



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Corinthians 6:12-20

“Freedom”

1 Corinthians

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Jim. We are in 1 Corinthians, if you're visiting. We have started a series in this book, and that's what we do at Believer's Chapel almost always. There are some exceptions, but generally our ministry is to preach through books of the Bible, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, and we are in chapter 6 of 1 Corinthians, the second half.

Last week we looked at the problem of lawsuits in the church, and as I explained last week, so much of 1 Corinthians is dealing with problems in that church, so he moves from one problem to the next. And what he deals with this week in the second half of chapter 6, and we'll look at the rest of the chapter, verses 12 through 20, is the problem of immorality in the church. It's a uncomfortable text in some ways to study, but it has some wonderful solutions, so 1 Corinthians 6:12, we read:

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by any.

Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.

Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be!

Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, ‘the two shall become one flesh.’

But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let’s pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do pray your blessings upon us. We consider it a great privilege to come together with the saints on this Lord’s Day. What a privilege it is every week to come together, open your Word, and study it. And as we do, we come to a new text each week, and in the case of our series in 1 Corinthians, we come to a new problem almost every week. And we come to one this morning that may be, in one sense, a bit uncomfortable to teach and to hear, but it’s there by your will.

Paul put it there, but he put it there under the guidance and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And so while it was very, very important for the Corinthians to hear what the apostle had to say about this particular issue and problem, it’s equally important for us to hear it. We need to hear the things that you have put within your Word, the whole counsel of God, as Jim has reminded us.

And so we pray, Lord, that as we sit here this morning, that you would bless us with ears that are open, with hearts that are open to receive the ministry that’s given. May we consider the things that the apostle wrote. May we understand them, understand his rather involved argument, and understand the application. Make the application to us, Father.

We all have different problems and different issues that we struggle with, but we all need to understand what the apostle is writing here – wherever he writes, whoever the inspired author is, to understand the meaning of the text and how it

applies individually to each one of us. So we pray that that ministry of the Spirit would go unhindered this morning, that you would open our hearts to receive the ministry, and guide us in our thinking.

And may this be a time of learning and a time of worship. Certainly, this is a text that ultimately leads us to a sense of gratitude and worship of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; of our triune God, who is the source of all grace and life, and we give you praise and thanks for all that we have. We thank you for all we have spiritually. We thank you for what we have materially. We thank you that you’ve given us physical life, that you’ve given us bodies, and this opportunity to live in this world for a brief time.

Certainly, it’s like a nanosecond compared to eternity, but you’ve given us physical life. You give us an opportunity o live in this world, and as Paul tells us in this text, to live to your glory. What a great privilege. That’s an unfathomable privilege, when we think about it; to live to the glory of the almighty God. You’ve given us that opportunity. We give you praise and thanks, and pray, Lord, that you would provide for our material bodies.

Provide for our physical life, and make us thankful for all that we have. We pray for those who are sick. We pray for those that are discouraged. We pray for those who are unemployed. We pray that you would bless them, and give them healing mercy and opportunities to work, all according to your will. We know, Lord, that things come into our lives that are not pleasant, but they come into our lives for a purpose.

And we pray that that purpose would be worked out well in the lives of everyone who is undergoing difficulty of some kind. And those who are experiencing the good times in life of health and employment and all of that, that you would make them thankful for what they have. We are indebted to you for everything we have, and we can rest confident that when we lack something, we ultimately do not, because we’re in your care. We’re in your hand, and you’re going to take care of us to the end.

Help us to live faithfully. So Lord, we pray you’d bless us spiritually and materially, and we pray that you would bless us now in the rest of the hour, that we would learn and we would worship well. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

[Message] There’s an insightful passage in the Russian novel *The Brothers Karamazov* in which the subject of freedom is discussed. Everyone loves freedom. Everyone is for freedom. But not every idea about freedom is right. That’s what the narrator of the novel says; he speaks of the world’s proclamation of freedom. The world says, “You have needs. Satisfy them. Don’t hesitate to satisfy your needs.

