

“Freedom In Christ” Part 1

Christian Liberty

Galatians 5:13-16

Dr. Bruce Bickel

October 14, 2016

Bruce: Good morning, men.

Men: Good morning.

Bruce: Good to be with you. Let’s go to a moment of prayer and silence, and know that He is God. Ask the Lord to be our teacher this morning.

Heavenly Father, we’re so grateful for that entity known as the body of Christ. That is something that mankind cannot create, nor could even originate or even have the idea of, something so beautiful as the body of Christ. Our fellowship is not only with each other as brothers and sisters, but also with God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Our fellowship is the means by which we enjoy one another and worship You together. Father, I just pray that You’d be pleased again to open our eyes, that we might behold You once again more clearly for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Amen and Amen. Turn in your Bibles, please, to Galatians chapter five. We’re continuing our examination of Paul’s letter to the church in Galatia, the theme of which is Christian freedom or liberty in Christ. As you recall, so far we’ve been talking a lot the last couple of weeks about the difference between the two types of religion, the religion of human achievement versus the religion of divine grace. Whatever you want to call it, those are the only two options. You may call it whatever you want, but it’s one of those two categories. It’s either a religion of human achievement based upon our own accomplishments and our own merit in pleasing God versus the contrast that Paul is writing about to the church at Galatia, the religion of divine grace.

In chapters 1 and 2 Paul authenticates his ability and his authority to preach the doctrine of divine grace. He gives us the reasons why he is able to do that under the authority of God the Father. And so he’s very, very adamant about being one who is logically equipped to teach the doctrine of divine grace. He authenticates his ability to do that under the authority of God.

The next two chapters, three and four, deal with Paul’s teaching that the Old Testament also taught the doctrine of divine grace. The Old Testament and the New Testament both teach divine grace. And he spends both chapters three and four dealing with those particular issues, and referring back to the Old Testament as a means of teaching divine grace.

Then in chapter five he gets into how you live a life of divine grace. If there are only two options in faith, human achievement and divine grace, how do you live a life of divine grace? And that’s what we’ve been discussing the last couple of weeks. So I’ll pick it up and we’ll look at chapter 5, specifically verses 13-16. Chapter five of Galatians, beginning at verse thirteen.

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. But through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and

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devour one another; watch out that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen. At the close of a very important speech in Congress on January the 6th, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt shared his vision of what the world ought to become and what he wanted the world to become after the war was over. He envisioned four basic freedoms enjoyed by people all over the world—the freedom of speech, the freedom of worship, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear. Those are the four freedoms that he said were necessary for humanity to survive. Again they are freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

As I read the book of Galatians, I think there is one more freedom that we need to have to make sure that the world would survive. And that would be a freedom, a fifth freedom I would call it, where man needs to be free from himself and the tyranny of his sinful nature. We need to be free from the tyranny of our sinful nature.

Brothers, we don’t really understand the degree of sin in our human nature. We don’t understand that because we don’t emphasize the Fall enough. If you don’t understand the fall of man, you’ll never understand total depravity. I think there is a fifth freedom that we need to exhibit. And that is the freedom from ourselves and the tyranny of the sinfulness of the nature that we have.

And that’s what we want to talk about today—this freedom that we have in Christ. We live in an age of “do your own thing.” Authority is often challenged as individuals. And they follow the desires of their own hearts. It’s the tyranny of following themselves. Self-centeredness is the motivating factor for worldly freedom rather than freedom in Christ.

But that’s not freedom according to the Scripture. Jesus said, “*Whoever commits sin is a servant of sin.*” John 8:34. That liberation movement of the world system, being centered upon yourself and selfishness cannot set anybody free.

But Jesus says this also in John 8. “*If the Son therefore shall make you free, you are free indeed.*” That, my dear friends, is the manifesto of Christianity. If the Son therefore can make you free, you are free indeed. That’s what we’ve been examining in the book of Galatians—freedom in Christ, Christian liberty.

Now it’s very, very important that we understand what the definition of Christian liberty or freedom in Christ is, as the phrase is often misunderstood and misapplied. So first of all, what are we talking about when we talk about freedom in Christ or Christian liberty?

