

## 1 Peter 2:18-25 'Conscious Of God?'

Last week we looked at 1 Peter 2:16 to 21 in a sermon I entitled 'Set Free To Be Slaves For God'. V16 "live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover up for evil." If you remember this term "cover up" was understood as "a cloak of evil." We saw from John 8:31-36 that when we are in the depths of sin's bondage we are oblivious to being enslaved to its grip upon us. The self-righteous Jews falsely claimed, "We are Abraham's descendants we have never been anyone slaves, how can you say that we will be set free?" This is why we saw in v9 of this chapter that we have been "brought from Darkness into his wonderful light," because we were held captive by sin's curse!

There were those who were saying that being "born again" had set them free from the laws of the land and even from the law of God, the 10 commandments, because we are now under the new law of Christ's grace. And as a consequence then, sin is no longer sin for the Christian. But Paul answers this charge in Romans 6:1-2a: "What then shall we say? Shall we sin all the more so that grace may abound? By no means."

No, we do not sin more so that God may forgive us more. "By no means." Ephesians 2:1-2. When Jesus' grace finds us we are "dead" in that life, so "being born again," we are now dead' to that life! V12: "Live such good lives among the Pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God." So we are not to use our freedom in Christ as a licence for sin, or "a cloak of evil." No, we are to abide by all of the laws and authorities because they have been "established by God."

As we saw, the word for "servants" in v16 in Greek, is the word 'doloi' or slaves. So we are set free from the slavery of sin, to be willing servants, "slaves," for God!

V17 "show proper respect for everyone, love the brotherhood of believers, fear God honour the king." Peter was explaining that as I imitate Christ, imitate me. Love the brethren. Honour the king. Honour the powers that be though they be evil like Nero.

Finally, in v18-21 Peter is not condoning slavery. But seeking to deal with every echelon of society. The point being that even the lowest of the low can testify to the grace and glory of Jesus in our lives!

We pick up the text as Peter continues to refer to slaves. 1 Peter 2:18-25 'Conscious Of God?' V18: "Slaves submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh." So we continue with this teaching, even this command, that we are to live in submission to those who are in authority over us. Remember, there were basically three kinds of slaves: Prisoners of war, Slaves due to financial difficulties, and those who were slaves by choice! You see if a person found themselves in financial difficulty with no other option, and they sold themselves into slavery, (even their whole family at times to pay off their debt) when they had paid off that debt, if they had such a master who treated them well and provided for them abundantly, they could choose to become slaves for life. They would in affect become indentured servants for life!

But of course, this was not always the case. Slaves were a commodity that was bought and sold. The slaves of Roman owners could be put to death at the whim of their master. Even as easy as putting

down an animal. And indeed animals were often shown more respect and kindness than was the slave.

And friends let's remember, the context through which we are viewing these things is v13 "submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men." So clearly the institution or authority whatever it may be, the way that the believer conducted themselves under that authority, (whatever the standing of the believer may be and also whether or not that authority is good or bad) testifies, to who that person truly is. And to whose Kingdom do they belong! Slave or free, Jew or Gentile. And God can use those things for His Glory and to call His chosen ones to Himself! Look at v19 as Peter continues. "For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God."

Friends I want to draw your attention to this phrase, "because he is conscious of God." Listen to how the word "conscious" is defined by the old Collins dictionary: 'Having an inward knowledge of. Aware of. Mentally awake to the external effects of'. So Beloved, I guess the question is: Can we claim ourselves to be "conscious of God?" Do we have an inward knowledge of God that has been born out of our hungering after, and our devouring and saturating ourselves in the scriptures? Because we want to know Him, who created us from the dust and breathe life into us better. To know Him who has called us, "out of darkness into his wonderful light." And gave His Own Son, that we might be set free!

Brothers and sisters, are we awake to God, in all the aspects of our life? Are we mentally aware of the external facts and facets of God and His Work in this world, and the way those things apply to our lives? Do we recognise and confess, that COVID, and everything else that happens in the world is indeed in the Hands of God? And now let's place these things in the context of being someone who was literally under the authority of another who, not only had the key to your room as it were, but also had the power over you of life and death!

And now ask yourself, as I have put it to you before: How are you going to, (indeed how do you) act or react in any given situation? And also what is it that drives you or motivates you, to conduct yourself in that way? Friends I'm sure that at some stage in our lives most of us have been squeezed or pressured by someone or some situation, that made us want to scream. That made us want to cry out; Why is this happening to me Lord? Why have you put me in this place at this time? What do you want of me? What are you trying to teach me? And remember, Peter is addressing slaves.