“Indeed, expand your needs and demand more. This,” he says, “is the worldly doctrine today, and they believe that this is freedom.” But he asks, “What do they find in that freedom of theirs? Nothing, but enslavement and suicide.” Now, that was written over a hundred years ago, in a different place, in a different time, but it is even more true today of our world. I don’t need to tell you that our society is drowning in sex and pornography.

But when people think freedom is doing whatever they want, they soon discover that that is the sure way to slavery, because sin is enslaving and suicidal. It is death. Paul makes that point in 1 Corinthians 6, where he connects this false notion of freedom with the Corinthians church, and he corrects it. There were some in the Corinthian church who had turned their liberty into license.

They’d been saved out of a very permissive, depraved society. It was really worse than ours. We wonder, “Can things get any worse?” and the answer is, “Yes, they can.” They were worse in Paul’s day. Paul has just mentioned that some of the Christians had been idolaters. Some have been fornicators, some had been homosexuals. And some found their old ways hard to shake.

It is a fact that while we are born again, we’re new creatures in Christ, we bring some of the baggage of the old life into the new one, and so the process of sanctification – which is always ongoing in the Christian’s life, progressive sanctification – is unpacking all of that. It’s getting rid of those old habits, and strengthening us, and conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ.

Old habits are sometimes difficult to shake, and they were for many in that church in Corinth, because there was immorality in the church just as there is immorality in the church today. So 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 is an especially relevant passage for us in the early 21st century. Of course, it’s relevant in every age, because human nature is always the same, and in every generation the temptations are the same as they were back then, 2,000 years ago.

But in Corinth, there were men in the church visiting prostitutes, and doing it without shame. It was that bad. But Paul had the solution for enslaving behavior, and the

good news is if he had the solution for them in their condition, he has it for us as well, and it works. It is simple. The solution is doctrine. Now, I know that for many that’s kind of a snore. Doctrine – just the very word makes people’s eyes glaze over, but it’s the answer that Paul gives.

That’s how he deals with this issue here. Now, he tells them straight out, “Flee immorality.” He gives exhortations. He will speak of the Holy Spirit, who gives us the power to flee and to live life to God’s glory, so really, the fuller explanation of this passage, and the fuller solution to the problem is we are to live to God’s glory – that’s our purpose in life.

And we can do that – and I should say we should do that – at least in part by fleeing sin, fleeing temptation. And we can do that, and do that only by the power of the Holy Spirit, which we have. But the motivation to flee sin and glorify God comes from doctrine. So if we want to successfully resist the temptations of this world, and protect ourselves from immorality, we must know God’s Word. That’s vital. We must ground our thoughts in his truth.

Scripture, doctrine, theology – that must be what our thinking is governed by. Paul grounds the Corinthians in two truths. First, he reminds them of their relationship to Christ. They are members of his body, and they are God’s temple. The Holy Spirit lives in them. So the union or connection with Christ and the connection with a prostitute are mutually exclusive. They’re like oil and water. They’re like fire and ice. They don’t mix; they don’t connect.

Secondly, he reminds them that they were bought and paid for. Christ had saved them. They were not their own, so they couldn’t act as they pleased. It’s very much like the doctrinal point that he made in the previous passage, you remember; there it was lawsuits that was the issue. They were suing one another, and he was explaining that doesn’t go with their life. That is not to be in the church. That’s something that takes place in the world.

They’ve been saved out of that world. They’re not the people they once were. He reminds them of their past. He tells them that they were drunkards, they were revilers. He says, “Such were some of you.” That’s what they were – they no longer are. So his point is you are new creatures in Christ. You can’t live the old life any longer. That’s over. That’s finished. You’re a new creation, and you must live that way.

Well, he's saying much the same here, but here he's saying, “You're not your own; you've been bought. You've been paid for by the blood of Christ.” So they can't act any way they want to act. They can't act as they please. They must live to God's glory. Knowing all of that, knowing who we are as Christians, and what it cost to make us the people we are, with all of the blessings that we have, is the surest ground and motivation for good behavior.