First of all, you’ll notice in your notes that in verse 13 he says that it is the *freedom and the release from the obligation of the ceremonial law*. Christian freedom is the release from the ceremonial law obligation. Look at verse 13. “*For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*”

Christian liberty is being free from the fulfilling of the legal code to please God, and freedom from the frustration of not being able to keep an external set of rules.

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Do you ever get frustrated, men, in just thinking, “How can I do this again?” As Paul says, “I do the things I don’t want to do, and some of the things I want to do I don’t do.” Do you ever get frustrated about that?

You see, the ministry of the faith and religion of human accomplishment says that you’ve got to achieve those things. And freedom in Christ is freedom not only from the legalistic activities of the ceremonial law, but also from the frustration of not being able to fulfill all of those laws. Through Christ we have been set free from the tiresome performance of religious ritual.

Now that doesn’t mean that we don’t do certain things. But it does mean this. You don’t do it to achieve merit. You don’t do it to achieve pleasure with God. You don’t do it to get an aspect that he looks at you more favorably because you have done something. If therefore you are free in Christ, you’ve been set free indeed.

Now these legalistic Judaizers in the book of Galatians that Paul was dealing with felt they had the answers to this problem in the laws and threats that they offered through the keeping of the ceremonial law. But Paul is explaining that no amount of legalism and legislation can change the basic sinful nature of a person. Legislation does not change the sinful nature of a person. Only Christ can do that. It is not law on the outside but love on the inside that makes the difference. And that can only happen when you’ve been set free in Christ.

Paul tells us that we need another power source within us to motivate us, to generate us, to give us the idea that we can do it. And that power comes from the Holy Spirit of God.

The difference is this. The system of human achievement says that I’m going to keep a system of laws and threats in keeping the law. And I am my source of motivation. I have to do that myself.

If we’re going to be set free, men, we need to be set free from ourselves and the lack of power that we have. The world is always going to say that your enough is never enough. But Paul is going to teach us, as we understand Christian liberty, that Christ’s enough is enough. And the difference is not legalism on the outside but a love motivation on the inside. And that comes from the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

We’re going to spend a lot of time talking about that in future weeks about what it means to walk in the Spirit. You see, the Holy Spirit’s work in evangelism is essentially four things. First of all, *He convicts us of our sin*. Secondly, *He convinces us of our sin*. I not only need to be under conviction of my sin. I need to be convinced that it is sin.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: So the Holy Spirit converts us from our sinful life. So He convicts us of our sin, convinces us of our sin, *converts us from our sin*, and then *comforts us in our way of life in Christ*. He comforts us. And I would add one more thing. *He controls us by the work of the Holy Spirit*. Those are the five things the Holy Spirit does—convicts, convinces, converts, comforts and controls. That’s where we have the idea that the love comes from the inside, not law keeping from the outside. Love on the inside produced by the Holy Spirit makes the difference.

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The Old Covenant law was external. It was designed to show what true holiness was. It was designed to show that man could not achieve it. That was the purpose of the Old Covenant law. The ceremonial practices of the Mosaic economy were symbolic lessons which taught that the sacrifices were necessary for sin. But what they really did is that they just pictured the final sacrifice of Christ. And once Christ came there was no longer any need for these symbols and these rituals. That’s where we have freedom in Christ, from maintaining the legalistic duty of achieving those symbols and those laws that were designed to be kept in the Old Covenant law.

So in a positive sense, men, we can say this. Christian liberty is freedom to operate by the internal working of the Holy Spirit. That’s the difference between the religion of human achievement and the religion of divine grace. It’s the inner working of the Holy Spirit.

Participant: Would you say that again, please, Bruce?

Bruce: Certainly. Christian liberty is freedom to operate by the internal working of the Holy Spirit. Do you understand the difference between the external motivation that you and I have to keep laws versus the internal working of the Holy Spirit? We keep the law by the internal working of the Holy Spirit.

We need to understand what Christian freedom is. But we also need to understand that we have the responsibility of obedience to the moral law. Let’s talk about that.

The moral law of God doesn’t change. The motivation to keep it changes because it’s no longer external. It’s internal because of the working of the Holy Spirit.

