

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

Breaking Free from Sin

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: TMC110

Whenever I come to this time of the year and focus so intently on the cross of Christ, it becomes a time of self-examination for me. I hope it does for you. The closer I draw to the cross, the more I see the ugliness of my own sin. The more I contemplate the death of Christ and realize what He did on that cross for me, the more I hate what I am in my fallenness.

It's so easy to become tolerant of your sin. One of the things I fear for you as young people, in fact maybe I fear it more than anything else except for the fact that you might not really be saved is that during the years of your youth, you train yourself to sin. You can do that, you know, because the habits you're forming now in your life will be very difficult to break. It is during these years in your life that you are developing what the writer of Hebrews calls "besetting sins." Sins that become your friend, sins that become familiar to you, sins that in the future you're going to find almost impossible to break, sins that will become so habitual that you may not even recognize them for what they are and they are the sins that nailed Jesus Christ to the cross. They are the sins for which He died, for which He gave you forgiveness, and yet witlessly and ignorantly and maybe willfully, the sins in which we continue to live.

In Hebrews chapter 12, familiar words, the writer says in verse 1, "Let us lay aside every weight or encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us."

That is a very important statement, young people, and I want to focus on it. There's another thing I fear, that if you find it easy to develop habitual sin here, what's going to happen when you leave this summer? The sins that you've already cultivated will find an easier time when you're outside the environment of Christian friendship, Christian accountability, the daily teaching of God's Word, high expectations, chapel messages, etc. You see, it's your nature because you're fallen, like me, like all of us, to be easily entangled in sin. That's what it says, "The sin which so easily entangles us."

It isn't difficult for sin to entangle us, to wrap us up, to find its way so deeply into our lives that it becomes habitual. It's not difficult for sin to do that. It's easy. And usually there are certain sins that we battle all our lifelong because we cultivated them in our youth. They are the sins that most easily entangle us, the ones that perhaps we find the most tolerable. And generally, the ones that aren't our entangling or besetting sins are the ones we most easily condemn in other people. If you're to live the Christian life and to run the race with endurance, you have to deal with your entangling sins.

Let me see if I can't help you to understand why some sins entangle you so easily. First of all, sin has great power because your flesh is unredeemed. Your spirit has been redeemed. You are, on the inside, a new creation, your flesh has not been redeemed..and by flesh, I don't just mean your physical body, I mean your humanness, both the way you act, the things you do physically, and the way you think and feel. All of that...will, mind, emotion, body is all still the flesh and sin has great power in your unredeemed flesh. It made Paul say, "O wretched man that I am, who will shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He saw it like a corpse, strapped to himself which was decaying him, a foul corpse at that. Galatians 5:17 says, "The flesh wars against the Spirit and they are in opposition to one another."

Sin has great power in our emotions. It has great power in our will. It has great power in our affections, to command us to do what is wrong. And until our bodies are redeemed, you've got to understand that you are highly vulnerable. That's why the Bible talks about staying as far away from sin as you possibly can because it's so easily finds its way into our unredeemed flesh.

Secondly, I might add, it not only has great power in our flesh, but it is very close. As an enemy, we would like to believe it is far away and we can see it coming. But truthfully, sin is very close, it is actually in us...it is in us. Jeremiah 13:23 says, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Or the leopard change his spots?" And the obvious answer is no. The conclusion then, "You also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil. Sin is deep within you. The heart, says Jeremiah, is more deceitful than everything else and desperately wicked.

So sin has great power in your unredeemed flesh and it is very near, it is even within you. Paul says in Romans 7, "The sin that is in me...that is in me." You never will be able to run away from it, whether you're at home, or whether you're isolated, whether you're in the midst of a group of people like this in a service focused on the Lord, wherever you are sin is there. Having the right associations and the right environment will give you strength to deal with it, but it's there.

A third thought, just kind deepening our understanding of why sin easily entangles us is that sin does not remain separate. That is to say, it is there but it is not easily identifiable. Somebody asked me some years back if I preached sermons with a pure motive. And my answer to the question was, "I don't know, because I don't know." I would like to think that every time I stand up to preach the Word of God, I do it with an absolutely pure motive to glorify God and not with any motive to bring attention to myself, to gain a reputation, to gain respect, to be thought of as virtuous or holy, or gifted. I would like to think that every time I preach, I do so purely and singularly out of a motive to glorify God. And if you ask me if I do, my answer would be, "I don't know," because sin is so entangled in what I am that I cannot separate it out. It runs that deep and that pervasively.

