

Part 3: Contend for the Faith

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[0 : 00] The first reading for this morning, and it's found in Malachi chapter 3, which is the last book of the Old Testament.

Malachi chapter 3, verses 16 through to 18. And it says, Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord paid attention and heard them.

And a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.

Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve him.

Well, let's give thanks to God and for the children as they make their way out to Sunday school.

Two readings this morning, so if you'd like to turn firstly to Galatians chapter 5, verse 1, and then over to Romans 6.

[1 : 16] And we're going to look at our freedom in Christ Jesus, which is a follow-on from the previous two messages. So Galatians chapter 5 and verse 1.

Now hear God's word. I'll read it once more just so it's in our minds and hearts.

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. And then if you'd like to turn over to Romans chapter 6, verses 15 through to 19.

Just a few verses. Again, hear God's word.

What then? Are we to sin because we are no longer under law but under grace? By no means. 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.

[2 : 41] 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.

And having been set free from sin, having become slaves of righteousness, I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations.

For just as you were once presented, for just as once you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, leading to sanctification.

Well, may God bless the reading of his word to our hearts and, of course, our understanding of it.

Well, let us pray as we come to the word of God.

Father God, we ask of you this morning that by your mercies that we are able to present ourselves to you as a living sacrifice, for this is our acceptable form of worship, or your acceptable form of worship that we are to present.

[3 : 51] We recognize, Father God, that we are to be transformed from our old self and conformed into the image of Christ. We also recognize, Father God, that this happens by presenting our bodies and minds and by our minds being renewed so that we would be able to discern what is good, what is acceptable, and what is perfect.

And we ask you for this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, in the first message, we saw having, trying to understand what makes a Christian culture, and I'm trying to distinguish the difference between a Christian culture and just coming to church, which may not be the Christian culture that it ought to be.

And that the key question last week that was posed is, are you coming or are you becoming? God wants us to come as his people, but then he wants us to become a people who become more like Christ.

This takes a long time. Christ is perfect, and we're not. We will never be perfect in this life. But the process of sanctification, becoming more like Christ, is what the Christian life is about. And so in the first message, we saw what God is doing with a person that he saves. What does God do with you after he has saved you? Well, he takes hold of your life, and he makes you more like Christ.

[5 : 26] And you have a very active, passive role in this, in that you consider the mercies of God, you present your bodies. God is doing all the work, but you are keeping yourself, keeping in step with the Spirit, as Paul would say in Galatians.

And so the Christian life is a life of complete transformation. And there are, of course, three tenses of salvation, which I will get to in message four, which ultimately lead to a Christian culture, because all cultures have an identity.

And the identity is largely based on what you do with your minds and your bodies and a number of other things. Those identities produce cultures. And so if you have people who are becoming like Christ, you inevitably have a Christ-like culture.

It's not rocket science. It's fairly clear to understand. And so in the second message, which is, as you know, there are four messages over the course of two sermons.

So last week there was message one and message two. And of course, because both are online, you're able to listen to both at different times. And so this is message three. But in message two, we had what it meant to contend for the faith against those who pervert the grace of God.

[6 : 51] So last week, we also got to see in message two what it meant for people to pervert the grace of God. So now we come to part three. It is a continuation of what life under compulsion looks like compared to life that is truly free.

And so this message very much follows on from the second message. So a person is either living a life under compulsion or they are living a life that is free.

As Paul says in Galatians 5, you have been set free in Christ Jesus. You're no longer slaves to sin. You're no longer under a yoke of slavery having to follow what your body feels like doing.

Now, of course, we all have feelings, but we are to present our bodies as living sacrifice. Our bodies are not to determine who we are. Our minds are not to determine who we are.

So feelings have a place, but they must be in their place at all times. Feelings have a place in your life, but they must be in their place.

[8 : 03] They're not allowed to dictate. They are allowed to inform. So there are multiple things that are going on in the Christian life all at once, which we don't have time to go into, other than to say that God is continually at work in the life of the believer.

But God is working in, and he commands us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. The Christian life is therefore a life that is completely being transformed more and more to look like Jesus.

So as we sit here this morning, it may not feel like God is conforming us to be like Christ. But if you find yourself tuning out, that's sin.