The cross of Christ is everything. It's the center and the essence of the gospel and it is the basis or the mainspring for good behavior. Now, that's what Paul will come to in this text. So he corrects these wayward Corinthians, and points them in the right direction by reminding them of who they are. They are a temple. They have responsibilities. They are God's temple. And he reminds them of why they are so blessed.

They're blood-bought, and that should give them a sense of deep indebtedness and gratitude to the one who bought them. Well, that's what he comes to, but first what he does in verses 12 through 14 is correct the false premise of their behavior. Bad behavior begins in bad thoughts, so before Paul builds the theological foundation – before he builds a good foundation, he pulls down a bad one.

They had a theological justification for what they did. They didn't simply visit harlots. They could rationalize it in their own mind. They had an argument worked out in their thinking. They could argue for their right to visit the brothel, if you can imagine that. But as Paul will point out, their argument, their thinking, was just a bad excuse, and Paul begins by exposing it as a gross error.

He begins in verse 12 saying, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable.” Paul had taught that while he was in Corinth. He had taught that all things are lawful. He taught them that we are no longer under the law. That was Paul's Bible, the Old Testament, and so no doubt he gave them lessons on the law of Moses. He gave them explanations of its purpose, and that we're no longer under that law. It's no longer binding.

We're in a new covenant; we're not under the old covenant. But he explained the righteousness of that law that still does govern our lives. So he explained all of that. He explained about the law, that we are no longer under that law. We are free from the restrictive ceremonies, and schedules, and calendar of the law. “All things are lawful,” he says. And what he means by that is all kinds of things are permitted.

Every kind of action is open to us, and because of the new birth, we are able to live as God intended man to live. We are now free to function according to God's design.

Now, these people had perverted Paul’s teaching. They had drawn implications from it that weren’t there, and they turned their Christian liberty into personal license. Their reasoning was something like this.

“Well, we’re not under the law. We can eat all kinds of food. We can satisfy our physical hunger. Therefore we can satisfy all natural desires. We’re free.” Paul corrects that in two ways; first by showing that the analogy between food and fornication is false, and we see the point of the food, they were thinking in those terms, from the next verse. But first he shows that this analogy that they were drawing between all kinds of food and satisfying their desire in other ways was false.

Food is neutral. It belongs to what theologians have categorized as things indifferent. Fornication does not. It is by nature profane. It is a spiritual crime. It is sin. It’s always foolish to do anything that is harmful to ourselves physically and spiritually. Liberty – and we enjoy great liberty in the Christian life – but liberty has limitations. If it’s not profitable, or helpful, or healthy, it’s wrong, even if it’s a thing indifferent.

Well, sin, outright sin, which is not a thing indifferent, is never profitable. It’s always harmful, so we can’t sin; we can’t justify doing that. Secondly, liberty requires self-control, even in regard to things indifferent, things that are in and of themselves legitimate, like food. Otherwise, if we don’t exercise self-control, we’ll become slaves of our appetite. So Paul says, “It’s true – all things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.”

We can easily be mastered by our appetites, and that’s true when we’re enjoying something that’s legitimate. We over-indulge; it can master us. But that’s especially true when we seek to satisfy our desires in illegitimate ways, in sinful ways, because then we will quickly become the slave of sin. Sin is powerful, intoxicating, addicting, and deadly. So Paul shows that their logic here doesn’t hold.

Freedom never means free to do anything. It means free to do the right thing. Some things are harmful to us, physically and spiritually. Again, Paul’s teaching that all things are lawful means all types of action are lawful. Not everything that we do, not every act is lawful, but all kinds of things, all kinds of activity are lawful, and some are not because some are harmful.

So we are free to eat. We are free to enjoy sex, but only in the right way, within the boundaries that God has set, according to God’s design, and for his purpose. That’s the next point in Paul’s argument, or as Paul deconstructs their argument, their defense for

what they were doing. Freedom means free to function in the way God created us to behave, not contrary to it. He writes in verse 13 that “Food is for the stomach, and the stomach for food.”

