

**Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas**  
**Fredericksburg Bible Church**

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 [jthomas@fbgbible.org](mailto:jthomas@fbgbible.org)

**A1220 – May 13, 2012 – 1 Corinthians 7:17-24**  
**The Lord's Freedman, Christ's Slave**

Alright, let's turn once more to 1 Cor 7 and today I want to take us up to verse 24. I intended to do that last time but we ran out of time because we had to deal with some other important issues and so this time let's review what we've seen in vv 1-20 and then finish on out to verse 24. 1 Cor 7 basically divides into two sections, vv 1-24 deals with those who have been married and vv 25-40 deals with those who have never been married. This division is based on the first words of verse 1, *peri de* translated "Now concerning" and the repetition of these words in verse 25, *peri de*, also translated "Now concerning." So clearly Paul is dividing the chapter topically in half. They're related divisions but *peri de* indicates a slight shift in emphasis, so for the most part, vv 1-24 deals with those who have been married and vv 25-40, those who have never been married.

In verses 1—7 Paul deals with the statement of verse 1, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." What do you think about that statement Paul? Well, Paul didn't like it so much in the context of marriage because first of all, verse 2, it would lead to fornications. For that reason "each man is to have his own wife," that is, have intimate relations with her, "and each woman is to have her own husband," again, meaning have intimate relations with him. Paul's reasons in vv 3 and 4 are contractual. Marriage requires two components; first of all a contract, these are the vows each partner promises the other partner. And secondly consummation, there must be the act of consummation so the two become one flesh, that's a marriage. So Paul's reason for intimate relations inside of marriage goes back to the contract. Verse 3, "The husband must fulfill his duty," contractual word, "he must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband." Both took vows and those vows include intimate relations, therefore to abstain from intimate relations is to violate the contract. Then verse 4, "The wife does

not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” So again, this is mutual, and in the marriage contract you have given up all authority over your own body because the two of you are one body, you are one unity and so then your body does not belong to you, you do not have rights over your body, your partner has rights over your body. Therefore verse 5, “Stop depriving one another,” the translation assumes deprivation was going on at Corinth and this was causing fornication and that probably was the case. Corinth was terribly sexually licentious. So Paul looks at intimate relations within marriage as a healthy way to avoid falling into sexual licentiousness. But there is one exception, maybe Paul says; the Greek indicates a lot of uncertainty in Paul. Nevertheless, it is the word of God so I see no uncertainty in the grand scheme of things. If there is a situation in life that comes along that merits tremendous efforts in prayer then he says, “except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” Three requirements to the exception, the norm, of course, is intimate relations. But if abstinence then first of all, mutual consent by agreement, both partners must agree to abstain. Secondly, devotion to prayer during that period, that means intense prayer for some circumstance in life. And thirdly, of limited duration, for a time, then come back together. This is necessary “so that Satan will not tempt you,” the weaker partner, “because of your lack of self-control. 6But this I say by way of concession, not of command.” The exception is a concession due to circumstances in life that are of rare occurrence. The command is verse 5, stop depriving one another or don’t deprive one another. So we have the normal marital life put forth and it is defined by the contract you took in your vows, to engage in intimate relations on a regular basis with your own spouse.

Now verse 7 probably is a transitional verse to get us over to verse 8 so it should probably be translated, “Now” instead of “Yet.” “Now I wish that all men were even as I myself am.” Namely celibate. Paul was celibate when he wrote this. “However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.” Some people have the gift of celibacy and others do not. Paul wishes that all did because of reasons he mentions later in the chapter, namely, an undivided interest in the things of the Lord. But he recognizes that not all men have the gift of celibacy, the gift being lack of sexual desire.

