

Freedom in Christ / COB / 07.20.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** Once you become a special agent in Jesus Christ, you take on a life of risk and adventure, as you carry out the gospel mission. There is danger and hardship ahead, but God promises that he will strengthen you and guide you and prepare you to be a special agent, that he will prepare you for the battles of life. God's goal is to progressively sanctify you for success.

- † Yet, every year I meet special agents just like you in churches just like this who are stagnant, bored, ill equipped for life, and even suffering.
 - **[Slide 2: bondages]** Many are in bondage to sin, ruled in their minds by sinful thoughts and ruled in their lives by sinful actions.
 - Some of these agents suffer physical addictions, like alcoholism or drug addiction.
 - Some have emotional disorders, like codependency, chronic relational or romantic problems, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, anxiety, or depression.
 - Some are in the grip of terrible habits as strong as addictions, like pornography, materialism, chronic gambling, overeating, or laziness.
 - And some simply misunderstand their identity as special agents in Christ, and so they pursue false missions like people pleasing, achievement, power, or wealth.

- † These bondages cause destruction in your life, destruction in your health, even deterioration in your character. Someone in spiritual bondage can appear very worldly, not Christian at all; what Josh last week described as an impostor! because these problems inhibit an agent's ability to walk with God, to minister to others, or to provide a witness for Christ.
 - And the repeated failure to overcome will slowly deteriorate an agent's self-image and create doubts about God and his ability to help.

- † The good news is that you can be free! I personally have known people with most of these problems, who have found freedom in Christ. I myself have suffered through many of these, but Christ has set me free. He is willing to do the same for you.
 - Let's pray and then we will explore...

How the Problems Arise

- † **[Slide 3: problems]** Y'all know there is evil in the world, right? You wouldn't need to become a special agent in Christ on the gospel mission if there were no evil. But the problems that hold us back as agents arise through our own fault.
 - First, all of us were born with a corrupted human nature. This corruption can include a predisposition of vulnerability to a specific bondage, which results in a lifelong weakness in this area. So some people are predisposed to become alcoholics if they drink alcohol; others will never be able to handle gambling even a little; it is something wired into their brains.
 - I have a friend who is from an ethnic group that is predisposed to having cholesterol issues. So simply due to his genetics, he cannot eat red meat without endangering himself. It is no different for some people when it comes to a predisposition to addictive behavior. I have read

that some ethnic groups are predisposed genetically to alcoholism, that once they start drinking it can be very difficult to stop. Some of us might be weak in this way when it comes to video games, stress, or porn – one taste leads to big problems.

- The Bible says the negative effects of our corrupted human nature, which we also call inherited sin, include a blinded intellect, foolishness from a corrupted mind, an evil and idolatrous heart, defiled emotions, passions, behavior, and character, and an enslaved will. It is no surprise then that some people are born more susceptible to addiction or depression; it is in the nature of being a flawed human being.
- As if that were not enough danger, we then open the door for evil to work by choosing to sin. If you choose to smoke crack even once, statistics show you most likely will end up addicted; and you have opened that door physically by engaging with the substance. The same is true mentally, emotionally, and spiritually for any sin issue: the more you engage in sin, the stronger its influence over you becomes. You become a compromised special agent.
- I have one friend who was miraculously delivered from his addiction to cocaine and says that he never feels tempted by drugs anymore, but he still struggles daily with a temptation to porn. So his addiction to cocaine came through his choice to sin; his vulnerability to porn is something he probably always had, but which gained firm control over him through his decision to sin.

Christ is our cure

- † **[Slide 4: Cure]** Whether the problem is alcohol, gambling, people pleasing, anxiety, or depression, most people find it difficult to break free. It can be hard and painful to overcome in the crisis right now, and it can be hard in the long-run to not revert back to old sinful ways. Victory can be had, however, through Christ.
 - Scripture says that before accepting Christ as our Savior, we were captive to many claims on us, including sin [Romans 6.20]. But Christ paid the price with his blood for our freedom from these things [Ephesians 1.7; 1 Peter 1.17-19]. We call this redemption.
 - 1 Peter 2.24 [NET]: “He [Christ] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we may cease from sinning and live for righteousness. By his wounds you were healed.”
 - So Peter tells us that Christ has provided the cure for what ails us. He has made provision with his blood so that we can be renewed in spirit, healed in our intellect and emotions, straightened out in our perceptions and approaches to life.
- † So why do even special agents in Christ suffer with all these issues?
 - Remember, God’s blessings are given by grace, but sometimes there are action steps we need to take which are part of the means God has chosen for realizing that grace. So we have to learn how to appropriate for ourselves the blessings of Christ.
- † There are aspects of disease in our problems, and so sometimes it is necessary to engage the help of medicine or counseling. But the root of the reason we have these problems is sin – both inherited sin which is our corrupted human nature and our decision to sin – and the cure for that aspect of the problem is the blood of Christ and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.
 - I have one friend who was an addict, and when he came to Christ he lost all desire for the drug, instantly. I have another friend who had to go through a medical detox and then a year-long residency in a Christian counseling environment, and then time in a halfway house before he

