

Liberty from the Lordship of Satan

Christian Liberty

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Bible Text: Galatians 1:4; Acts 26:12-18
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Our Scripture lesson is taken once again from Galatians 5, beginning at verse 13, and that's on page 1,815. "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

This is the word of the Lord. [Thanks be to God.]

May we pray.

Lord, help me to be clear and concise, compelling, practical, Lord, that each word I speak would be acceptable to you and beneficial to someone here and someone who is listening, and that all these things we ask in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I have been doing a little short series, how long it lasts I'm not sure, but I forgot to print out the Confession of Faith so I am going to use my cellphone and then I'm going to do what everyone should do, I'm going to turn the thing off. So let me read from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 20, and the first paragraph.

"The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin, from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind. All which were common also to believers under the law; but under the New Testament the liberty of Christians is further enlarged in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish Church was subjected; and in greater

boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.”

As we continue on our study of Christian liberty, we’ve seen how we are free from the doctrines and commandments of men when it comes to worship. We are also free from obedience to every lawful authority where that lawful authority commands us to sin. Then we considered the curse of the law last week, and we considered the curse of the law as we looked at the law of sin and death as Paul describes it in the eighth chapter of Romans, that is, every time we sin, we incur a deadening, and every time we experience that deadening, we sin more. So, it’s a vicious cycle as we saw last week (Romans 8:2). Today, we want to look at our being liberated from the dominion of Satan and the power of the world.

Let’s turn in our Bibles, having read it again, verse 13, Galatians 5:13, “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature.”

If you turn in your Bibles back to chapter 1, verse 4, you see Paul saying this on that page 1,809 and he says beginning in verse 3,

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Now you see, Christ gave himself to free us from the present evil age and when we think about the world in the Bible, we’re not talking about material things like this pulpit, we’re talking about the spirit of an age. You know, the spirit of an age varies from one time and place to another.

If you think about this, when people in another culture do things which seem to us to be insane, it’s simply that the spirit of their age, their world, their culture, is radically different from ours.

When I worked on my doctorate trying to understand Islam in such a way I could communicate to Christian believers how to communicate with Muslims, I tried to deal with the fact that if you have a Muslim world and life view that things that seem to Western people to be insane like being happy to sacrifice your own children and your own life to further the cause of Islam, to defend the honor of the prophet Mohammad, to defend the Koran, such ideas as that as taking our children and offering them up to defend the Islamic faith, that seems insane to us. So, when people do things

that seem insane to us, what that is, is an indication that the world in which they live, the culture in which they live, has a different perspective on life and reality than we do. We need to understand that.

When we read newspapers and when we watch the one-eyed monster, we should discover there that people don't always see the world the way we do. They see the world as radically different than we do and so we need to understand that.

That's why arguing with people is an exercise in futility that will only stimulate your sinful nature and make you say something you should never say.

So, Christ died to deliver us from this present evil age and when Paul was writing to the people in Galatia, he was writing to people in what we now call Turkey, and he was communicating to them the radical freedom that comes to Jews and Gentiles through Jesus Christ.

Now I want you to notice, if you turn back to the left to Acts 26 as Paul is defending his faith and talking about what happened to him, and we're going to Acts 26 and that's page 1,739, and Paul, at this point, has been called to defend himself before King Agrippa, that's King Agrippa II and his sister/wife Berenice. He and his sister had a thing. So anyhow, Paul is speaking to Agrippa II, and as he begins to talk about his conversion, if you look at the bottom of page 1,739, as he describes himself as a fanatical hater of the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore a fanatical hater of all Christians. Understand what I'm saying?

That's why he was full of rage and a determination to wipe out everyone who named Jesus as Lord and Savior, and so he says in verse 12,

“On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’”

Now the picture there is of an ox being driven, and even a little boy can drive an ox if he has a stick with a sharp point on it that's sharp enough to pierce the skin of that ox, and so that's how you get the ox to go, you inflict pain on his leg if he's not doing what you want him to do.

So, notice how he describes it that way, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” What would happen to an ox that would kick against the goad? That point would go in deeper. Think about this for a moment.

God pursues people that way, and when people resist God, they say, “I don’t want this.” What happens? When they kick against the goads, they experience a lot of pain.

Have you ever thought that the pain of life is designed by God to bring you to himself?