Repent of it and start paying attention. If you find yourself rejecting this, then again, repent of that, because that God is dealing with you here.

In fact, one of the things that I've always been frightened of, if we ever did as a church, move to weekly communion, is because of how serious communion is, and God deals with his people at communion, you never know what might happen because of just how serious it is that God uses that particular means of grace and how he deals with people at his table.

[9 : 22] So the focus here is very much on, as we saw last week, becoming like Christ. Not just coming to church, but becoming like Christ. So here's the summary.

In Galatians, Paul is saying that Christ has set us free, that we are free people in Christ Jesus, and we are free from slavery.

And what's the slavery? Well, the slavery is a life under compulsion. That means that you think you're free, but you're primarily obeying your feelings, you're obeying your instincts, you're obeying your thoughts.

Yes. And like a person who is born the first time has to learn how to live. Children have to learn how to live. And as parents, you are the ones who have to teach them how to learn how to live.

Well, it's no different when you're born again. You have to learn how to live. You can't assume that because you were born again at the age 30, that you know how to live.

[10:23] You don't. Being born again means you have to learn how to live a new life. In the same way, you had to learn how to live the old life. And so, what Paul is addressing here is really learning how to live this new life that we have in Christ Jesus, a life that is free from compulsion.

Not completely free, but it's free from the yoke of compulsion. It's free from the yoke of slavery. Now, in Romans chapter 6, Paul makes it abundantly clear that you have been set free from sin. You have been set free from the dominion of sin. You are no longer bound to obey sin. The excuse that I'm a sinner, I can't help it, is no longer acceptable for the person who belongs to Christ Jesus. Because Paul goes on to say, you are slaves to the ones that you obey. In other words, now it comes down to your obedience. Will you obey your old master, sin, or will you obey your new master, righteousness in Christ Jesus?

You are slaves to the one that you obey. The life under compulsion is a life that cannot help but obey sin. But the life of freedom is the one that presents themselves to a master.

[11:42] And in Christ, we present ourselves to Christ. In the same way, a prisoner cannot enjoy life unless he has been set free from his prison, you cannot enjoy the new life in Christ unless you have been set free from sin.

It's just not possible. You cannot be transformed to look like Christ and to become more and more like Christ unless you have been set free from the dominion of sin.

Because as long as you're within the dominion of sin, it has its power over you. There's no change. You're like a man in prison. You can't enjoy the creation from inside a prison cell.

You cannot enjoy walks over the hills or put your feet in the water on the seashore. You can't enjoy any of that because you're bound. And so if the claim is walk in righteousness, walk in this newness of life, go ahead and enjoy the creation to put it in those frames, you have to be out of the prison. So it's absolutely impossible for God to tell you to become more like Christ while you're still in prison. However, the reason he can command us to be transformed by the renewal of our mind is because we have been set free from that prison.

[13:03] We have been set free from the power of sin. That's not to say that we have been set free from its presence. The presence of sin is still within our bodies, in their flesh.

We still have instinctive earthly desires, but we have been set free from the power of it. That means that though we have feelings that are contrary to Christ, we no longer have to obey those feelings. So we've been set free from its power. We may not actually be set free from its presence. In fact, the three tenses of salvation, which I'll get to in the next message, explains the Christian life in the context of being set free from its penalty, being set free from its power, and ultimately we will be set free from its presence in glorification in the new heavens and in the new earth.

Currently, in justification, we have been set free from its penalty. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Currently, we have also been set free from its power.

We no longer have to obey sin as a slave master, but we have not yet been set free from its presence. We still live in a sinful world. We still have sinful thoughts and sinful feelings, but we no longer have to obey them, and that's what Paul is saying here.

[14:23] Now, to quote a very famous Scottish theologian, one of my favorites, John Murray, John Murray says this is what the Bible calls definitive sanctification.

You haven't been, you're not on parole. You're not, you don't have a tag on you. You have been set free definitively from the power of sin.

And in fact, John Murray points out that you can read the word sanctification in the New Testament, and almost every time that you read it, it always refers to a once-for-all act, that you have been definitively sanctified.

You have been definitively set free from the power of sin. So he says this in Romans 6, verse 16, do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves to the one that you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness. Then verse 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.

