

ChristReformationChurch

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The World, the Flesh, and the Devil

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Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: Romans 6

The Christian has many enemies. If you are a person who insists that you must be popular with everyone, well, you are going to have a hard time following Christ. In fact, it will be an impossibility. The world hates Christ and He warned us:

Luke 6:26 "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

It is important that we remind ourselves of these things regularly, and that we are careful to instruct new Christians in particular that when we stand with Christ, we will find many standing against us. A coward simply cannot walk with Christ.

Now, last time we considered how we can expect to come across people who claim to be Christians but whose goal is in fact to enslave others to their own self-made brand of religion that they still want to call Christianity. These people are *legalists*. And you recall that their method is to insist that to be justified with God we must not only believe in Christ, but we must carefully fashion our lives to some set of rules that serve to merit God's full acceptance of us. Christ is not enough, in other words. And we saw that the Apostle Paul in particular tipped us off about these people, reminded us that we are fully justified in Christ, set free from condemnation, fully redeemed and forgive and therefore we must never yield for a second to these legalists. We send them on their way.

Now it may have been Martin Luther (I am not positive) who said that the Christian has a three-fold enemy: *the world, the flesh, and the devil*. And I want us to consider this morning at least one aspect of one of these 3 culprits that every Christian must expect to try to entice him away from Christ. Namely, what the Bible calls –

the flesh and the particular brand of enemy that inevitably attempts to lead us into sin through this channel.

I will not go into great detail about the nature of *the flesh* in the Christian except to say that, as we know, as long as we are in this present world, even though we are justified before God and in Christ, we are still going to battle this remnant of our old self that the Bible calls the flesh. That is to say, while Christ gives us a new nature, a new heart, new desires, a new mind – makes us a new person in other words – we will never be fully and completely “fixed” until the Day Christ comes and raises us up with Him and we have those new resurrection bodies. Sinless, totally free from any taint of evil.

But for now, the Christian battles against the flesh. This is why Paul wrote to the Galatians:

Galatians 5:16-24 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (17) For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (19) Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20)

idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, (21) envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (24) And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

This battle never existed before we knew Christ. There is no Holy Spirit in the unsaved man. His mind, his desires and affections – all of them (even if they appear to be quite noble at times) are, in the end, the product of his sin – of his flesh.

Now, here is the particular point in regard to this enemy called the flesh that I want us to carefully consider this morning.

We can expect another brand of enemy agent to come along with the intention of leading us away from Christ. We call this category of evil the “libertine.” And his message is that God does not care how we live because we are saved by grace, not by our own works. This is, you see, the opposite error from the legalist.

Let me give you an example of a man who claimed to be a Christian, who was a church member for many years, who was touted as a fine Christian man by others, but who lived like the devil. He was a libertine. He believed that he could be a Christian and live however he wanted to. This is taken from his obituary:

John died Tuesday at age 75. He was born in 1924, He served his country during World War II. After the war he married and worked for a Midwest corporation until he retired.

Most important, John had a deep faith and spent a lifetime serving God and his Savior Jesus Christ. He was kind, gentle and loving toward every person he met.

In other words, at his funeral the pastor and his friends all pronounced him most assuredly in heaven, that that “better place” everyone talks about.

But none of it is true.

John in fact consistently refused to obey Christ. He insisted that he could live however he wanted to. If he wanted to be an adulterer, then he could do so and still be accepted by Christ in the end. After all, he liked to remind everyone, Christ is gracious

and forgiving and none of us are perfect.

I had several conversations with John over the years as his pastor. He very much disliked the fact that God is perfectly holy and that if we are to be justified before the Lord, that somehow WE must be perfectly holy. John took great exception to this whenever I taught it. Of course, our perfect holiness and sinlessness comes from Christ taking our sins upon Himself on the cross, not from us somehow making ourselves sinless by working to be “good.”

But John took this good news of the gospel, this wonderful announcement that Christ paid for our sins in full on the cross, and turned it into a license to keep walking in sin. John would answer a resounding YES to the Apostle Paul’s question:

Romans 6:15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

And so John walked in sin. It was his habit. In the end he took another man’s wife and when he was confronted for this by myself and our church, his response was, “well I resign from your church then.”

Now, what should trouble us even more than John's actions is the message preached at his funeral.

Most important, John had a deep faith and spent a lifetime serving God and his Savior Jesus Christ. He was kind, gentle and loving toward every person he met.

This is a blatant lie and it is the lie of this false teaching that we are calling "libertinism." This idea, that a person is forgiven by God when they believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and then God really doesn't care how they live after that because after all, we are saved by grace, Jesus' blood washes away all our sin, no one is perfect, and so on.