And so, Jesus is speaking to Saul in Aramaic, and he says, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads. Then,” says Paul in verse 15, “I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’”

Obviously, he’s recognizing this is something supernatural. And listen to what Jesus said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”

Well, that had to be a wake-up call. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”

Do you know that when people persecute believers, which they do today in this world in China, in Saudi Arabia, in other countries, people persecute Christians, do you know when people persecute Christians they are persecuting Jesus and he regards it that way?

Now look at what Jesus tells him in verse 16,

“Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you.”

That’s an interesting thing. Have you ever thought about the fact that you’re called to preach? Think about it. When God converts us to himself, he’s called us to preach in every case. That doesn’t mean that you should be standing behind a pulpit and teaching Scripture, but it means that when people have had a life-changing encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ, they want to tell people about it.

I remember the night I was converted. I was converted in the Sunday school wing of the First Presbyterian Church of Myrtle Beach (where the Chinese spy balloon was shot down yesterday. I have friends on Facebook who live there and took photos.) But anyhow, back then churches used to always be unlocked and the Sunday school wing was unlocked, and so it happened I was the only person in that little meeting of college-aged men who was a member of that church. They just knew that it was open and that’s where they met.

That's how I was converted, and I wanted to tell people about it after I was converted. I wanted to say, "Something's happened to me." I didn't have an emotional experience at all. I didn't cry. I didn't laugh. I simply prayed a prayer I had prayed many times in my life, but somehow, I knew that God had finally answered that prayer and he had changed me and he had given me new desires.

So, I was converted.

By the way, as an aside, the church that my grandfather pastored in Port Gibson, Mississippi experienced terrible vandalism this week. A man high on crack and drunk went into the church which is left open because tourists like to see this beautiful old church that has a seven-foot-tall golden hand on the steeple pointing to heaven, and the amount of damage he did was unbelievable: stained glass windows knocked out, the organ messed up, the piano flipped over, every single pew in the church turned upside down. And their pastor, my friend Mike, went to see the man who did this in jail, and he asked him, "Why did you do it?" He said, "I'm mad at God. I'm mad at God."

Paul was mad at God. He didn't think he was mad at God, he thought he was serving God, but he was mad at God, and so he wreaked havoc wherever he went. Now notice again what he says in verse 17, "I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles."

Here's his commission, next sentence, "I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." See his commission? He's got to turn people from darkness to light. He's got to open their minds and he's got to deliver them from the power of Satan.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, that's an impossible task. Neither you nor I have the power to do that, but one there is who does and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why I want you to understand you can never argue a person into the kingdom of God. It's foolishness.

Facebook, I love to study Facebook because it reveals to me our culture in a powerful way, and what it reveals is that 99% of people are idiots. Now what I mean by that is simply this: People get into fights with total strangers over nonsense.

In the final analysis, when you weigh everything in light of eternity, who wins presidential elections and whatnot is not ultimately of no real

consequence. What we need to understand is that premiers and presidents and prime ministers are simply the backdrop of a stage where God's real action is taking place. What's God's real action?

God wants to bring people in the Ukraine and bring people in Russia to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. God wants to take what was once the most Presbyterian city in the world—Pyongyang in North Korea was the most Christian city in the world at one time, and there were more Presbyterians in Pyongyang than in the cities of Scotland—amazing story, and that's why Satan hated those people, and Satan unleashed a cult of madness, the Kim Dynasty, to wipe out Christians because the hatred of Christians is an irrational and violent thing.

Now notice he says again, “to open their eyes,” verse 18, “and turn them from darkness to light.” Have you ever thought when you're watching television news, you're watching darkness? That you're watching people trying to explain the world without any sense of how the world really works?

From darkness to light—how do you do that? It's by the power of the Holy Spirit. And next he says, “from the power of Satan to God.”

Does he mean that everyone you encounter who is not a Christian is demon-possessed? No.

We need to distinguish a couple of things.

First of all, what does total depravity mean? We confess we believe that human beings are totally depraved. What does that mean? It doesn't mean that people are as bad as they can possibly be.

It means that in the totality of human nature, no part has escaped the effect of sin. That means that even my mind, my ability to think and reason has been affected by sin. Total depravity does not mean people are as bad as they can possibly be.

There's a difference between Joseph Stalin and Albert Schweitzer. Joseph Stalin was really down there in people being really, really, really bad. Albert Schweitzer was very, very noble. But both men are like you and me, no part of their being escaped the effect of sin.