[15:38] Freedom. No longer a life under compulsion, but absolute freedom, not from the presence of sin, but definitely from its power.

In other words, you no longer have to do what it tells you to do. And so when you do, it's your choice. The Christian who sins, the reason why sin is so terrible for the Christian is because he does it whilst he belongs to Christ.

See, the unbeliever who sins doesn't sin in union with Christ. The believer who sins does. And this is why there's this definitive break that is possible in Christ now to say no to sin because it has no part of Christ at all.

So there's two headings, not big headings, but two headings. The first one is this, to explain our freedom in Christ. One taps in to the way people think.

The second taps into the way people feel. Here's the first one, superior war. I'll explain in a moment. Superior war. The second one is life under compulsion, not being freedom.

[16:49] So here's the first one. Superior war. Superior war for two men and they came up with a hypothesis and it's played out to be true. Biblically, we always knew it to be true anyway because one of the first things you learn when you study the word of God is not just the word of, it's not just the message of the Bible which is inspired inerrant and infallible, but every single word is carefully divinely chosen.

In other words, God is very careful with similes and antonyms. You can't mess around with words. The words that have been chosen cannot be substituted for another word.

It's one of the basic rules to reading scripture carefully. Don't substitute the words that God has given us for words that we want to use. And what the Superior war of hypothesis says, these two men, they said that their argument or their theory was this, that the type of language you use shapes a person's understanding.

So you've got to be very careful with the type of language you use. Hence why we need to stick to biblical language to explain the Christian life. And he says, even if the language used is speaking of the same object or the same subject, it doesn't mean that people are going to understand things in the same way.

So let me give you an illustration. How many words can you think of to describe money? Well, some people will use the words cash, bread, dough, dosh, wonga.

[18:30] The list is almost endless. But you know that each word proclaims a different image. So if you have a man who says, I go ahead and earn my bread, the image that that portrays to you is a man that probably got responsibility, probably understands that hard work puts bread on the table.

And so he refers to money as bread because he understands it's hard to come by, it's a blessing when it does, through work, and you're able to provide for others with it. But if you have another person says, well, I've earned loads of wonga this week, well, immediately you have a completely different impression of that man by the words that he has chosen to use.

It also tells you his relationship to money as well. So the idea that we can use any word to describe the same thing is not true. It's not a matter of simile and antonyms.

Words that are the same or words that are opposite. You've got to be careful with the words that you use. I'll give you another example. You take the word sex. Now, biblically speaking, the Bible is very careful when addressing this subject.

So it will use the words often to lie with. She laid with him, so to speak. And we know what that means. We don't need to go into the detail of the physical act.

[19:54] We know what it means. It's a very polite and respectful way of speaking of the physical process of two people coming together and ultimately producing a child.

But now think of the many terms used in the world, the vulgar ones. And now you begin to see that the type of language that people use to describe that act indicate the type of thing that they think that that act is.

So they can use disgusting words to describe a God-given gift and it becomes a very vulgar practice because the vulgar use has been used.

It tells you what they think. So at no point can you get away by using words that describe the same act and give the same impression.

Why is that important? Why have I spent all this time trying to explain to you the importance of sticking to the biblical words and using these illustrations to show you that just because you can use a different word to explain the same thing, you're not actually explaining the same thing.

[21:06] Well, it takes us back to what John Murray said. And John Murray pointed out that we are meant to understand God's word by the words that he uses.

We are meant to understand God's word by the words that he uses. We are meant to understand God's truth or the truth by the words that he uses.

So we use biblical words to explain the Christian life because the Christian life is a product of God's word. If we don't, we could end up thinking about the Christian life in a different way than the way God wants us to think of it in the same way people can think of sex in a different way than the way biblically it is described or money in a different way than the way money is described.

So we can't just change words and think that we're now talking about the same thing with the same commitments or the same feelings or the same attitudes towards it because words, how they're used, matter.

So Christians, and this is where we're getting to, this is the point, Christians who speak about the Christian life as a journey are substituting the biblical words for unbiblical words.

[22 : 23] And when you talk about the Christian life as a journey, it sounds very passive. It sounds as though it is a waiting room and you're just waiting for time to pass before Christ returns.