could safely try walking in the world again. But both of them needed the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit to stay clean day after day for what has now been over a decade.

- Because of the inherited sin aspects, we might have a lifelong vulnerability for some of these issues, and we all have a lifelong tendency to sin. But we can have victory by learning to appropriate the work of Christ moment by moment.

Appropriating the work of Christ

- † **[Slide 5: appropriate]** So let's talk about appropriating the work of Christ. That begins with fully understanding and believing biblical truth about yourself and your relationship with God.
 - The two great weapons of evil are temptation and deception. If you suffer any of these issues, you already have been tempted down the wrong path. Now, your feelings, other people, and even demons will try to deceive you, to convince you that you are defeated, that you are shameful, that you might as well give up. Let's look at the scriptural evidence.
 - **[Slide 6: Acts 10.43]** The first truth is that because of Christ God is willing to forgive us. Acts 10.43 NET: "About him [Christ] all the prophets testify, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."
 - **[Slide 7: Ephesians 2.4-7]** The second truth is that God has made us spiritually alive: Ephesians 2.4-7 NET: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even though we were dead in transgressions, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you are saved!"
 - **[Slide 8: 1 Peter 1.3]** The third truth is that God has regenerated us in a new spiritual birth: 1 Peter 1.3 NET: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..."
 - **[Slide 9: Colossians 2.12]** The fourth truth is that God has given us resurrected life: Colossians 2.12 NET: "Having been buried with him [Christ] in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead."
 - **[Slide 10: 2 Corinthians 5.17]** The fifth truth is that God has made us a new creation: 2 Corinthians 5.17 NET: "So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away— look, what is new has come!"
- † **[Slide 11: truth about you]** The deception is that you are worthless, sinful, evil, unloved, and helpless. You will hear those thoughts in your head; sometimes other people will come along and helpfully say them to you as well. The truth that will set you free is that you have a new identity as an agent in Christ.
 - In the Bible, we are called saints, that is "holy ones"; we are called brothers and sisters of Christ [Romans 8.29]; we are called sons and daughters of God the Father [2 Corinthians 6.18]; we are called fellow heirs with Christ [Romans 8.16-17]; we are called citizens of Heaven [Philippians 3.20]; we are called children of the light [1 Thessalonians 5.5]; we are called a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God [1 Peter 2.9-10]. This is the truth!
 - To fight off the lies, to believe the truth and let it affect our thoughts and emotions, we must prayerfully reflect on this truths, on this evidence, every day until we have absorbed it into our consciousness.