Now it’s important to realize, men, that the moral law of God has not changed. Nor has our obligation to keep it changed. Those things have not changed. Because the teaching of Christian liberty posed a threat to this legal system of the Judaizers, they accused Paul of being antinomian, in other words, of being against the law, of rejecting the moral law. They were basically saying this. “Paul, if you’re teaching divine grace, then you’re obliterating the law keeping and you’re antinomian, which means that you’re against the law, because the moral law of God has not changed and you’re obliterating it.”

Paul is not teaching that. He is not antinomian. He’s saying this. The difference is that you have the internal ministry of the Holy Spirit now as the motivating factor, giving you the will to be willing to be obedient to the law. So the moral law of God has not changed, nor has our obligation to keep it changed. We need to realize that.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Please!

Participant: How can we, or can we at all, facilitate the Holy Spirit working in us? After we convert, what can we do to keep that going, or is it just not up to us at all?

Bruce: No, it’s up to us. We work at it! We work out our salvation with fear and trembling. There are certain things we work at. Peter says this. Work at grace. You work at those things.

What are the things that we do for what I call absorbing grace? Oftentimes, when somebody says, “I don’t feel motivated to do anything. What do I need to do?”, what I

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say is, “Absorb grace. Be in a situation where you put yourself in a position to absorb grace, where grace is given to you through Christ by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.”

What are some of the things that we can do to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who is at work in us? We need to realize this: that it is God who is at work in us, not us. It’s not our efforts. It’s trusting God’s efforts through the internal working of the Holy Spirit. What are some of the things that you and I can do to put ourselves in a position to absorb grace that would be motivating us?

Participant: Read Scripture.

Bruce: Scripture, certainly. Read the Scripture.

Participant: Worship.

Bruce: Worship.

Participant: Ask God to open our hearts so we would even have a desire for that.

Bruce: Ask Him to give us the desire—worship, studying the Scripture. What else?

Participant: Fellowship.

Bruce: Fellowship,. Exactly! Our fellowship is with one another,. But also with God the Father. Take a look at 1 John. Men, do you realize the beauty of fellowship? Look at 1 John for a moment. First John chapter 1, the first four verses.

First John chapter 1 verse 1. *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life—the life was made manifest and we have seen it and testified to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. That which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you may also have fellowship with us. And indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we write these things so that our joy may be complete.”*

Now men, we can’t replicate the experience of the apostles. We can’t make that happen. But by faith we can experience the same intimate relationship that John is writing about in these verses.

Take a look at the four stages of developing an intimate relationship. First of all you’ll notice verse 1. *“That which we have heard.”* We heard the gospel. We heard it somewhere—preaching, reading it. We heard the gospel. There’s a message that we heard. The first thing is you hear about the Person and work of Christ.

The next thing is this. *“Which we have seen with our eyes.”* That means that you see it to the point of understanding. You not only hear the message of Christ, but you understand it. You look behind those words and you have the understanding of seeing what it means. So it’s a greater depth than just hearing the message. It’s taking it to the point of understanding. I understand what I hear. That’s what he says when he’s talking about having seen it. With our eyes.

“Which we have looked upon.” That’s the word *beheld*. That means that you meditate upon it. When you hear the message of Christ, when you hear the apostles’ doctrine, you look behind the words and you begin to experience it. And you look at it intently. And you begin to meditate upon it and you begin to think about it. And you begin to see God behind the words of the Scripture.

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One of the best things you can do, men, is to keep a list of the twenty-eight attributes of God when you're reading the Scripture, because the whole reason for the Scripture is what? God is revealing Himself to us in His nature, His character and His glory. God is revealing Himself. That's the purpose of the Scripture. Every word of Scripture is designed for one thing, to give God a means by which He is revealing Himself to us. One of the best things we can do is to keep a list of the twenty-eight attributes of God so that when you read the Scripture, you behold it, you look behind the words and you see one of those attributes. That's how you begin to meditate upon the Scripture.