Food and the stomach go together. They were made for each other, to benefit the body. The body and immorality don’t go together; they weren’t made for each other. Immorality is harmful. The body was made for a higher purpose. “It is for the Lord,” Paul says, “and the Lord is for the body,” meaning the body is for the Lord’s use and purpose, for his service in glory, not for our own personal pleasure, and for our own satisfaction.

Food and eating will someday end; God will abolish them, Paul says. But he won’t abolish the body. It’s not temporal. The body has a future. That’s what Paul says in verse 14, where he refers to the resurrection. “Just as God raised Christ bodily, he will raise us up through his power.” The body, then, is eternal; therefore it is important. What we do today has eternal consequences. It will be raised and glorified.

The stomach will not be raised and glorified; it’s temporal. It’s going to end. Eating and such things are temporary, and will come to an end. So the two cannot be compared in order to justify behavior, as it seems the Corinthians were doing. And if they were doing that – if they were making a comparison between the body and the belly to argue just as we satisfy our desire, like eating, we can satisfy another desire, like sex.

If that’s what they were doing, they’re wrong, Paul says. The two can’t be compared. The stomach is temporal; the body is eternal. Both have a function, but the function of the body is not our pleasure; it’s not for our pleasure, it’s for God’s glory. So we must reverence the body. But what some of the Corinthians had done was rationalize sin so that they could indulge their old habits. Evidently they found the struggle difficult, and they yielded to it.

Much easier to yield than to fight the temptation, so they rationalized things. They misapplied Paul’s teaching about freedom, and they interpreted their Christian liberty as an excuse for license; as an excuse for self-indulgence and sin. The human mind is very good at that. The human mind is very clever. It can always find a way to sin and justify it. That’s Jeremiah 17:9 – “The heart is more deceitful than all else, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

And the point of that question is no one can understand it. It’s too complex, it’s too deceptive. It deceives us so that we’re self-deceived, and the reality is we are our own worst enemies. We rationalize our behavior so that we can find a way to do just what we

want to do. The Corinthians did that. But what Paul is exposing here is it’s false reasoning – they’re making false comparisons.

And what they were doing was just giving themselves an excuse to sin. In verses 15 through 17, Paul shows them how unconscionable, how heinous and scandalous their sin of immorality is by reminding them of their union with Christ, and here comes doctrine. He begins, “Do you not know” – now, that’s the fourth time that he uses that expression, do you not know, in this chapter, and it indicates that they’ve had previous instruction on this subject, the subject of the believer’s union with Christ.

He says, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” Do you not know that there’s a union between you? I’ve taught you this before. So what he’s doing is he’s reminding them that they’re without excuse. They know better than what they’re doing. They know to think better than the way they were thinking, because they’ve had plenty of instruction on this.

They’ve been taught that their bodies are members of Christ; that through faith, we are spiritually joined to Christ, joined to the resurrected, ascended, living Christ. So when a person physically joins himself to a prostitute, he is uniting what is holy to what is unholy. And that’s intolerable. It may be physically possible to do that – it obviously is – but it’s morally impossible to make such a union, such a joining together.

Immorality, as Paul will explain, is unique. It’s a unique sin, because sex is unique, and Paul indicates that by using the word “joins.” That refers to a very close union. It’s the word that Moses used, the Hebrew equivalent, is the word that he used in Genesis 2:24. That’s what Paul cites here, when the man and the woman are joined together physically, the two shall become one flesh. They in effect become one person.

Now, that’s more than a physical union. It’s also psychological, it’s spiritual, it affects the whole person. It is a commitment of oneself to the other. The two are united, body and soul, and so Paul asks, “Shall I do that? Shall I take away the members of Christ” – that is, shall I remove the physical body from its use for sacred service to Christ – “and join it to a harlot?” Shall I become one person with a prostitute?

This person who is united to Christ, am I going to unite myself with a prostitute, no less? And then he answers that very sternly, “May it never be.” Now, that’s a very strong denial. He uses that throughout his writings. We see that expression used quite frequently in the book of Romans, and it means, “No way.” May it never be – that’s impossible.

These two things are mutually exclusive, and Paul shows the impropriety of that, of such a union, in verse 17, by describing the relationship we have with Christ.