- Listen, I have been through this myself; I know. Only if you become devoted to learning the truth, believing it, and allowing it to change the way you think, will you ever be free.
- † **[Slide 12: Ephesians 4.22-24]** Do you think we can be free in Christ if we continue to choose to turn away from Christ and walk in sin instead? No. If we keep opening the door to sin, it will continue to grow in its corrupting influence over us. So appropriating the work of Christ also involves the earlier action step of submission to Christ.
- Ephesians 4.22-24 NET: “You were taught with reference to your former way of life to lay aside the old man [person] who is being corrupted in accordance with deceitful desires, to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new man [person] who has been created in God's image— in righteousness and holiness that comes from truth.”
 - While we retain our old nature, which has a tendency to sin, in our new spiritual birth our nature is given renewal, which creates in us a desire to please God. If we submit to Christ and accept this truth about our new self, we will experience greater freedom.
 - **[Slide 13: Colossians 3.9-10]** Colossians 3.9-10 NIV: “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”
 - Note in both these passages, the Bible says we can lay aside or take off our old sinful self and put on the new self that God created, saved, and is sanctifying us to be. This is a conscious choice. God’s truth is that we can commit to submit to Christ in each and all areas of life. We can and have to choose to put aside our old ways, choose to allow God to renew our minds, and choose to learn to live as God’s image, as a reflection of his character.
- † **[Slide 14: Holy Spirit]** Have you ever seen a movie or television program that showed a person with an angel on one shoulder and a demon on the other, each whispering into his/her ear contrary advice? We all feel the struggle internally between what our corrupted flesh wants us to do and what is our new plan as guided and renewed by the Holy Spirit.
- This internal struggle with temptation and wrong thinking can leave you feeling wretched! [Romans 7.24]. It usually is especially acute in new believers and in those who are in the process of taking a big step of faith. I remember when I first came back to God, when I really submitted to Christ when I was thirty: it seemed like every day there was this argument in my head about what to think, what to do, how to live.
 - Only God can set us free from this struggle: In Romans 7.24-25 NET, Paul wrote: “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”
 - God sets us free by grace, but he asks us to take action steps as part of the means of that grace. We need to learn to listen to “the angel on our shoulder”: that is, to the truth the Bible says about us and the guidance of the Holy Spirit on our renewed nature. If we want to be free, we must submit to Christ in all areas of life and we must learn to yield, be filled, and be led by the Holy Spirit, moment by moment throughout the day.
 - Then we must appropriate the biblical truth about what Christ has already accomplished in us and what God wants to do in us as part of the sanctification process. We must realize that we can put aside our old corrupted way of life and cling to the new renewed and sanctified self Christ has given us.

- † **[Slide 15: Galatians 2.20]** Do you know that you are dead to sin? Galatians 2.20 NET: “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
- In our salvation, we died with Christ and were resurrected to new life with Christ. This is one thing we symbolize with water baptism: you go under to symbolize that you die to sin with Christ on the cross and you come back up to symbolize that you now enjoy resurrected life with Christ, all because you are identified with him.
 - **[Slide 16: Romans 6.3-6]** Romans 6.3-6 NET: “Or do you not know that as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may live a new life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united in the likeness of his resurrection. We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”
- † **[Slide 17: 2 Corinthians 5.14-15]** So now – with Christ already achieving victory over sin and evil – we can learn to live for Christ instead of for sin. That is the first step in our mission and a prerequisite for being successful in the rest of the mission.
- 2 Corinthians 5.14-15 [NET]: “For the love of Christ controls us, since we have concluded this, that Christ died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all so that those who live [spiritually] should no longer live [physically] for themselves but for him [Christ] who died for them and was raised.”
 - We can escape the corruption of our old self and partake of the divine nature being embedded into our new self, but we must trust in God’s promises and obey his commands, we must live this life in faith.
 - You see in the picture, the little demon is now replaced with the self. It is so tempting to be a half-way Christian, to retain control of our lives as we seek worldly pleasures and give God only a piece of ourselves, but this is what leads to failure. When I decided to be a half-way Christian, my life was good, but my love for the world and my half-hearted attempts to walk with Christ were what led to my downfall. If we really trust God, then we will seek to live as he directs and believe in his promises.
- † **[Slide 18: Galatians 5.24-25]** One important aspect of living in faith is trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit to allow us to live in union with Christ.
- Galatians 5.24-25 NET: “Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also behave in accordance with the Spirit.”
 - We can conquer our flesh and our sin, if we are yielding to the Holy Spirit. The Bible says we now have the power to resist sin [1 Corinthians 10.13], for we are no longer slaves to it [Romans 6.6-7; 1 Peter 2.24] and have been purified from our former acts of sin [2 Peter 1.9].
 - **[Slide 19: 1 Corinthians 10.13]** 1 Corinthians 10.13 NASB: “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”