But what does the Bible say about the Christian? Specifically, what does God have to say about how His people live out their lives in this world? Can a person be a serial adulterer, as John was, and still have full assurance that they will hear Christ welcome them into heaven when they die?

Romans 6:15-18 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! (16) Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to

death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? (17) But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, (18) and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

Let me interject here before we read more Scriptures like this. Understand that the Christian's obedience to Christ *is not slavery demanded by threats, but freedom!!* In Christ we have been set free from slavery to sin and its condemnation and death, just as the Israelites were set free from cruel slavery in Egypt. Turn to Christ in faith and He will "enslave you," but that turns out to be freedom. Freedom to love one another rather than hate. Freedom to do right instead of doing evil.

Alright let's continue then. Does the Bible say that the libertine is correct? No!

Romans 6:1-4 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? (2) By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? (3) Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (4) We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by

the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

1 Peter 2:15-16 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. (16) Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

1 John 2:1-5 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (2) He is the propitiation [ie, satisfaction] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (3) And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. (4) Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, (5) but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. (17) And the world is passing away along with its desires, but

whoever does the will of God abides forever.

1 John 2:26-29 I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. (27) But the **anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. (28) And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. (29) If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

**The “anointing” John refers to is of course the Holy Spirit who lives in every genuine Christian, leading, guiding, directing, giving us the ability to discern good and evil.

I suppose this next passage is the clearest of all in its exposure of libertinism as a false gospel. Notice as we read it that we are not talking about God requiring *perfection* or else. No, what Scripture says is that a Christian’s entire direction of life, his way of thinking, is all radically changed from what it used to be so that now the habitual character of his mind and heart and life is one of loving righteousness, desiring to live in it, and

when he or she fails (sins), the Christian hates his own sin, repents of it, and turns back onto course. The question is, *what is the overall direction and desire of a person's life and heart?*

1 John 3:4-11 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. (5) You know that he [Christ] appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. (6) No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

(7) Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. (8) Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

(9) No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.

(10) By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. (11) For this is the message

that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

Boom! There it is. John, you see, continued right on through his life making a practice of sinning. That is who he was. That is what he loved. And therefore, as the Apostle John tells us here, that John was no Christian. And the declaration made at his funeral was a blatant lie:

Most important, John had a deep faith and spent a lifetime serving God and his Savior Jesus Christ. He was kind, gentle and loving toward every person he met.

I have heard other libertines say something like this:

"I know that what I am going to do is sin. But that is why Jesus came and died on the cross. So that what I am going to do can be forgiven and I can be assured of heaven."

Now, we need to understand that this kind of teaching is very, very common in local churches today. And here is the favorite byword of these kind of people:

Romans 6:1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

The libertine's cry is YES!! And you see it very frequently today. People like this seem to delight in searching out the most evil person they can find, and "saving them," then bragging about how gracious and merciful God is. You have seen it, right? Someone commits a most atrocious, evil, wicked sin – even repeatedly over many years time – and the libertines immediately rush to hug the guy and tell him how much God loves him and then they announce to all the rest of us that the fellow is soooo sorry, and that therefore all of us are required by God to forgive him because, after all, where sin abounds, God's grace and mercy abound all the more!!

This is a terrible perversion of Christ's truth.

Listen to the Apostle Paul dealing with libertinism in the church at Corinth. As he is doing so, he apparently quotes some of the catch phrases the libertines were using in order to justify their sin. I have highlighted them:

1 Corinthians 6:9-20 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, (10) nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (11)

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

(12) **"All things are lawful for me,"** but not all things are helpful. **"All things are lawful for me,"** but I will not be dominated by anything. (13) **"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"**—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. (14) And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.

(15) Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! (16) Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." (17) But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

(18) Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. (19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,

(20) for you were bought with a price.
So glorify God in your body.

The message of the Bible then is this:

Christian, be who you are, not who you used to be.

Do you see their false reasoning?

And that is true liberty.

- Christ has fulfilled God's law by dying for our sins and by obeying the law perfectly for me. Therefore I am free from any condemnation of God's law and that means *all things are lawful for me*. I am free to do whatever and God doesn't care.
- Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food. If God didn't expect me to indulge my body sexually then why did he make me a sexual being? Surely He has no problem if I want to go to a prostitute.

And Paul refutes each of these twisted ideas.

But at the heart of Paul's argument here is this: *Christian, you are not who you used to be. Christ has made you a brand new creation. All of that old business of immorality, idolatry, thievery, greed, and drunkenness that you used to live in and for – it is not you any longer.* In fact, anyone who continues to live in that old evil way is simply demonstrating that they do not know Christ at all and they will never see Christ's kingdom.