He says, “The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with him.” Now, that’s a close relationship. Our relationship to Christ is often described as a very close union. In John 15, for example, we are described as branches in a vine. Now, that’s a close union; we are one with him, just as a branch is one with the vine. Just as it gets its life from the vine and bears fruit, we are united with Christ, and we have his life in us, and we bear fruit because his life is in us. We are a branch in the vine.

We have the description of family union. We’re like children in God’s family. That’s a close union. But here, he’s saying something else. He’s saying something really even more that describes the closeness of the union. He says, “We’re one spirit with him.” Back in chapter 2, Paul said, “We have the mind of Christ.” We share a common life with him. We share a common thinking, and thought process, with him.

Christ has so joined us to himself, so taken us into his divine embrace, that we are one spirit with him. How do you separate spirits? That’s a close union. So how could a Christian even consider joining himself to a prostitute, or joining in any illicit relationship, whether it’s profane entertainment, or a crooked business deal? If we join ourselves to that, we are joining Christ to that, because we are united with him.

We have an obligation to stay pure, and guard the sacred relationship that we have with the Lord Jesus Christ. But in case they haven’t gotten that message, Paul tells them straight out, “Flee fornication.” That’s the meaning of “flee immorality.” That’s a little bit tame, flee immorality. The idea is flee fornication.

So whether you understand Paul’s rationale or not, the deconstructing of their argument, and showing how it’s illegitimate to compare the stomach and food with the body and immorality, and to justify things on that level; whether you understand why this is a sin or not, still there’s only one thing to do. Whether we get his point or not, there’s one thing to do, and one thing only, and that’s avoid this sin at all costs. It dishonors Christ.

So whether you understand – what Paul is saying, “Whether you understand what I’m saying or not, flee it.” Just like Joseph did. I’m sure Paul had him in mind in his flight from Potiphar’s wife and her attempts to seduce him. He resisted – you know the story in Genesis 39, how he resisted until the only thing he could do was run. She was persistent.

Finally, he didn’t allow himself to rationalize the problem. He could’ve done that; he’s away in a foreign land. Nobody knows him there. His family wasn’t watching. It

could’ve all been done in secret, and certainly would’ve been to his personal advantage, materially and socially, there in Egypt. But he didn’t rationalize the problem. He didn’t rationalize the situation.

He knew he was being tempted to sin, and that nothing could make it right, so what he did was flee. And that’s what we must do. It’s just that simple. But Paul adds a further explanation to give incentive to obeying, and fleeing, and avoiding sin at all costs. He describes immorality as unlike other sins. It’s against the body. “Every other sin,” he says, “is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.”

Now, Paul doesn’t mean by that that other sins are not against the body. Gluttony or drunkenness are also damaging to the body, and to a person’s personal health. But those sins, for the most part, consist of excess in things that are morally neutral, and their effect is usually undone by abstaining, or curbing the appetite. But fornication is different. It is not excess in something neutral, and it cannot be undone. It is against the whole person, body and soul.

Its affects can be physical, obviously, but they are also psychological and spiritual. This is a sin that scars the soul. It destroys the person. Solomon spoke on the danger of fornication in Proverbs 7; I’m sure you remember that text. In fact, it’s striking that as you go through the Proverbs, over and over again, Solomon warns about this situation. He warns about the harlot.

He warns about the adulterous woman, the strange woman, and he calls her “a deep pit,” meaning once you embrace that sin, once you fall into it, it’s very difficult to get out. And that’s not only true for men, it’s true for women. The warnings are given to young men, but they apply to women. Avoid the seducer. Well, in Proverbs 7, he describes a situation that he saw as he looked out to the window, through the latticework.

He sees a young man; he calls him naïve. Doesn’t mean he’s stupid – it means he’s just not wise. He doesn’t have the principles of the proverbs in his mind. He’s not thinking in that way. He’s thinking very naturally, not spiritually and wisely. And so he sees this young man pass by a woman’s house who seduces him. She makes him a proposition and snares him. She’s an adulteress, and he accepts her invitation for a night of pleasure.