I don't know whether I've ever had an absolutely, totally, completely pure motive that lasted very long

because sin is not separated from what I am. It infects all my duties. It infects all my ministries. It's tangled up in all my motives. It retards and somehow wounds all my purposes and all my good intentions and it even crowds in on the very acts of obedience and worship that I endeavor to express to God. Even my best efforts are somehow tainted. Paul says, "I see this law, or this principle," in Romans 7, "warring within me, waging war with the law or the principle of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members."

Sin is strong then, we said first of all. Sin is near, second of all. And thirdly, it is entangling. It is co-mingled. We can't separate ourselves from it. Yet the Bible tells us here that we must lay aside the sin which so easily entangles us. Ephesians 4:22 puts it this way, "Lay aside the old self which is being corrupted in accordance with the lust of deceit." Peter put it this way, "Abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul." Paul in Romans 6 said, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lust." So we're commanded to disentangle ourselves with something that is powerful, that is present, that is pervasive.

How do we do that? Well it's not an easy battle and I really believe that there are some of you who aren't fighting it very well and you are allowing yourselves to be more deeply entangled with sin. Here you are in the right environment. Here you are with the right potential accountability, here you are sitting under the right kind of teaching and the right kind of truth, but you're not making the proper application, you're cultivating sins and the day will come, I promise you, when you will look back and with great sadness of heart say, "Why didn't I deal with those when I was young?" This is the time.

Now there are two things to recognize, if you're going to deal with entangling sin. One, that the power and the strength to deal with it is the Holy Spirit's. It is the Spirit's power. Paul makes that very clear in Galatians chapter 5 when he talks about walking in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. It's not just a negative thing. It doesn't mean you sit around trying to discover sin and stamp it out. It means you preoccupy yourself with obeying the Spirit of God as His will is expressed in the Word of God and in the promptings of the Word of God and in positively being consumed with obedience, you will find that sin has a way of disappearing. It is the Spirit's work. You walk in the Spirit, you won't fulfill the lust of the flesh. Walking in the Spirit means allowing the Word of Christ to dominate your thinking and walking in harmony with that.

I guess I could simply say, "What it comes down to is the necessity to put the Word of God in your heart, to let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." Let me suggest to you that if you haven't developed in your own life a commitment to Scripture memory, now is the time to do it. You need to begin to put the Word of God away. David said, "Thy Word have I treasured up, hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You." How shall a young person cleanse his ways? Be taking heed to Thy Word. And as a result of that, verse 9 of Psalm 119, he says in verse 11, "I've hid it in my heart that I might not sin."

I mean, that's what the great Christians have done. They've put the Word of God in their hearts so that they literally find themselves yielding to the Holy Spirit's application of that Word. The Word is the stuff that separates us out from sin, that hedges us against temptation.

Paul memorized Scripture, the Apostle Paul. There wasn't any magical trick. There wasn't any sort of supernatural secret that he knew and nobody else did that made him a great Christian. He hid the Word of God in his heart. Listen to Acts 17:3, "Paul, as his custom was, went into the Sabbath," now follow this, "explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead." Literally when it says explaining and giving evidence, the Greek says, "Opening and placing before them the evidence."

What does that mean? Well he was showing them the evidence. What evidence? Old Testament evidence that the Messiah had to die, He had to suffer, He had to be crucified. Where is that evidence in the Old Testament? Well for one thing, it's in Isaiah 53, is it not? You might even find it all the way back in Genesis 3:15. You will find it in the sacrificial system where all the pictures of Christ are taken up in the lambs of sacrifice that were offered. You will find the suffering of Messiah in a number of places in the Psalms, such as Psalm 22 which describes His crucifixion. The point being this, the Apostle Paul stood there as his custom was in the Sabbath in front of the Jewish people and reasoned with them out of the Old Testament concerning the necessity of Christ's death and he didn't have a scroll in his hand. He had it in his heart.

Believe me, he wasn't unrolling scrolls all over the place. He was reasoning with them out of Scripture which, no doubt, had been committed to his own memory. Believe me, Paul memorized Scripture and that was the strength of his ministry, it was a biblical ministry.

If you go back to Acts chapter 2 and listen to Peter preach the great sermon that he preached on the day of Pentecost, you will know that Peter memorized Scripture, too. Because he quotes great chunks of Scripture in that Pentecost sermon beginning in verse 14. If you look in your Bible and see the quotes that are there, taken directly out of the Old Testament, you will know the alacrity with which Peter could use the Scripture because he had committed it to memory. It's not just for the sake of memorization, not just for the sake of proclamation, but for the sake of purity.