Going on to verse 8 which should begin with the word “And” since it’s continuative, “And I say to the unmarried and to widows,” actually that should be translated, “to the widowers and widows,” most cultures had a word for widows because that was a common problem, women tend to outlive their men and that brought a particular set of problems, but those problems did not occur for men so most cultures did not have a word for widowers. So Paul took the feminine word widows and put it in masculine gender to communicate a widower, which implies by the end of the verse that Paul was a widower. So to “widowers and widows it is good for them if they remain even as I.” That is, unmarried. “But if,” and here’s another exception, you’ll notice if there is an exception to the rule Paul will mention it. Verse 5 is an exception to the rule, verse 9 is an exception to the rule, verse 11 is an exception to the rule, verse 15 is an exception to the rule and verse 21 has an exception to the rule. So I’ll cite these exceptions as we go through. Verse 9, the exception to the rule is that “if a widower or a widow “do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn.” That is, if it’s such a distraction that they’re no good for serving Christ then just let them marry.

Verse 10 he shifts to those still married, “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord,” meaning this teaching is based in Jesus’ teaching in Mark 10, Paul’s commentary on what Jesus taught was “that the wife should not leave her husband,” no divorce, verse 11, parenthetical exception, “but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband”. So two options if a woman divorced her husband - remain unmarried or be reconciled. If the husband died then a third option would be opened up according to verse 39-40, she could remarry, only in the Lord. But as a rule, no divorce. And for the men, verse 11 “the husband should not divorce his wife.” Again, the rule is no divorce.

Verse 12, “But to the rest,” and by rest he means those in mixed marriages, a believer married to an unbeliever, “But to the rest I say, not the Lord,” meaning Jesus does not address mixed marriages in the gospels, but nevertheless Paul does and he does so under the inspiration of the Spirit, so it is just as authoritative as what Jesus taught. He says, “that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.” And vice versa, verse 13, “And a woman who has an

unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.” So as a rule, no divorce. Verse 14 gives the reason, “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife,” that is, he has contact with the truth, and who knows, verse 16, “O wife, whether you will save your husband? And vice versa, it works both ways, if you married as unbelievers and one of you came to Christ then remain married because you may be the one God has assigned your spouse to come to Christ through. And further the children, end of verse 14, “otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy, they too are set apart so as to have contact with the truth of the gospel through the believing parent and so do not divorce. So the rule is no divorce. The exception to the rule is verse 15, “Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.” You are not to fight the unbeliever to stay married because God has not called us to frustrate unbelievers, if they want a divorce you can’t stop them, God has called us to peace.

Now we come to verse 17 where we started last week and here we want to review a little more in depth and take it on to the end of this section in verse 24. In verse 17 Paul says, **And so I direct in all the churches.** This was not a novel teaching at Corinth, this is what Paul instructed in all local churches. And by implication all local churches should be following the same instruction. The division of the church into various sects, Baptist and Methodist and Presbyterian and Assembly of God, etc...is not the vision Paul had for the church. Paul’s vision was for all local churches to follow the same doctrinal principles. So the local church at Corinth was splintering away from the doctrinal principles of other local churches in other localities and this was out of line and out of step with Paul’s desire for the various local churches he founded. His desire was that if you were from Ephesus and attended the local church at Ephesus, but you had to go on a business trip to Corinth, when you attended the local church at Corinth it would be a seamless unity of doctrine, it would be like walking from one room to another room where the décor flows, not one house to another house where the décor differs significantly. Ideally Paul envisioned the same things taught in your church being taught in other churches. And I really have that desire strongly too. I’m not ecumenical but I got out of Eph 4:3 years ago a very strong desire for pure doctrine to be taught in all local churches. I’m not interested in Fredericksburg Bible having the inside scoop on truth; I want all believers to have the truth. And it saddens me that is not the case.