So there's a deepening intimacy that John is describing here in our relationship to Christ. He's saying that first of all, you hear about it! The second thing he says is that you see it. You look at it to the point of understanding. And thirdly, you meditate upon it. You behold it. You grasp it. You think about it. And the last thing is, you touch it. That means you've touched His life.

And so there is a degree in which John is describing that this is how you develop an intimate relationship with Christ. You hear it. You see it, looking to the point of understanding. You behold it. You grasp it. You meditate on it. And then, finally, you touch it. You begin to touch the life of Christ, because the reality of God's revelation is that He reveals Himself to you through the Holy Spirit.

And what happens when you behold it and you touch it? You begin to see God behind the pages of Scripture. You begin to see God in all of His glory, all of His attributes, all of His nature. That's how you behold it. And that's how you develop an intimacy with Christ.

So those are some of the things we need to do, men. Just put yourself in a position to absorb grace. Worship, prayer, Bible study, fellowship, confession of sin, whatever those things may be. Do those things that will put you in a position to absorb grace. Yes, sir?

Participant: That's how we learn in the world, too. It's a Biblically based application, I guess.

Bruce: Yes, the world copies those things as we educate. Yes, Ted?

Ted: I just want to point out that it was interesting when you asked the question about how you put yourself in a position to absorb grace. The responses were interesting. The first few responses had to do with me and Jesus. The fourth one, which came from Sig, had to do with us and Jesus.

Bruce: Right.

Ted: And it's interesting. That's the point I've made a number of times. The focus in many of our churches is not on the body, but on me and Jesus. And it's just very interesting how those responses came out.

Bruce: Good point. Men, it's really hard for me to describe the uniqueness of the body of Christ. It is something that is so radically unique and foreign to our culture. Mankind could not create something such as the body of Christ. It's an impossibility. They can't even think about that. But the body of Christ is so unique. It's an entity that is just so unique in this world system, and we don't give enough understanding of what the body of Christ is about. That's why the beauty of the fifty-eight "one another" commands is so important, how we learn to get along with each other.

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But really, it’s about us. Notice what John says here in verse three again about fellowship. *“That which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you.”* In other words, he’s talking about the Person and work of Christ. *“So that you too may have fellowship with us,”*

What’s the basis of our fellowship? It’s not Number Two red punch and stale cookies. *(Laughter.)* It’s the gospel of Christ. It’s the apostles’ doctrine. It’s the oneness that we have in Christ. *“So that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship indeed is with the Father.”*

Notice the two prepositional phrases—“with us” and “with the Father,” and with God the Son. Whenever we’re together and we have fellowship, we need to realize this: that our fellowship is with God the Father and God the Son just as much as it is with us. That’s what makes the body of Christ unique. Wherever we are together, we’re in fellowship with God the Father. This very moment we’re in fellowship with Him.

What does *fellowship* mean? We’re going to talk about that this weekend. You’re getting a little bit of a dose of what John and I are going to talk about this weekend, about the need and responsibilities of fellowship. Fellowship is where two people or a group of people possess something in common they can share together and then participate with each other. What is it we share together? The Person and work of Christ, the gospel of Christ. We have that together. That’s the common thing that we have. And we share and we give that to one another. That’s one of the ways in which we can absorb grace.

We need to realize that the gift of the body of Christ is so unique that when one of us is down, somebody else is going to build us up. We need to realize that this is part of our calling, to be in fellowship with each other. We’re not the captains of our own souls. It’s not so much about me and Jesus as it is about we and Jesus, the body of Christ. And we need to reconsider that by thinking about the body of Christ because it is so unique.

But the real positive sense of Christian liberty, brothers, is to operate by the internal working of the Holy Spirit. And one of the great joys we have is being in fellowship with each other. Put yourself in a position to absorb grace. Work at that.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: You’re not earning any merit. What you’re doing is that you’re asking the Holy Spirit to give you the willingness to be willing to work at it, because that’s what the Holy Spirit does. He changes our desire. He changes our motive. That’s what the Holy Spirit does. And we need to work at that and feed that when that comes about.

Participant: Hey, Bruce?

Yes, please?