And Solomon says, as he sees this young man enter the house, “He does not know that it will cost him his life.” This sin is deadly. It’s physically deadly, but mainly mentally, spiritually deadly, and I can imagine if we were to have a sequel, an epilogue to that, or whatever, if we see the young man come out in the morning, he might think, “Well,

I got away with that. The husband didn’t return, and it was quite a night. I got away with it, and enjoyed myself.”

And what he doesn’t know is he died. He didn’t die physically; he died spiritually. It’s very much like Adam and Eve when they ate of the fruit. God had warned them, “In the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die.” They didn’t die immediately – not physically – but they did spiritually. And this sin has a spiritual consequence on the soul of the individual. So we’re not to commit immorality, or any sin, for that matter, because it is harmful to us. Sin is always destructive.

But also, we cannot engage in immorality because we are not our own masters. Again, more doctrine – we can’t live any way that we please because we belong to another; we belong to God. That’s the last point that Paul makes in verses 19 and 20. “We are God’s house. We have been bought by Christ, and the Holy Spirit lives within us. We are his temple.” That’s what Paul says.

“Do you not know,” and there it is again. “Do you not know” – you ought to. You’ve been taught this truth enough. When I was in Corinth, I went over this with you. Haven’t you learned the lesson yet? “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to you?” The Holy Spirit is God the Father’s gift to the believer. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit at the moment of faith, and forever; can never lose that.

What a great privilege that is; what a great privilege we have. The Holy Spirit lives within us, literally. The third person of the trinity lives within the heart of the believer. We’re sealed with the Holy Spirit at the moment of faith, and forever, as I said. That is a great privilege, because he lives within us, God lives within the believer. He is there to guide us in our decisions, to give wisdom and direction to us, to impart to us the mind and the thoughts of Christ.

He protects us in our walk through this world. He enables us to live well, and to face the challenges of this world and this evil age in which we live. He gives us the power to overcome the temptations that we face, and those temptations are great. They are greater than we are, and we need to know that. We don’t have the strength to stand up to sin. It’s foolish to try to do it in our own strength.

But the Spirit of God gives us the power to prevail over it. He gives us the power to do what we’re supposed to do, and that’s flee, and we can, and we will, as we walk by the Spirit. We have union with God. Our whole person is joined to Christ, body and soul, and

God the Spirit, as I say, lives within us, literally. Fornication, sin, then, is a desecration of that relationship.

We are not free to do that. We are not the captains of our souls. “You are not your own,” Paul says. God lives in you, if you’re a believer. He owns you. And Paul explains why that is in verse 20. “You have been bought with a price.” We are bought and paid for, and bought and paid for at a very high cost – the blood of Christ. That’s what the 24 elders sang in Revelation 5:9, that Christ the Lamb purchased for God with his own blood some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

That’s what Christ did at the cross; he bought his people. He purchased them, just like someone in the ancient world might’ve entered a slave market and purchased a person. That is us, with a difference. Our slavery is real freedom. We were in bondage to sin, and we were justly held under the penalty of the law. But when the price was paid, our freedom was obtained. In our case, the payment was blood.

Christ’s death satisfied the penalty that was against us; fully satisfied God’s justice. We could never be free until that penalty was paid, and we couldn’t pay it. He paid it in our place. That’s what Paul is describing here. Deliverance, freedom from sin, real freedom, genuine freedom, by payment, by purchase, and now we belong to him, wholly and completely, and that has obvious implications, doesn’t it?

We can’t live just any way that we please. We cannot live for ourselves. We must live for him. We’re told today to live for ourselves. That’s completely contrary to what the Word of God teaches us. We’re to live for him, and if we live for him, we’ll be living for ourselves in the truest sense. This is the conclusion that Paul makes at the end of the verse. “Therefore,” he says, “glorify God in your body.”

You belong to him, so honor him in all that you do, and all that you have, and significantly, as we do that, as we glorify God, God glorifies us. The Spirit changes us. He cleans house. He cleans us up. That’s the work of sanctification – in the previous passage we saw positional sanctification. We’ve been set apart from the world. But we are being progressively sanctified at every moment.