We're all on a journey. We're all on a spiritual journey. I want to argue with you or not argue with you but make the case that that is a very poor choice of words to describe the freedom that you have been given in Christ Jesus.

And I would encourage you never to use that word to describe the Christian life again. The reason being is because the word journey has been carefully chosen by those who often want to live passively in sin.

In other words, where does the word journey so often turn up? This is the other point. Where do you often hear the word journey turn up? Well, you often hear it turn up when you're talking about the Christian life and sin.

Well, we're all on a journey. I feel like an excuse is coming. I feel like you want to live passively with sin. In other words, the language is purposely chosen by the person to give them room to carry on with sin.

[23 : 39] Rather than say Christ has set you free, you're no longer under the law of sin and death. You're no longer under its power to obey.

You're free. You're no longer under that yoke. No, the word journey is chosen. And the image that it gives is an image of passivity.

It's just, I can't help it. We're all on a journey. We all change at different rates. We all grow at different speeds. But we can all say no to sin if we're in Christ. Well, we don't use that language because it's too definitive.

It's too to the point. It's too direct. And people don't want that kind of directness. But what I'm trying to say to you is that definitive reality is something that we have that has been given to us by Christ in the gospel.

So this is how Paul puts it. For if you live according to, this is Romans 8, sorry, Romans 8, 13. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die.

[24 : 42] But if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. In other words, our new relationship with sin is not one of being passive.

It's one of go ahead and kill it. Our new, that the Christian's relationship with sin is one that says, not anymore. It doesn't mean that you're not going to sin again.

You will. Because it's a constant battle. You're not going to be free from the present. You're free from its power. But in moments of tiredness, in moments of fed upness, sometimes it gets the better of you.

This isn't about being sinlessly perfected. This is, however, about being able to say no because you have the power to do so. And the reason why your life changes is because you get stronger and stronger and stronger in saying no to sin.

That's how you change. And you get stronger and stronger and stronger in saying yes to Christ.

Does it mean that you won't sin in the future? Well, you should sin less, but it doesn't guarantee it because the flesh is an absolute master at trying to get us to do what it wants us to do.

[25 : 52] Right? That we, that the fact, trying to, this is why, as I said last week, we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice because our bodies so often want to dictate what we do next.

Our minds so often want to dictate, but this is how I feel. How can it be wrong? Put it to death. Lay it down as a living sacrifice. Your body's dictating.

Your body, you're living a life under compulsion. And so we come to this point, the second point, life under compulsion. People, as I said, will often want to change biblical words for words of their own to give them room to carry on the way that they are rather than choose the very definitive language

that we have in Romans 6 and Galatians 5.

And therefore, don't ever think that we're talking about the same thing if we're using different words. It doesn't work like that. I've explained quite clearly that that's not the case.

So if you want to use these words, you're probably using them to either unaware of what you're conveying or you're trying to cover. And now you know I know.

[27 : 05] And now you know that this is why I try and stick to the word of God as honestly and perfectly as I can is because this definitive language matters. It makes a difference to your life.

Christ has given you absolute freedom. You cannot be any more perfect than you are right now in the eyes of God. And therefore, live that. Live that Christian life saying no to sin.

So, secondly, and life under compulsion. Well, as I said last week, your body wants to dictate what you do.

Well, I feel like doing this. I feel like doing this. I feel as though I'm in love. I feel angry. I feel this. I feel that. Whatever it may be. And your body then wants to dictate your action.

Those instinctive actions. Those who pervert the grace of God rely on their instincts. Remember Jude? And then your mind also, if it's not renewed by the word of God, tries to work in tandem with your body dictating the terms, that sounds about right.

[28 : 07] That feels right. That sounds right. Let's go for that. And so, what looks like freedom is nothing more than a life under compulsion. What looks like freedom is nothing more than a life under compulsion.

You're obeying your instincts. You're obeying your feelings. You're obeying your body. It's dictating the terms. Now, is there a place for sadness? Is there a place for happiness? Is there a place for...

Yeah, there's a place for all of the range of emotions, but all the range of emotions have their place. And the place that they have is not one where they get to rule the roost.