Participant: When you were talking about the attributes of God, and reading the Word and keeping the attributes with you and being aware of them, would they all be revealed in the Old Testament. I mean I’m sure that the New Testament tells us. But it’s there in the Old Testament, right? It’s not like we learn more of His attributes, or a new attribute in the New Testament. The Jews knew all the attributes of God.

Bruce: Yes. Exactly right. The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed. The New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.

Participant: Amen.

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Bruce: They go back and forth. One of the beautiful things you can do is to study Christ in the Old Testament. It’s a wonderful theme—Christ in the Old Testament. This is the answer to your question. What’s the most important verse in all of Scripture?

Participant: *“In the beginning, God.”*

Bruce: Genesis 1:1. If you don’t understand that, men, nothing else makes sense. So go to Genesis 1:1. Somebody read that. Genesis 1:1. *“In the beginning God.”*

Now look behind those words. Think of some of the attributes you see, some of the attributes of God? What do you see in that? You see what?

Participant: His eternity.

Bruce: God’s sovereignty. You see it. God is sovereign over all things. You talk about the sovereignty of God. It starts in the first four words. And we have the audacity to reject the sovereignty of God, thinking that I’m the captain of my own soul. When you look at the Old Testament, God’s sovereignty is in the first four verses. What else do you see in the first four verses? *“in the beginning God.”* What’s another attribute?

Participant: His eternity.

Bruce: Eternality, pre-existence. God didn’t create Himself. Christ was not created one day. The pre-existent Christ. You see that, the eternity of Christ. What about His omnipotence? Who could create *ex nihilo*, creating out of nothing? Only God can do that.

You see, when you take a look and meditate upon that, that’s what John is saying. When you behold and you think about those things in the Scripture, when you behold and you meditate on that, you begin to see the revelation of God behind all the pages of Scripture. Yes?

Participant: There are two “in the beginnings.”

Bruce: Go ahead.

Participant: The book of John. *“In the beginning was the Word.”* I’m just saying, “Thank You, Lord.”

Bruce: That means two different things. Go to the book of John.

Participant: You mean the Gospel?

Bruce: Go to the Gospel of John and look at 1 John. Keep your fingers in John and 1 John.

John 1. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”*

When did the beginning begin?

Participant: In eternity.

Bruce: In the creation, when God said it would begin. In other words, John the apostle is writing in his Gospel about the pre-existent Christ. He existed before all of time, because there was a point when the beginning began and that was when Christ was there. He was not created. He was pre-existent.

Now go to 1 John. *“That which was from the beginning.”* He’s talking about the pre-existent Christ who is now continuing on. He’s continuing with the pre-existent Christ. He’s not talking about the pre-existent Christ. You see that in the book of John. Now he’s saying, “the One who was from the beginning.” He’s now reaffirming Him, saying that the pre-existent Christ is the same One we’ve been talking about. But we’re now in

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present reality. One was in the beginning and now the other is a present reality. So there are two beginnings, but they have different meanings. One is the pre-existent Christ and the other is the continuing of the pre-existent Christ in present-day reality.

That’s what we’re talking about when we talk about freedom in Christ. Christ has set us free from the obligation of all the law keeping externally. But our obligation to keep it has not been diminished because God’s law has not changed. Paul was not an antinomian. He was not against the law. He was not rejecting the law of Moses. He was just saying that the law of Moses is fulfilled internally by the work of the Holy Spirit when Christ redeemed you, as opposed to your having to maintain your efforts to externally keep it yourself.

Take a look at what Paul was doing in saying that Christ’s ethical law had become internal. His ethical law had become internal since Christ had come to live inside the believer by the Holy Spirit. What was once external is now internal.

Go to Romans chapter eight. Look at verses 9-11. *“You however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit which dwells in you.”* Notice that three times he says the words, “dwells in you.” That’s the energizing force of the Holy Spirit, to motivate us to have the willingness to be willing to want to obey the moral law. It is not something we do externally. The Christian life is not the little red choo-choo that says, “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can.”

Paul is saying this. It’s the Holy Spirit who will want to make you do it. He will give you the willingness to be willing to do it. That’s the role of the Holy Spirit. We need to feed that and put ourselves in a position to absorb grace so that we can mature in Christ. Remember this. We hear. We see. We look or behold. And we touch. That’s how you develop intimacy with Christ.