Verse 18, **Was any man called when he was circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised?** That is, if you came to faith as a Jew you should not become a Gentile. You say how could Jew become a Gentile? By reversing his circumcision. Some Jews in the *diaspora* felt the pressure to Hellenize, to become more Greek, particularly those who competed in the Olympic Games; they were ashamed that they looked different so they had a surgery that would hide the circumcision and make them appear uncircumcised. Josephus talks about how widespread this was. In any case, those who came to Christ when circumcised should not become uncircumcised. Why not? Because it has nothing to do with spirituality. Paul told the Galatians, “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new creation.” And, “in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but faith working through love.” Circumcision wouldn’t get you closer to God.

Of course the reverse is also true in verse 18, **Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised.** So Gentiles should not try to become Jews. Gentile Christians often felt the pressure by Judaizer Christians to get circumcised, but when the Gentile Titus visited Jerusalem with Paul in Gal 2, and they went in before the pillars of the Church, Titus was not compelled to be circumcised. So then what does circumcision or uncircumcision have to do with anything? Nothing. Not a thing whatsoever. The only reason Paul had Timothy circumcised was for ministry purposes. Paul wanted Timothy to go with him and Silas and Timothy was a unique case because his father was a Greek but his mother was a Jew and so he had the opportunity to decide as a young man whether he wanted to identify with the Greeks or the Jews. Paul had him circumcised to open up opportunities for evangelizing Jews that would otherwise be closed. But as far as Timothy’s spirituality was concerned, there was no benefit.

If you’re trying to change your social status, which was often related to marriage, or your physical condition in order to be more spiritual, you were just out of luck, those things are irrelevant to spirituality. Verse 19, **Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.** What does matter and what is related directly to spirituality is **the commandments of God.** So if circumcision is nothing then Paul obviously saw the Law of Moses as set aside because circumcision was commanded by God under the Law of Moses.

So Paul saw a dispensational shift from Israel, a nation in which God dealt, over to the Church which is not a nation. From Israel, a racial group to the Church, which is composed of all racial groups. The Church is neither Jew nor Gentile but a body of Jews and Gentiles baptized into Christ. And with a change from God's dealings with Israel to the Church there is of necessity a change in law. They were under the Law of Moses. Paul says clearly here, we are not, yet that does not mean we are without a standard for living, there are commandments to follow, we are under the Law of Christ. And his commandments are not burdensome, they are easy because we walk by faith. And faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God. So the manner of **keeping the commandments of God** is walking by faith - in the content of the word of God.

Verse 20, he repeats the central feature of the chapter, **Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called.** A change in marital status, moving up in society, all this is irrelevant to spirituality. Now we come to verse 21, **Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it;** now I want you to think about that, not in terms of American slavery but in terms of Roman slavery. Don't read American slavery back into the text. Roman slavery was common. It is estimated that 40-50% of the population were slaves. And at Corinth, a city of 750,000 people, 460,000 were slaves, so 61% of the population of Corinth were slaves. Where did all these slaves come from? There were two avenues. One, through military defeat. When Rome defeated foreign nations they would take hostages and turn those able to work out to be slaves. The Roman Empire was expanded significantly through slave labor. And at Corinth, since it was so important to maritime trade in the Mediterranean, many of the slaves served in the Roman Navy. Two, others became slaves by selling themselves into slavery. Slaves had a much better life than many free Romans simply because of uncertainties, as slaves you had a nice place to stay, lots of freedom, three square meals a day, they took very good care, typically, of their slaves; so many people would sell themselves into slavery simply because it was a better quality of life.

So he says, verse 21, **Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it.** No big deal Paul says, you can still be spiritual as a **slave**. Social status is not something to fret about. Later Paul is going to serve just fine in chains, he's going to evangelize the entire Praetorian guard and the gospel is going to reach up into the royal echelon of Roman society. So if Paul can serve in



chains I think you can serve in any social status. The whole point here, as far as principle application is not to worry about your social status. If you can improve it, fine, Paul says, **if you are able to become free, rather do that**, or better, “make all the more use of it,” but it’s not essential to serving Christ effectively. In the final analysis, in terms of service, it doesn’t matter whether you are rich or poor, slave or free, Jew or Gentile. It just doesn’t matter.