But let's focus here on the power of Satan. Everyone you meet has a demonic influence that is working on them. That sounds crazy. Again, we're not talking about Jesus' casting demons out of demon-possessed people.

By the way, the Bible doesn't have a phrase demon-possession; it simply takes a verbal form (*daimonízomai*, *δαιμονίζομαι*) of the word demon

(daimónion, δαιμόνιον) and uses it to describe people who are “demon-possessed,” they are demonized.

Do you ever hear voices? Sure, you do.

You won't admit it, because I learned a long time ago—I worked in college as a psychometric clerk, what that meant was that when people took tests back in the old days before there were really good computers, I had a stencil that I put over a sheet of paper, and I counted the dots, and I added them up, and I put the score there. So, I was a psychometric clerk, and one of the best things that I ever examined was the MMPI, the Minnesota Multiphasic Psychological Inventory, and I learned, as I had to take that thing several times in my life, I learned how to lie, because had I said on that thing that I hear voices, they would have said, “This man is schizophrenic.”

But the reality is everyone hears voices if you understand what that really means. I'm not talking about being in here now and you're all here present and I hear, “Bob!” If I'm hearing that, then I'm probably schizophrenic.

I'm talking about powerful, powerful, powerful thoughts. Do you ever have a very powerful thought come into your mind right at the point where you're trying to do something for God? Do you ever pick up your Bible and you're reading and all of a sudden you have the thought, “How do you know there's a God?” Do you ever begin to pray, and you ever have the thought, “How do you know God's listening?”

Now, because I majored in philosophy, I would enter into a dialog with what I thought was myself and I would reason, “Well, I believe the Bible is true because of this, and this, and this. And I believe God is there because of this, this, and this.” And by the time I finished proving that the Bible was true and that God was there listening, I had spent all my time I should have spent praying arguing with what I thought was myself, until one day I realized those thoughts are like traveling in the old days with an AM radio, and you ever travel from one city to another city, to another city, and the AM station you're listening to is fading away, and you get another station, and you're not sure what station? Where is this station coming from?

I remember on December 26th early in the morning, right after midnight 1967, I got in my mother's car, and I drove from Myrtle Beach, home of the Chinese spy balloon, and all the way to Jacksonville, Florida.

Why did I do that? Because I had a diamond ring, and I was determined to put it on the prettiest girl I'd ever seen. As I'm driving, in order to stay awake though I was plenty awake because I was excited... anyhow, I got all

these stations. I discovered a station that I could hear really well, WWL out of New Orleans of all things. I can't pick up WWL in Alexandria, Louisiana, but late at night, back in those days because of the way AM signals bounced, I listened to it.

So anyhow, you're riding down the road, and you lose a station, you get another station trying to figure it out.

Let me tell you that your mind is like a radio, and you can't always tell what station you're tuning into, and this is where it is.

Some thoughts that come to your mind are simply the product of your natural human nature, and some of them are part of your sinful human nature, and some of them are from the world because our culture really affects us (James 3:15). And if you don't think our culture affects us, just look at this. That's a lot narrower tie than I used to wear, and it's not as narrow as ties I wore before that. Why does this look good to me? I don't know.

Because I see pictures of how people are supposed to look and, you see, the world affects us, but sometimes the station is tuned into 6.66 on the AM dial, and you're getting thoughts from the devil. That's the dominion of Satan and power of Satan that Paul was commissioned to go to pagan people in ancient Turkey and to communicate with them the power of the gospel.

I'm going to tell you a couple of stories in how I learned to deal with these thoughts. First of all, I had a very dear friend who would be now ready to turn 96 years old. His name was Dick Ayers. Dick was in the oil business, and we became very good friends because every week Dick and I would go visit visitors who visited our church, and so on those evenings we talked a lot.

And one day I was asking about some things, and he said, "Bob, you need to understand that you sometimes need to take charge of your thoughts in the name of Jesus." It was kind of a revolutionary idea, taking charge of what I'm thinking in the name of Jesus, and that came in really handy when this horrible experience happened in my office. Because I've never accepted money for counseling people or charged anyone for counseling people, I have counseled an unbelievable number of people.

One day a young woman came to see me. Her parents had had me recommended to them, and the first time we visited I learned some things about her, and after we counseled awhile, we made an appointment, and she came back to see me.