We cannot repeat what the apostles did. But John says this. By faith in the work of the Holy Spirit you can have the same intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ that I did when I saw Him. You can have that now by faith--by hearing about the message of the gospel, by looking at it, by seeing it, and finally by touching it. You begin to see that you’ve touched the very life of Christ when you’re absorbing grace.

God’s morality has not changed, men. Because of what Christ has done—WHJD?—what has Jesus done?—the believer now lives under the internal restraints through the internal presence of the Holy Spirit.

We are not reacting to a code. We are responding to a Person. The law was not set aside in its moral sense, but only in its ceremonial sense. We don’t need to do those things anymore because once Christ came, those symbols are no longer necessary because they were all completed in the Person and work of Christ. There’s no change in the content of God’s moral law, men, only in the way in which God brings about the fulfillment of it. He changes the way in which it is fulfilled. He doesn’t change the quality of it—from the external requirement of the ceremonial law to the internal leading

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of the Holy Spirit. What changes is the way that it is fulfilled. No longer is it fulfilled by our human achievement. It is now fulfilled by divine grace through the working of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

To look at the book of Galatians, there are fourteen instances in that book alone that are references to the work of the Holy Spirit. When we believe in Christ, the Spirit comes to dwell within us. Look at Galatians 3:2.

Transcriber’s Note: Galatians 3:2. *“Let me ask you only this. Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?”*

Bruce: We are born after the Spirit, as was Isaac. Galatians 4:29.

Transcriber’s Note: Galatians 4:29, NKJV. *“But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.”*

Bruce: There is a reference to the Old Testament. Divine grace. Galatians 3:2 and Galatians 4:29. It is the Holy Spirit in the heart which gives assurance of salvation. Galatians 4:6.

Transcriber’s Note: Galatians 4:6, NKJV. *“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’”*

Bruce: *And it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to live for Christ and glorify Him.* “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you to accomplish His will.”

You see, men, we work at it. But we don’t work at achieving anything. We work because we have received something. We have received the power of the Holy Spirit with our conversion and our regeneration. And now we put ourselves in a position to work at that through the Holy Spirit, to feed that by developing an intimacy with the Person and work of Christ by the fellowship that we have with the body of Christ. It is they Holy Spirit in the heart who gives assurance of our salvation.

Now men, the Holy Spirit is not just some divine influence. He’s a divine Person, just as God the Father and God the Son. What the Father ordained the Son accomplished and the Holy Spirit applies. You and I have a Trinitarian salvation.

That means this. When did you become a Christian? You became a believer, a follower of Christ and joined the body of Christ when God ordained that before the foundation of the world. God ordained that. If you reject the doctrine of election, you’re saying that God has no mercy. *“The soul that sins shall die.”* Why aren’t we dead? Mercy!

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: *“The wages of sin is death.”* Why aren’t we dead?

Participant: Mercy.

Bruce: Mercy. You see, men, if you deny the doctrine of election, having been chosen from before the foundation of the world, you’re saying that there is no mercy, because all of us deserve death. But God in His mercy, before the foundation of the world, chose some of us in Christ. What God ordained—when did you become a Christian? When Christ accomplished your salvation on the cross. He didn’t make it possible for you to become a Christian. He did it because He achieved your salvation. What God the Father ordained the Son accomplished and the Holy Spirit applied it. When you heard the gospel, something happened.

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Go to Acts chapter two, the great message of Peter at Pentecost. What was their response? Verse 34 says, *“What shall we do?”*

Participant: Repent.

Bruce: You see, one of the best indications that you’re a follower of Christ is that you change your view of Christ. That’s what happened at Pentecost. Three thousand people changed their view of Christ. When they heard the message of the gospel preached, they said, “What do we do? We’ve been exposed! We’ve heard about the Person and work of Christ—the One who was crucified, the One who died on the cross for my sin. What do I do?”