I believe also that Timothy and Titus and other Apostles and other men of God like Apollos who was mighty in the Old Testament scriptures, and Barnabas the son of encouragement, and many others of the heroes of the New Testament were those who had memorized Scripture. If you go back in to the Old Testament, look at the book of Proverbs and the first few chapters of Proverbs...chapter 2, chapter 4, chapter 6, on in to chapter 7, there's a constant cry for the memorization of God's revealed truth and principle. Joshua chapter 1 verse 8 says that you need to meditate on the Word of God day

and night, and if you do that, you'll make our way prosperous and you'll have good success.

Deuteronomy chapter 6 says that you're to talk about the things that have been revealed from God when you sit down, stand up, lie down and walk in the way. They should be the most familiar part of your conversation. James 1:21 says, "Receive the engrafted Word which is able to save your lives."

It's an absolute vital part of spiritual living if I'm going to deal with entangled sin, to put the Word of God to work in my life, it becomes the agency by which the Spirit of God gives me direction. Listen to Proverbs 22 verse 17, "Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your mind to my knowledge, for it will be pleasant if you will keep them within you that they may be ready on your lips so that your trust may be in the Lord. I have taught you today, even you. Have I not written to you excellent things, of counsels and knowledge to make you know the certainty of the words of truth that you may correctly answer to him who sent you?"

In other words, that's how you live your life. The truth is made available. Take it in, store it up that it might be a resource for you in the spiritual issues of life.

So we have to realize that if we're going to deal with sin, first of all, that it's going to be the work of the Spirit and the Spirit uses the Word. And if I am not involved in putting the Word of God to work in my life, learning it, memorizing it, understanding it and applying it, I am never going to deal with entangling sin. And I'm going to cultivate habits of unrighteousness that I will battle all my life long and thus I will forfeit potential power and ministry, as well as joy.

Now let me move to a second component. The Holy Spirit has a part, but so do you. I mean, there's a necessity for us to recognize a few things as well. Let me just give you some of them. One, don't underestimate the seriousness of your sin. I think this is the initial error that Christians make. They don't think sin is really as bad as it is. Don't underestimate the seriousness of your sin. Entangling sin is serious because all sin is serious. It is so serious, if you keep reading down in Hebrews 12, you will find that the Lord is going to chasten you for every single sin. He is going to scourge every son whom he loves because he wants to drive out every sin. Don't underestimate it. It steals joy, it destroys faithfulness, it robs you of peace, it makes you useless in service to Christ, it limits your answers to prayer, it brings discipline from the Lord, it is deadly, serious stuff. I know when you're young you think you can get away with sin, you can compromise with your girlfriend or your boyfriend, you can be involved in drinking alcohol and losing control of your senses, you can compromise by cheating on exams, you can have a cheat sheet or you can look over somebody's shoulder, and you think that's a small thing. It's that kind of thing that put Christ on the cross. It's that kind of thing which would bring you hell if it were not for the sake of Christ.

On August 17, 1662 in England, there was past what was called the Conformity Act, one of the black marks on European and English history. The Conformity Act was an act basically that forbid any

preacher in any pulpit to be a non-conformist. That is, not to conform to the state religion. And there were many non-conformist preachers. We today know many of them as Puritans.

On that last day, that day that that thing went into effect and the last day the non-conformist preachers could preach, they all preached farewell sermons in all their churches. It was a terrible day. Preachers all over England stood up to say their goodbyes to their congregation. Some of them died as martyrs. Some of them were shipped off to other nations and never returned to see their congregations or their families again. Hundreds of families were split up. There's a book entitled, *Farewell Sermons* which records a couple dozen of those sermons. One of them preached by a man named Calimy, stood up to his congregation and on the last day he would ever be allowed to preach to them before his exile for preaching the Word of God, he said this, "There is more evil in the least sin than in the greatest outward calamity."

That was a profound statement. He was saying to them, "You think it is calamitous that I am being dispossessed of my pulpit. You think that it is calamitous that I am being sent out of my country and away from my family and exiled. Let me tell you something, I am concerned that you know this. As severe as this calamity is, there is more evil in the least sin than in the greatest calamity."

A calamity is not a sin. We look at something that is calamitous and we think that is the great issue. It is not. You look at Hurricane Andrew, you look at an airplane crash, you look at the martyrdom of a missionary as we heard about this morning, and we say that is a gross thing, that is a severe thing. No, that is not a sin. That a missionary should die is not a sin. That is to transport him to heaven. That a hurricane come in itself is not a sin, that a plane crash in itself is not a sin. And Calimy was right when he said, "The least sin in your life is more evil than the worst calamity."

And then he went on to say, "The least sin in your life is more evil than the worst misery because sin dishonors God, it abuses mercy, it despises grace, it presumes on forgiveness, it defiles worship service and fellowship."