God the Spirit is working in us to get rid of that old baggage and strengthen the inner man, and make us more like Christ. That’s going on constantly. “He restores the years that the locusts have eaten,” as Joel said. He blesses us, and that’s worth noting, because so often when we face a temptation, we think, “This is my opportunity for real pleasure. This relationship is going to give me a life of happiness. I can’t give this up.

“I know what God’s Word says, but if I don’t do this, if I don’t take this, I’ll lose out on everything that’s enjoyable in life.” That’s not true. That’s the deception of sin. God is no man’s debtor, as I frequently said, and that is true in this. As we walk by the Spirit, and we live obediently, and sometimes we have to give up things that we want, we have to flee them, God’s aware of that and he blesses in exchange.

He gives us a life of real meaning and purpose, and a life that’s clean, and comfortable, and joyful. He’ll never be our debtor in that. We can know this: if we walk by the Spirit and we’re faithful to him, we will be blessed. So the question I would ask you, I ask myself, is do we live like that? Do we live to please God, or are we living to please ourselves? I imagine, to be frank and to be candid, most of us live much of our lives to please ourselves, without a lot of thought.

Well, maybe that’s because we really don’t think about the price that was paid to set us free. It was the infinite, precious blood of Christ that was shed and paid for us. He willingly died in our place so that we would live. Paul tells us that before he tells us to glorify God. He tells us what God did for us before he tells us what we should do for God, and he does that for a purpose. He does that to motivate us to live for him.

That’s really the greatest incentive to obedience. We can warn people, and we can threaten people with the thunderings of the law, but the surest motivation to a life of obedience, joyful, willing obedience, is love and gratitude. And the greatest gratitude comes with an understanding of the greatest gift, the gift of Christ’s life for ours. Paul tells us that in 2 Corinthians 5:14, where he says, “The love of Christ constrains us.”

The love of Christ – that is, the love that Christ has for us – motivates us to live obediently for him. David Brainerd found that to be true. He was a great missionary to the American Indians in the mid-1700s. In his journal, that was edited by Jonathan Edwards, he wrote about instructing the Indians. He referred to them as “my people.”

But he wrote, “I never got away from Jesus and him crucified, and I found that when my people were gripped by this great evangelical doctrine of Christ and him crucified, I had no need to give them instruction about morality. I found that one followed as the sure and inevitable fruit of the other.” The love of Christ in the cross of Christ constrains us, controls us. It motivates us to live a life that’s pleasing to him; a life that brings glory to him.

So here’s the solution to the temptations that we face. We live in a wicked world, and it seems it’s only getting more and more wicked, and full of more and more blatant

temptation. But this is the solution to that, this is the guard against that, and it is doctrine. It is knowing who we are and what has been done for us. We are united to Christ. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit gives us the power to overcome sin. The cross gives us the incentive to flee sin, and to live for God’s glory. That’s how we journey through this vanity fair of the world, without being stained by it, and without being sucked into it, and in fact, this is how we shine as lights in it. And may God enable us to do just that; to shine as lights in the midst of this world. If anyone is here without Christ, the light that we shine is the gospel – the free offer of salvation to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

He’s God’s eternal Son, who became a man, and offered himself up as a sacrifice for us. He paid for our salvation by suffering the penalty of our sin in our place, and everyone who believes in him, at the moment of faith, is forgiven forever, sealed with the Holy Spirit, and given the great opportunity and responsibility to live for him – to live to the glory of the almighty God.

Like he needs that from us – but he gives us that opportunity, and equips us to do it, so may God help us to do that; to live to his glory by fleeing that which is ultimately destructive to us, and to live to his honor and glory. God help you to do that – help all of us to live a life of obedience. Let’s pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for the text and the lessons that we have here. It’s not an easy text to study, to read, to follow, to preach, or to listen to, but it’s necessary. This is the world we live in. The world that Paul lived in is the world we live in. We are faced with temptation constantly. But the good news is there’s a solution.

There’s a way to avoid it. There’s a way to be victorious. We can do that by your grace, by your power. So enable us –