- Do you believe this? There is no temptation in your life that you cannot resist! How great a thought is that? When you are tempted to take that drug, to give in to that lust [whether it is for sex, money, or food], to follow that bad impulse, you can resist, because of what Christ has done already and because you have the Holy Spirit – the power of God! – ready to help you!
 - And listen, sometimes our temptation is to feel stressed, anxious, overwhelmed, angry, depressed, or to seek our own value in false missions like popularity or achievement, but the same truth applies: you can have victory over these thoughts if – in that moment – you choose to yield to, be filled by, and led by the Holy Spirit instead of yielding to that evil impulse.
- † **[Slide 20: Colossians 3.1-3]** There is a battle for our minds, and we have to choose to keep our minds on God and his truth if we are going to succeed in overcoming these problems.
- First, we must set our mind on the things of God: Colossians 3.1-3 NET: “Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Keep thinking about things above, not things on the earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”
 - This means adopting Christ’s priorities, his attitudes, his pursuits. It means less Xbox and fewer ski trips so you can do more evangelism and more ministry work; because you believe in Heaven and deliverance and that what is eternal is much more important than what is not.
 - **[Slide 21: Philippians 4.8-9]** Second, we must fill our minds with the things of God: Philippians 4.8-9 NET: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things. And what you learned and received and heard and saw in me, do these things. And the God of peace will be with you.”
 - This means we should shun media filling our minds with horror, violence, and lust, and stay focused on what is godly. We should not spend any time doing what is sinful or degrading, and instead follow the example of Paul, keeping our minds focused on the things of God.
 - **[Slide 22: 2 Corinthians 10.3-5]** Third, we must take every thought captive in the name of Christ, and cling only to that which is good. 2 Corinthians 10.3-5 NET: “For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards, for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ.”
 - This taking every thought captive is a powerful tool. When you hear “take that drug” or “find some porn,” you know that is not God speaking to you, right? So take that thought captive in the name of Christ! You must reject that thought, and you need to have ready some scriptural truth to counter that thought. Ideally, you will have it memorized, but it helps to have it written on paper or bookmarked in your Bible, so you can get to it right away. Don’t believe the lie!
 - **[Slide 23: Romans 8.1]** Again, when you hear “You are a shameful, worthless creature!” does that sound like the voice of God? No. God will correct you, but he is not harsh, for he loves you! And this thought contains a lie, for Romans 8.1 says, [NASB] “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

- † To be victorious, we must realize that our battle is not only with ourselves, but it is a spiritual battle. We have the power of God on our side, but we must use it as we fight against the influence of demons and their evil.
- **[Slide 24: Ephesians 6.10-12]** Ephesians 6.10-12 NET: “Finally, be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.”
 - **[Slide 25: armor]** If you read the rest of that Ephesians passage, you will find we must appropriate this power of God, through absorbing the truth in Scripture, knowing and believing in the gospel, accepting our that God has granted us the righteousness of Christ and then seeking to live it out, strengthening our faith in God and trusting in his promises [especially those that are part of our salvation], and being diligent in prayer.
 - So when we “want” to give in to temptation, when we “want” sex outside of marriage or we “want” to wallow in depression or self-pity, we need to remember that this is not just a question of whether we will be good or bad in this moment. We are choosing in that moment, whether to walk with God in righteousness, and thus continue to be blessed with victory and healing; or to walk with Satan in evil, and thus continue to be cursed with failure and damaging sin.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 26: action steps]** As special agents in Christ, we desire to have victory and freedom in Christ so we can carry out our gospel mission...
- First, we need to get right with God. Part I of that is to commit to submit to Christ. We will never be perfect, but we can commit to doing our best to follow Christ in all areas of life. The more we submit – which includes immediate confession when we slip up – the better our chances of victory over spiritual bondages.
 - Part II of getting right with God is we need to learn to yield to the Spirit moment by moment, to let him fill us with the character of God, and to let him lead us in each decision we make. If we are walking by the power of the Spirit then we will not be walking in sin or internal devastation.
 - We also need to learn the truth about how God thinks of us, what Christ has accomplished for us, and what we are empowered to do, and we need to believe in these truths absolutely.
 - But learning it once, believing it once, might not be sufficient. We need to reflect on these truths and memorize them. Getting the truth into our way of thinking and having it recallable when needed are powerful tools for finding freedom in Christ. If you have a specific issue, find verses that speak to that issue [I can help] and focus on them every day, until you feel the truth is doing its work to set you free.
- † We have some resources to help you. First, this sermon ties in with the previous four about sanctification and with the one from last October about our spiritual adversary. If you missed any of those, you might want to get a script copy or listen to the audio file on the website.
- Second, after VBS, we will have a Bible study in the development hour about our identity in Christ, freedom in Christ, and the battle for your mind. Mark Balch, Carol Denson, and I will be teaming up to lead the discussions. Come and learn, for yourself and so you can help others.
 - And third, your pastor and other elders are always here for you, for prayer and counsel.