You see, the first indication that you’re a Christian is this. You think differently about Jesus. You think differently about Him. He’s no longer just a moral teacher, a good illustration, a good leader, a good man. You change your view of who Christ is because you’ve understood this. I’ve been convicted of my sin. I’ve been convinced of my sin. I’ve been converted from my sin. I have comfort in my new way of life and the Holy Spirit controls me because he dwells within me through regeneration. You see, He’s not just some divine influence. The Holy Spirit is a Person. What God the Father ordained the Son accomplished and the Holy Spirit applied.

Let’s talk about what freedom is not for a few minutes. We’ve seen what freedom is. Let’s talk about what freedom is not.

First of all, *it is not indulging the flesh*. Look at verse thirteen of Galatians five. *“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. But through love, serve one another.”*

Christian liberty, men, is not the freedom to do what you want to do just because you think you’ve been set free. In the Scripture the flesh is our fallen nature, that part of us that is prone to sin. It’s what is referred to as “the old man” in Colossians chapter 3, verse 9.

Transcriber’s Note: Colossians 3:9, NKJV. *“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds.”*

Bruce: Now notice in verse 13. I think the English Standard Version translates this “the opportunity.” Some of the older versions translate it “occasion.” It’s the same thing. *“Only do not use your freedom as an occasion”* (or opportunity) *“for the flesh.”*

Now that word *occasion* or *opportunity* is a military term meaning a base of operation. He’s saying, “Don’t make your flesh a base of operation for making decisions.” How often do we make our decisions based upon the flesh? It’s because we’ve reverted back to creating a base of operation where I’m going to make my decisions based upon this arena in which I operate, and that is the operation of the flesh. Paul says, “Don’t do that.”

It’s what he says in Romans 12. *“Do not be conformed to the system of this world. But be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* Remember, think right, act right, feel right. You’ve got to think right, men, before you act right. And Paul is telling the Galatians, “Don’t have the flesh in your freedom. Just because you’re free in Christ, don’t think that you can operate now with a base of operation where you’re going back to the flesh to make your decisions.” He says, “Don’t do that.” We are not to make our flesh or sinful nature the base of operation for our decisions.

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That’s why it’s so important sometimes, friends, when you and I are about ready to make a decision, that we need to go to the body of Christ, because there is wisdom in the counsel of many brothers. We might just need to get some input from other people before we make our decisions, because sometimes we’re not sure what we’re doing. You see, everything I do is tainted, isn’t it? Everything that we do is tainted in some way because of our sinful nature. Until we’ve been set free from that and God glorifies us by taking us home, we’re going to be in that arena of struggle, where Paul says, “Why do I do the things that I don’t want to do?”, and “Why don’t I do the things I want to do?” You see, that’s part of the struggle.

But what we need to be understanding is this. We’re not to make our sinful nature, our flesh, the base of operation for making decisions. So Paul makes it very clear in verse thirteen that we’re not to use Christian liberty, our Christian freedom, as an occasion to feed the flesh, saying, “I’m free in Christ. But I can operate just like the world system.”

I can only speak for myself, men. But probably my greatest sin, I think, is the sin of presumption. Too often I presume upon God’s grace because I know this. I’m free in Christ. Okay. You can have that thought. You really don’t need to forgive that person, because look what he’s done to me! What am I doing? I’m going back and creating a base of operation in the flesh. Paul says, “Don’t do that. You’ve been set free not to do that.” And the thing that grieves me the most is what I’ve said so often. Sometimes I just presume upon the grace of God. I just presume upon it. It’s the sin of presumption. You have to be careful about that, men, because when you’re set free, Paul says that just because you’ve been set free, don’t presume that you can revert back to having a base of operation in the flesh to make your decisions. Don’t presume upon that.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes?

Participant: When you find yourself constantly presuming--,

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: And constantly failing to live by the power of the blood--,

Bruce: Mm-hmm.

Participant: Even though you know once again that you’re set free and you know that it is He within you who keeps you from the flesh, you know, where do you find that? I mean, when you hit that wall and you continue to sit there, and you open yourself up to Satan, it creates great confusion.