Secondly, as you look at your part in dealing with sin, not only recognize the seriousness of sin and don't be lulled in to thinking that it's acceptable. But secondly, strongly purpose not to sin and make God that promise. Have you ever said that, God? I want to tell you, I don't want to sin. I purpose in my heart not to sin. If you are not willing to say those words to the Lord, then it is clear that you're clinging to besetting entangling sin and you don't want to let go of it and you don't want to tell God you do because it's bad enough being a sinner without being a hypocrite.

Are you really willing to say, "I purpose in my heart not to sin this day, right here, right now and every day? I purpose in my heart not to sin." The Psalmist said it, Psalm 119:106, "I have sworn and I will confirm it that I will keep Thy righteous ordinances."

You're not going to be able to do it perfectly, but at least the willing heart is expressed. And if you don't have that kind of willing heart, then you are enjoying your sin. Psalm 119:32, "I shall run the way of Thy commandment." I want to go your way, God. I want to obey You. Puritan Thomas Manton wrote, "To sin against the light of our own conscience and the illumination of the Holy Spirit and the chastening instruction of our minds, that aggravates our sin. But to sin against our fixed purpose of not sinning is more serious." Because now we have added to our weakness a lying, hypocritical promise.

Thirdly, watch for sin's subtle movement. And what I mean by that is be suspicious of your own spirituality. Be suspicious of your own spirituality. You think you're strong? Be careful because when you think you're strong, you're weak. "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." That's why it says in the Old Testament about Job that he made a covenant with his eyes. He didn't trust his eyes. He said, "I made a covenant with my eyes, how then could I gaze at a virgin? How can I look with a leering lustful look if I made a covenant with my eyes not to look?"

Watch the subtlety of sin. Be suspicious of your supposed spirituality. Let me give you another principle, number four. Repent immediately after you sin. Repent immediately after the cock crowed the third time, what does it say? Peter went out and...what?...wept bitterly. Immediately when he realized his sin, he wept in repentance. If you're going to deal with entangling sin, it's going to take some very, very concerted effort on your part. Understand the seriousness of it. Understand the subtlety of it. Deal with it immediately when it hits. Be immediately repentant.

And one other thought. Continually pray for divine help. Devote yourselves to prayer, Paul said, keeping alert in it, Colossians 4. If I understand the seriousness of sin, if I will honestly make promises to God daily not to sin and plead with Him for the strength to keep the promise, if I will watch for sin's subtleties, if I will be repentant immediately upon sinning, I'll begin to cultivate a hatred for sin, I'll begin to cultivate a pattern of obedience.

I'm not saying these things to you this morning because I want to browbeat you. I'm saying them because I want to keep you from the grief that all of us that reach my age in life have when we look back and say, "Why did I ever allow certain weaknesses to get cultivated when I was young?" If you don't hate sins now, you'll learn to hate them because once they become besetting or entangling sins, they just continually hang on in your life in a debilitating way. Now is the time, young people, to be honest before the Lord with what those entangling sins are and deal with them, not for the sake of the Master's College reputation, not for the sake of your own church so much, not for the sake of making sure you're prosperous and successful, although that's a component, but for the sake of being everything God wants you to be. Why would you want to be any less?

Do you think you're going to ultimately find pleasure in violating God's Law, violating God's principles? Do you think somehow in spite of what God says you've got a better way? The Lord says, "Obey me and I'll bless you," but you figured it out yourself and if you sin, you're going to get more out of life. I mean, you really wouldn't want to believe that lie of Satan, would you? Now is the time for us to lay aside the sins which so easily entangle us. And I'm going to pray for you now and as I always do and I'm going to pray for you over the summer as you go that the Lord is going to give you the strength to walk in the Spirit because you're meditating on the Word all the time, you're memorizing the Word, you're learning the Word. And that you're recognizing the seriousness of your sin, you're making covenants with the Lord regularly to avoid sin, your repentance is instantaneous, you are watchful of the serious subtleties of sin and you're pursuing God's help in constant prayer that you might have triumph over the flesh and temptation.

All of that so that you can be everything God wants you to be, so that you can know the fullness of blessing.

Father, we thank You, this morning, for this wonderful chapel. We thank You for the reminder of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross it cost the price He paid for us as the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world. And, Lord, we cannot hold on to the very thing which nailed Him there, little sins that we think so inconsequential but in reality were enough to cause Christ to have to suffer on the cross, enough to send us to an eternal hell. Give us a holy hatred for sin, not only sin in others but sin in us. And may we lay aside the sin that easily entangles us and run the race, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross for us. We pray in His wonderful name. Amen.

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