Beloved, the answer to these questions most of the time, not always but most of the time, in the midst of the struggle and the trial, the answer doesn't come to us like a lightning bolt out of the darkness. Yes sometimes God does grant us that lightbulb moment, but often it comes days, weeks, months, and even years later. And indeed sometimes, we never get an answer to our trials and struggles at all. We are called just to trust God. To have faith!

Job never got an answer to the trials of his life. We know he got belted because God deemed him worthy to suffer for His Name. Yes for the sake of God's Name Job did suffer. We know that. But Job didn't! And to Paul's answer from God to his threefold prayer of, please Lord take away my affliction. "My grace is sufficient for you" God replies. The point being, that in the midst of it all, are we "conscious of God?" Do we seek to see Him in it? Or do we blame Him for it? Are we prayerfully and humbly asking the question: 'Why God? If it be your will please show me Lord. Use me Lord for your glory'. Or are we raising our fist at him in anger and defiance? Are we aware, and do we confess, Lord God, all things are in Your Hands? Yes are we awake to the truth, that He has placed me in this situation and though I may not have the answer now, indeed like Job I may never have the

answer to my struggle in this life. But one thing I do know, is that You have called me to be faithful in every given situation in my life, come what may! Slaves were the lowest of the low. And yet even so, they could testify to God and glorify Him in their labours and throughout their lives. And Beloved, so can you. So can I. Whether we are five or a hundred and five. We can honour Him in every situation in our life. If we are indeed, “conscious of God.”

Brothers and sisters being “conscious of God” will give us our motivation. How can I honour You Lord in every situation? Be it just or unjust. Whether I'm in the right or the wrong. Because how we deal with those situations, no matter how deep or insignificant they may seem, will either glorify the life, the work, the death and the resurrection of Christ in us, or our example to the world in Satan's hands, will in a real sense, bring Jesus down from that soul saving suffering of the Cross! As we saw some weeks ago, “God's name is blasphemed among the gentiles because of you.” But friends, what will determine our actions, if we are truly saved, is if we are, “conscious of God.” Our sincere and genuine witness to the perishing world around us, should be, the most important thing to us in our lives. Family. Friends. Neighbours. Even enemies!

V20: “But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is commendable before God. Can you see what he is saying? It is one thing to cop a beating or to be mistreated or maligned because we are deserving of such things. But it's another thing altogether if such things happen to us because of our innocence, and because the world sees Jesus in us! And notice he uses the word endure. It's the “enduring of such things. Suffering reproach for the Name of the Lord, this is “commendable before God.” Yes in the “enduring” of such things do we walk in our Master's footsteps. V21. “To this you were called.”

Again remember, he is talking to slaves, literally. Even though these things do apply to us all, because we are all “slaves” for God. Slaves did not have a life of ease which many who claim Christ today offer us, and many more are looking for. They had not rights. They had not riches, or heaven on earth, which many profess and peddle to their seekers. No the message which they received was Christ's Cross for the forgiveness of sin, and a Kingdom which is not of this world. But patient “endurance,” under the difficulties and the trials of this life, for our faith in Jesus!

As I explained last week, we must view these things in the shadow of the Cross. Peter, like Jesus our Lord, warns us of these things so that we will be prepared. “To this you were called because Christ suffered for you leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” Dear friends, I've mentioned before that if life for you as a professed follower of the Lord Jesus Christ at this time, in this country, at this point in our nation's history is a breeze, (and I say this with all sensitivity) then Peter is not writing this to you, and dear friend, “conscious of God,” sadly, may I suggest, that you are not! Because if ever there was a time in our nation's history, (though certainly we are not being enslaved with slave masters over us) and yet again, if ever there was a time in our nation's history, when Christians were being pressured, coerced, and even forced to embrace all manner of sexual depravity and evil and increasingly so, from this society, and even from the governing authorities who are diametrically opposed to all that we profess, that time is now!

Yes if ever there was a time when Bible believing Christians were being pushed to be enslaved by the evils of this world in this nation of ours, it is today! Worship and bow down to anything or anyone you want, and you will be embraced and even lauded. Buddha. Allah. Krishna. Scientology. The sky. The trees. The dalai lama. Your football team, your club, or your letterbox. And yes you will be embraced by all. But profess Christ Jesus as the Creator, the Ruler, the Redeemer and the Judge of the entire Universe, and you will have enemies and antagonists on all sides. And why? Well, “to this

you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”

No let us not romanticise this Beloved. He's talking to slaves who were being beaten for their uprightness. Yes the righteousness in the sight of God. Not of men. They faced tremendous hardship for their testimony of a righteous life under the most difficult of all prejudice and enmity. Because they truly followed in Jesus` steps! Now ask yourself, (in varying degrees) Is this who you are? Are you mistreated or maligned in whatever way by the world, because of your zeal in wanting to honour the Name of Jesus? Or is life a breeze. Because your Christianity is perhaps even hidden under your bed?