When she came back to see me, I began to have really terrible thoughts. I began to have the thought of how good it would be to commit adultery with her. Wow! I love my wife, I loved my job, and those are two things that I could have lost, as well as loving my children, I could have lost instantly because I know had I yielded to this voice which involved copulatory activity on the floor, using old Anglo-Saxon onomatopoeic physiological term. Had I done that Satan would have engineered that the door would have opened, and I would have been caught, and I would have been fired, and I would have probably lost my family as well as my job.

What happened? I remembered the words of my friend, Dick Ayers.

I'm trying to pray. Do you know I tried to pray, and I couldn't pray?

Have you ever been in a situation where something's happening, and you can't even pray? And then finally a thought came into my mind, and I can't tell you, this was not 6.66 on the radio dial, but 7.77, and it was the Holy Spirit, and here's the thought, "Get out of here!"

It was my office. It was my church. But I heard it very clearly, "Get out of here!" And so, what did I do? I said to the young lady who never knew anything was going on in my mind and—by the way, later she was ritually killed in Little Rock and chopped up—I went into the sanctuary of the church, and I did something I had never done before. I commanded that thought to get out of my mind and not to return; I dealt with the thought as if it were an actual person or entity. And do you know what happened?

When I said, "In the name and the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command you to get out of my mind." Whoosh. Have you ever jumped into an ice-cold mountain stream? The coldest water I ever jumped into was Lake Susan in Montreat, NC and it was a hot summer day, but when I dove into the water of Lake Susan, it was so cold it was unbelievable—and it was as if I had come out of a Turkish bath, a steam room, and suddenly plunged into an ice pool. My mind was free. The thought was completely gone. No longer was my mind in terror and so at that point I pleaded with God. I said,

"Lord, I need your help. I need your protection against Satan. I need you to deliver me from the power of this compelling obsessive thought," because I knew I had to go back in that room.

So, I prayed for protection, I went back into the room, and I said to the young lady, I said, "We don't need to meet again. I'm going to pray for you." I prayed for her. I dismissed her and sometime later, several years later she ended up in Little Rock ritually killed and cut up. Wow!

I was troubled about it and I talked to a friend of mine about the incident and he said, “Well, when you’re in the presence of a dog, you’re liable to have some fleas jump on you.” That’s an interesting thought, isn’t it? We can pick up things that are going on in another person and they can pull us and entice us in. You can go in certain places, and if you become sensitive spiritually you can be aware that there’s something not right in a particular place.

You’ll find that is often the case on highways where there are truck stops, that bad things happen. And by the way, you know, next Sunday is the Super Bowl. Did you know that the greatest day of human trafficking in America takes place at the Super Bowl? Human trafficking. Young men and women kidnapped and forced and tricked into being slaves. So, as you celebrate the Super Bowl, remember it’s the greatest day of exploiting women and children in America. Demons are contagious. That’s why you have to wear your spiritual armor.

So, Paul’s commission fits in with this chapter in the Westminster Confession of Faith about Christian liberty where he tells us that we are delivered from the present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin.

I pray for you today if you are dealing with very powerful compelling urges that you can’t seem to get relief from, quit praying and start taking command in the name and authority of Jesus Christ. Listen, when it’s time to command Satan to get out of our mind, Satan will tell you, “We need to have a prayer time.” There’s a time to quit praying and take authority over what’s in your mind so that you can then pray and pray for power and protection.

So, as we close the sermon today and move to the Lord’s Supper, I want to invite you with me to join in a prayer of deliverance, of being set free from powerful compelling thoughts like, “How could this simple bread and wine do me any real good?”

Or, “Bob today was the nuttiest he’s ever been when he was talking about that. And I cannot believe in his office in Alexandria, Louisiana, he actually had compelling thoughts that he was not able to be delivered from until he spoke out loud and demanded them to be gone.” So, I want to pray.

Lord, I pray for us, each of us as we deal with thoughts, Lord, that are sometimes so compelling, so obsessive that we cannot seem to be rid of them any other way, would you give us to take seriously that you have given to us as believers the power of life and death in the tongue (Proverbs 18:31). May

we always use our tongues for good. And right now, Lord, I want to lead the people here in a prayer of deliverance.

Lord Jesus, we pray as we pray, you would set us free. And Lord, in that authority, we now do take command over our own thoughts, our own imaginations, our own desires, our own drives, our own insecurities that are exploited by Satan and we command every spirit in or around us that does not love the Lord Jesus Christ to get out and to be gone. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Lord, hear our prayer.

For Jesus' sake we pray. Amen.