to do what? Free to say to a society, as Jeff Pollard has unquestionably proven, has had a calculated movement over the past fifty years to make public nakedness acceptable that tells you that you can leave as much bare flesh as a woman has with her basic two pieces of underwear and even less, and it's acceptable because it's at the beach, it's at the pool. Now I ask you, come on, let's get honest, in the light of two perspectives. Luke 17 and verse 3: "It is necessary [Jesus said] that offenses come." He said, "In a sinful world there is inevitably to be sin. That's the way it's going to be." But then he says, "But woe unto him through whom the offense comes. It were better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck, and he be thrown into the sea than he cause one of these little ones that believe in me to stumble." If by your wanton, irresponsible refusal to say, "I will not bear my flesh in such a way that is an unnecessary provocation to sin", then what are you saying? You're saying, "I'm either a slave to sun, sand, and surf" or "I'm a slave to present immoral American bathing fashions, and I'm indifferent to being the occasion of sin in others." That's what you're saying. "But it's my..." Use not your liberty as a cover-up for wickedness.

You men, you find that indiscriminate mixed bathing settings are a provocation to mental lust, which Jesus said is a violation of the seventh commandment. Then you've got to be willing to be the odd man out. You young men. The singles going to have a bathing party, going to have a pool party. You've got to have the guts to say, "Cut me out." What do you mean? "I'm too much of a sinner! Cut me out! I'm free from your smiles. I'm free from your frowns. Call me a wacko. Call me a legalist. I'm just being true to who I am. I'm free. And I'm God's slave." And you go smiling all the way home to read a book while everybody else is splashing. You say, "Pastor, that's radical." You show me that that's not a legitimate application of biblical principles, and

I'm ready to retract everything I've said. I am sick and tired of people so enslaved to this world's standards of summer modesty.

You women, don't come to prayer meeting and give the man a lesson in posterior anatomy by the clothing you pour yourself into because it's summertime. God says in 1 Timothy 2, the first word to women in public worship is how to dress. And I think prayer meeting is part of public worship, isn't it? Last time I asked, it was. You see, the world's got us, folks, got us by the tail. You say, "Well, pastor, we'll get the reputation for being a bunch of Mennonites." So what? A lot of things worse than that.

So what do you know about it? I'll tell you what I know about it. I was reared five minutes from Long Island Sound in Stamford, Connecticut. When my pappy would come home at night to give my mother a little rest from all the kids surrounding her, he'd walk us down the beach. We'd swim and have a lovely time. Summertime, when I wasn't working, I'd lay on the beach hour after hour. It's a wonder I'm not riddled with skin cancer. I was a sand surf beach boy. When God saved me, nobody preached to me like I'm preaching to you, but I saw this in my Bible. And I've been willing to deny myself splashing in salt water, which I love. And in many settings, where I'd thoroughly enjoy, and it would be, quote, my liberty to do what I do in the water. But what I've got to see when I get out the water, I ain't got no liberty to do that. I'm told to pluck outright eyes, not go where my eyes are going to need to be plucked.

What about? Got a lot of weddings coming, folks. You girls getting weddings? God help you if men have to sit here with their heads bowed because of all the flesh and cleavage they've got to watch at a Christian wedding. At times I've wanted to weep and put my head down and say, "Folks, I want you to know I've got nothing to do with all the flesh you see." Does this validate free yet slaves of God? Free from current wedding dress and bridesmaids fashions. As a slave of God to validate, I've embraced modesty as the standard of my life. Is that unreasonable?

What about your music? Does my listening to this music validate I'm free, yet a slave of God who says, "Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things." "Ah, but I just like the beat and I don't listen to the words." Nonsense! The impression is made upon the sensitive tablets of the brain. And that's why when you watch the close-ups at the rock concerts, you find the thousands lip-syncing all the words of their favorite rock star, carrying on like a demonic madman on the stage. "Ah, but I just listened to CCM." Yeah, with words so often that are so trite and denigrating to the glory and dignity of my God and of my Savior and His salvation that they are nothing short of blasphemy. "What do you know?" I make myself listen to some of the garbage so when I talk about it and you challenge me, I can look you in the eyeballs and say, "Let's take your CD and sit down and let's look at the lyrics together." You're not free. You're a slave to current sounds. Admit it. "I'm a slave. I can't live without it." You're a slave. Admit it. Don't say it's your liberty when your

chains and your manacles are clanking in your addiction to your videos, to your music, to your styles, to immodesty, and a host of other things.

I said, Lord, if I don't drop down into specific people will go out and say, "Lovely sermon, Pastor" and not have a clue what I was talking about. Now that's only a sampling. Hoping the Holy Ghost will provoke thought and prayer and reflection and a host of other things.

When you say, "Pastor, if that's what being a Christian is, that's too restricted for me. That's too radical. I'm not sure I want that." My friend, listen to me. There's one place to go and evaluate whatever you're holding to. You go to a place where God incarnate is writhing in agony upon a cross. That's what your addiction cost Him. That's what your slavery cost Him. Gazing upon Him and seeing the heart of God in the crucified risen Savior, then you'll be ready to say,

"God, what a fool I've been to think that anything You would require of me would constrict me and restrict me and be something less than the fullness of what You made me to be. Oh God, what a stupid fool I've been. Forgive me. Make me Your slave. Cover me in the blood of Your Son. I want to be Your purchased possession. I want to be Your conquered vessel. Lord Jesus, here is my ear. Nail it to the doorpost. Nail it to the doorpost."

Is there any sitting here this morning who says, "Oh God, I want to be free." The only way to get free is to become a slave. In that slavery, you are free. That's it. You say, "That's double talk." Yeah, I know, but it's Bible talk. And in Christ, in Christ, there's such blessed freedom. Blessed freedom. Blessed freedom.

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