It's rather one where they get dictated to by the word of God. In other words, if I feel angry, do I then have the right to be angry?

Or if I feel that I want to go out and kill someone, do I have the right to go out and do it? And if the only thing holding me back is the law or the fear of prison, then what's not being changed is that feeling.

[29 : 16] That feeling is being curtailed by the fear of prison rather than by keeping in step with the spirit. So hopefully you see the difference.

So life under compulsion is not a life of freedom. It's a life where you can't help but obey the feelings that you have. They're never kept in check with the word of God or by the conviction by the spirit.

I have a book on my bookshelf called The Betrothed. It's written by an Italian. It's a love story. It's, you know, a few hundred years old. And it's sad.

I mean, really sad. And I haven't made my way much through it that far because it, the first, the first, the introduction alone stirs up so many emotions.

You're not even ready for the first chapter. And then when you are ready, a couple of paragraphs in to what you know is a love story. And you think, I just, this is wrecking me.

[30 : 17] And so you have to put it down and you have to sort of, but boy, does this guy know how to tell a story? Boy, does he know how to write? Boy, does he understand the human condition.

Life under compulsion. Everything that he's writing is about life under compulsion. So life under compulsion is a person who doesn't belong to Christ or is a person who belongs to Christ but is not yet presenting their bodies as a living sacrifice, not yet saying no to sin.

They have the power to do so but for some reason they're not. They're still in their infancy where they've not matured to the point where they can recognize the power that they now have in Christ Jesus.

And so this is why you should sin less as you get older, as you get more mature. You should sin less. You know, big sins when you're young and as you get older you commit less and less of them.

And that's the sign, the impact of your transformation in Christ. It doesn't mean you'll ever be free from it but it means that by committing less it is the very God-given evidence of the power that God has given you to say no to sin.

[31 : 27] So continual transformation, not perfection but continual transformation. And so Paul is indicating that a person's relationship with sin before they are saved is one of slave master.

And a person's relationship with sin after they are saved means that you can say no to that master. You're no longer a master. You can say no to sin. But life under compulsion is a life where your

body and your mind dictates the terms rather than the word of God and the spirit of God. So life under compulsion is where you do not present yourselves to God as a living sacrifice. Rather, your bodies dictate the terms. Rather than the word of God dictating the terms, your body does instead.

So here's the exhortation. The reason why God can expect us to become like Christ is because he has set us free from the power to stop us from becoming like Christ.

Okay, the reason why God can expect us to become like Christ is because he has set us free from the power that can stop us from becoming like Christ. Freedom is explained in Romans as being obedient from the heart.

[32 : 43] Therefore, let's be clear on this matter. God has given us a new life and then he tells us how he wants us to live it. In fact, Romans, at least this part of Romans, Romans 6 onwards, is how to live.

We don't know how to live. We have to be instructed how to live because we've never lived in Christ before. And this is brand new and now we have to learn how to live the new life that God has given us.

And so this is not just about personal holiness. This is ultimately about producing this Christian culture. The more people who live this way, the more likely they are to be Christ-like.

The more likely they are to be Christ-like, the more likely you are to have a Christ-like culture. And I don't think too many of us can look around the world and see any great Christ-like culture within the church at large.

It saddens me because the power is there to do so. So if we desire, and I hope we do, healthy and strong Christians and therefore desire a healthy and strong church, then I would urge you to stick to the Word of God.

[33 : 53] And not just the Word of God in reading it, but stick to the Word the way the Bible describes the Christian life and what's possible. How you can, in grace, say no to sin and yes to God.

How you are free from the penalty of sin, justification. How you are free from the power of sin, sanctification. And how one day you will be free from the presence of sin, glorification.

But we're not there yet. We are, however, free from its penalty and free from its power. And so I call on you this day to consider again thinking of your life in terms of the words used in Scripture rather than your own.

Amen. Let me pray. No, we'll listen to our last hymn and then we'll come back and pray. Thank you. Thank you. Amen. Well, may you know the mercies of God, the mercies that you receive every single morning.

And may you remember that God is at work in you and that you are called to work out your salvation with fear and with trembling. But also remember that there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus and therefore remember that you are always his and you will never be separated from him.

[35 : 14] Amen. Amen.