But the exception Paul says is, **if you are able also to become free, rather do that**. Maybe Onesimus in the Book of Philemon is an example of that. Onesimus escaped from his master Philemon as an unbeliever, while escaped he became a believer. Paul sent him back to Philemon but pleaded with him to accept Onesimus as he would accept Paul and set him free. That would enable him to minister to Paul. However, if he could not become free, can’t you hear Paul telling Onesimus, don’t worry about it. The point is we can minister in any situation in life. Our situation doesn’t matter that much.

Now verse 22 and 23, the theological explanation. **For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord’s freedman**; now the word **freedman** is a technical term in the Roman slave system for a manumitted slave, a slave set free or released. Now it didn’t mean that he was no longer a slave in his social status. What does it mean? It means he has a new spiritual status given to Him by the Lord. So he may remain a slave but in the Lord he is free. Free from what? Free from the penalty of sin, which is eternal condemnation in the lake of fire, that’s our positional freedom, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

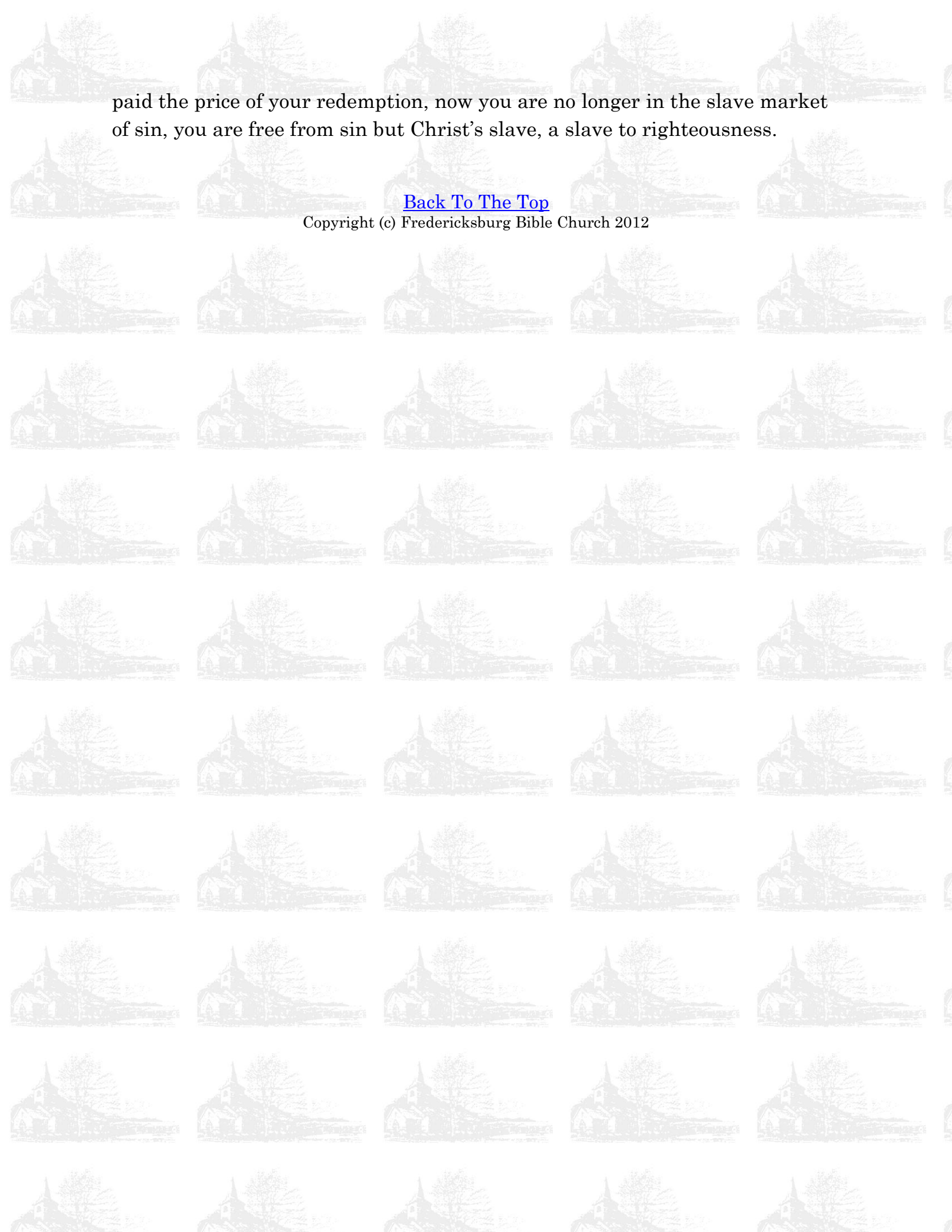
But then Paul says, **likewise**, or in the exact same manner, **he who was called while free, is Christ’s slave**. Now obviously it does not mean that he is no longer free in his social status. What does it mean? It means that he has a new status given to Him by the Lord. So he remains a free man but in the Lord he is the Lord’s slave. Slave to what? A slave to do righteousness.