Bruce: Oh, it is. And that’s where you have to find it. First of all, I think the most important prayer that I ever make is this. “God have mercy on me, a sinner.” That’s the first thing I say. It reminds me of my sin. And the first thing I need to do is to understand God’s mercy. God have mercy upon me, the sinner. And then I have to say, “Lord, remove those thoughts from my mind, because if I don’t have those thoughts removed, I’m going to feed that and have a base of operation in the flesh.” That’s where we begin the battle.

Remember the three words that describe the body of Christ. *Remnant*—it’s not everybody. *Persecution*—if you desire to live godly in Christ Jesus you will suffer persecution. And thirdly, *spiritual warfare*. That’s part of our spiritual warfare. We have

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to fight it at that point. And I just have to say, “Lord, have mercy upon me as a sinner.” The first thing that I need to remind myself of is what? Of my sinfulness. Not the fact that I need to have it removed or be forgiven of it, but first of all I have to have the realization that I am in a sinful mind right now. And what I need more than anything else is for You to be merciful to me in my sinfulness. Then, once I get that done, I can say, “Lord, remove those thoughts.” And I begin to replace them.

Here’s what I begin to replace them with. Turn with me to the book of Ephesians. It’s what I call *replacement therapy*. (*Laughter.*) I replace those thoughts with something else. Go to Ephesians chapter one.

Here’s what I say. It’s my paraphrased version. And it comes from this. “Lord, remove those thoughts from my mind, because if You don’t, Lord, it’s going to be a dead issue for me and I’m going to make my base of operation the flesh for making decisions, and I don’t want to do that.”

And this is what I say to myself. *“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him from before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, for the praise of His own glory.”

That’s what I say. I said that eleven times last night just because I was struggling in my mind. I did not want to make something I was thinking about a base of operation. And so what I had to do was to just fight through that. But one of the things I had to do was to replace those thoughts with something that was going to get me thinking differently.

The first thing I had to do and realize was this. Have mercy on me, a sinner. It all starts with that, because I need to realize this: that Christ is a better Savior than I am a sinner.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: He’s a better Savior than I am a sinner. I need to start with that. And then I remind myself of my calling, the fact that He chose me from before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined me through adoption to be His son, according to the counsel and pleasure of His own will. I need to remind myself of that. And so that’s how I battle those things. It’s not an easy battle, men. But it’s something we have to do to fight it out.

Paul makes it very clear that we’re not to use the freedom of Christian liberty as an occasion to set up a base of operation for the flesh. And anyone who says that freedom in Christ allows for indulging the flesh is a false teacher. Look at 2 Peter 2:18. *“For speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, by that he is enslaved.”*

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Now Jude verse four. *“For certain people have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were destined for this condemnation—ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality, and deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Having explained our calling to us in these verses, Paul then issues a very strong caution. *Don’t allow your liberty to degenerate into license.* Don’t allow your liberty to degenerate into license, and have a base of operation for the flesh in making decisions.

Now there are some people who will say, “Well, Bruce, what Paul is teaching is basically this. You don’t understand the true meaning of the grace of God.” If you do away with rules and regulations, they say, you’re going to create chaos and anarchy. If you get rid of the law keeping, you’re going to create chaos and anarchy.

Now that danger is true. That’s a true danger. That would happen. Remember, we’re not removing the moral law of God. We’re just changing the way in which it’s fulfilled. Rather than fulfilling it externally by rule keeping, we’re fulfilling it internally by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The law is kept. But it’s now internal rather than external.

Well men, I’ll tell you what. We’ll pick this up next week. I’ve given us a lot to think about today.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Bring your notes and we’ll pick it up in a couple of weeks and continue on this. The key point I would just like to remind us of is this. Men, don’t use your liberty as the means of license and reverting back to having a base of operation in the flesh for making your decisions. Men, we’ve been set free from that. We’ve been set free from that. May God give us the grace to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: For it is God who is at work in you for His glory. Let’s not forget that it’s God working in us.

Let’s pray. Father, we thank You for the fact that Your mercies are fresh every morning. That means they’re new. That means the mercies that I received yesterday will not be the mercies I receive today. And the mercies I receive today will not be the mercies I will receive tomorrow, because Your mercies are new. They’re fresh every morning. May we live in Your mercy for Jesus’ sake. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen.” (*Applause.*)