There are no secret Christians Beloved. This is actually a contradiction in terms. And again, I say this with all sensitivity and as someone who is concerned for your soul. Yes the words of instruction are, “that you should follow in his steps.” And may I suggest dear friends, are the steps of Jesus which led to the Cross!

Then v22 as Peter applies Isaiah 53:9 to our Lord: “He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth.” Jesus never deceived people. He never hid who He was or why He came. There was no deception found in His mouth. Yes He spoke always the truth of who He was, why He came, and who His Father was. Even under the threat of death! “Before Abraham was I am” He said. “I came not to do my will but the will of him who sent me.” “I and the father are one.” One in essence. One in attributes. One in purpose, one in eternity! “He committed no sin.”

Now I know you get this intellectually, but have you ever tried to get your head around the reality of it all. Never a false action. Never an unmerited angry word. Never a wicked thought, even an inclination, which is the seed of a thought, in all of his 33 years! In the midst of all of His hardships and sufferings, and He the only ever truly innocent man that ever lived. “He committed no sin.” And remember, he did this not through the power of his deity so to speak, but in His humanity in His humanness. Because the second Adam, had to pay for the sins of the first Adam and his descendants.

Who of us can go without sin for even one day? Even the best day of our life? No sinful deed. No sinful word. No sinful thought or inclination. Yes “we have been saved by grace through faith. And this is not of yourselves it is the gift of God.” v23 “when they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate, when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”

Friends, if there is one thing that gets me angry, it's injustice. People getting away with hurting and taking advantage of others. Alan and I often get bent out of shape about it together. It drives the both of us crazy. But it does us no good. it does you no good. We must all seek to do as Jesus did “entrust ourselves unto Him who judges justly.” Psalm 24:4-5 “he who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Saviour.”

I find this so hard to do personally. But I know I must leave it in God's Hands. Because “vindication” in this life, though we may long for it, it is not what is promised to us. “Vindication” may only come when we stand before the throne of God come judgement day. So we must in this life seek to have “clean hands and a pure heart.” that our lives be upright, because our intentions are pure. We must trust him who judges justly come what may even as Jesus himself did. Verse 24 “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness, by his wounds you have been healed.” Notice that it says, “he himself bore our sins in his body.” Sin permeates and

putrefies the whole being of a person. Mind, body and soul are made unclean, unacceptable to God! That is why Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden of Eden on the very day that they sinned and a flaming sword placed at the entrance to the garden, so that they of themselves, may never return. And Jesus carried it all! For all of His people born from Adam to the last person for whom He died. All of the hatred. All of the resentments. The jealousies. The envies. The greed. The anger. The adulteries. The sexual depravities. The murders. The blasphemies. The inhumanity! "Father why hast thou forsaken me." Yes he carried it all "in his body so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."

Brothers and sisters, we can fall into the mindset of thinking that somehow sin is out there somewhere. That if we don't do this or we don't do that, somehow we might be sin free. But no. Sin is within! Again, it permeates the whole being. Even the heart. Mark 7:18-23: "Are you so dull? He asked. 'Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, then out of his body.' In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean. He went on to say what comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, the deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean. Yes and Jesus carried it all! "By his wounds you have been healed."

Friends, like any terminal disease, sin permeates the whole life, the whole being. But sin is far worse than any other ordinary terminal disease. Because it is eternally terminal! There is no cure that mankind has found nor will they ever find. No good deed, no charity, no amount of money. Were we to even offer up our whole life upon an altar to God, even this would not be enough. Because the disease of sin, not only takes us to the grave, it carries us through death into Judgement and Hell! No there is but one cure and one alone. "By his wounds you have been healed. "We had to be healed of the disease and consequences of sin. And this is the only way. "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." "It is finished" He cried! Yes it is the Blood of the Son alone, "the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep" that can heal us from this (terminal) disease of sin! "No one comes to the Father except by me" He said.

So in closing this morning Beloved, I hope and pray that these things have stirred your soul to be "conscious of God." "Conscious" that He is in every situation. "Conscious" that all things are in His Hands. "Conscious of God" that Christ alone can heal us of the disease of sin. And "conscious of God" so that in all things, we might honour Him. Yes all that we think, say, and do!

Let's pray.