So then the grand point of both expressions is that we are free from sin and freed to righteousness. This is what it means to really be free in this world, free from the bondage of sin and free to do righteousness. If you want to be free you want to become a Christian because they are the only free people in this world. All unbelievers are slaves to their sin nature. They can always

and everywhere only do sin. In God's sight all of it is sin. The farmer who plows Isaiah says, sows destruction. Every thing an unbeliever does is sin because an unbeliever is sin. But Christ has paid it all, we're going ahead to verse 23 here, but only in Christ are you freed from the penalty of sin and only in Christ are you freed from the power of sin. Both are by grace through faith, you are saved from the penalty of sin by grace through faith and you are saved from the power of sin by grace through faith. Both justification and sanctification are by grace through faith.

Now then, the theological basis for our freedom in Christ, which is freedom from sin and freedom to righteousness is verse 23, **You were bought with a price**, a repeat of 1 Cor 6:20. Now the Greek word **you were bought** is *agorazo* which contains the Greek word for marketplace, the *agora*. If you travel to ancient Greek or Roman ruins you've heard of the *agora* or marketplace. This is where you purchased goods, it was their HEB and they were usually in the center of town and very busy places. So *agorazo* is an economic term used of a transaction, a purchase. And this is looking at the cross of Christ from the standpoint of economics. Let's draw a diagram and think about the three aspects of the cross. There are three ideas in the NT that relate to the effects of the cross. So if we put the cross in the center and we think of the effects of the cross upon God, (this is Godward) then we have the doctrine of propitiation, which means satisfaction. Have you ever felt like there was a person in your life you couldn't satisfy? No matter how hard you tried it just wasn't good enough. Well, Christ on the cross satisfied the Father perfectly. His just demands were met in full on the cross. There is nothing left for you to do to satisfy God. Jesus Christ already satisfied Him. So that is the Godward effect of the cross. The second effect is manward, the cross had effects upon man, namely reconciliation; God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Before the cross God was at war with man, but now after the cross God is at peace with man because of Christ. The problem is that man is still at war with God until a man accepts Christ's cross. Finally we have the third effect and this is sinward, the cross is directed toward man and this is what we have here, redemption, the payment, Christ was paying for sin, and He made the payment in full. So we have the cross of Christ acting in three directions, Godward, manward and sinward. The aspect in verse 23, in the word **bought**, is sinward, Christ paid the price for sin so you don't have to pay the price, besides, you didn't have the assets to buy yourself out of slavery, you were broke and worse than broke, you were in debt. So He





paid the price of your redemption, now you are no longer in the slave market of sin, you are free from sin but Christ's slave, a slave to righteousness.

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