Freedom, Not Fear

by Travis Dean

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A lot of people are celebrating today, not because it's the Sabbath, but because it's Halloween. As I have been driving around Lancaster, I've seen some interesting paraphernalia in people's yards and on their front porches. I have asked myself, "Why do people do this?" Most people don't hang skeletons from their front porches the rest of the year. Why do they on Halloween? Well, I did some research. Without going into a lot of details, here's some of what I found. Halloween is one of the oldest holidays with origins going back thousands of years. What takes place around Halloween in Lancaster is a mixture of Celtic, Roman, and Catholic culture with a little American thrown in. The oldest version of Halloween comes from the Celts. Over 400 years before Christ, the Celts inhabited what is now Great Britain and France. October 31 was the last day of the Celtic calendar year. It was their New Year's Eve. On this day they celebrated a festival, called Samhain ("sow-in"). Most of the Halloween celebrations we have today are dim reflections of the Samhain festival. But what impressed me was this: the driving force behind this Celtic festival was their fear of the dead. We may be more civilized than the Celts, but we still have our fears. How many of us would like to build our house in the cemetery? A lot of us put off the writing of our living wills because we don't like to think or talk about dying.

Today we're going to learn about a death that brings us freedom, not fear.

We're continuing our journey, learning how to be a healthy and dangerous Christian. Last week we discovered two reasons why God leaves us with our sinful DNA. The first is so we feel a need for HIS power. The second is so GOD is glorified, not us. As the saying goes, "It's not about us, it's all about HIM."

Now that we know our sinful DNA isn't going anywhere, how are we supposed to relate to it? What do we do with it? These are the questions we will answer today.

I would like to begin by looking at four possible answers to these questions. The first is to give in to our sinful DNA. Those who advocate this response say, "It's doesn't matter if I give in to sin. I'm saved by grace." Paul actually refutes this response, and shows it is a contradiction of what it means to be a Christian. The second way to relate to our sinful DNA is to ignore it. People who take this approach often say, "Don't tell me what I'm doing wrong. I don't want to know." If you take this approach you will need to stay as far away from God's Law as possible. It will constantly be POINTING OUT your sin. The third way to relate to our sinful DNA is to fight it. Paul actually tried this. And he says in Romans 7:23, 24 that it's a losing battle. That says a lot because he was VERY strong willed. A fourth way to relate to our sinful DNA is to try and convert it. I have tried this one myself. I kept waiting for my sinful DNA to change into a good DNA. It never happened.

There is a fifth way, though, to relate to our sinful DNA. This fifth option is to SACRIFICE it. This is the death that brings us freedom, not fear.

As we begin with this fifth option, turn with me to Philippians 2:5-7 (pg. 1043). Paul says that when Jesus Christ came to this earth, He was God in every sense of the word. Divinity and holiness were His. But He consented to take what WASN'T His. He was made something that was foreign to Him. He was made in the likeness of men. Now let's read 2 Corinthians 5:21

(pg. 1028). There are several pronouns in this verse, so let's clarify who is being talked about. The 'He' is God. The 'Him' is Jesus Christ. So, God made Christ who knew NO sin, to BE sin for us. This is an incredible truth. And we must be careful. Jesus Christ remained perfect & sinless. But while maintaining His purity, He took what wasn't His. He took our sinful DNA.

Let's say that we're all in Al's classroom. I have taken off of Al's desk the teacher edition of our English textbook, because I don't like English. I'm not doing very well in the class. And I figure that as long as I have his teacher's edition, he won't be able to teach the class. Well, Al gives an ultimatum. He says that whoever took his teacher's edition will be given a failing grade for the day. Well, as I said, I'm not that good at English, but I DON'T like the idea of getting a failing grade. Alan Cramblitt is sitting behind me, and he saw me take it. He feels sorry for me, so he grabs the teacher's edition from its hiding place. Al finds him with it. And he gets the failing grade. Alan didn't take the book. I did. Even though he had the book, he was innocent. Christ TOOK my sinful DNA. Yet He was still SINLESS, because it was MY sinful DNA.

For a long time I disconnected myself from Christ. I didn't realize how close He came. Turn with me to Hebrews 2:9. (pg. 1063) Paul is writing to the Hebrews. He is putting a case together to prove that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah. He begins in chapter 1 by showing how Jesus Christ as the Son of God is superior to the angels. Then beginning in chapter 2 and verse 9, he shows how Jesus Christ was made LOWER than the angels. (Read) The death that Christ experienced was for whom? It was for EVERYONE. When Christ experienced death, it wasn't just for Adam's sin. It wasn't just for the disciples' sin. It was for EVERYBODY'S sin. So when Paul says that Christ was made sin, it was MY sin. It means that He took MY sinful DNA. I praise God for that because that is the sinful DNA that I need deliverance from.

Now turn with me to Romans 6:6 (Page 1003). Paul is in the middle of a long discourse on how we are saved. We're jumping right in the middle of it, so we'll need to keep the context in mind. (Read) Our "old man" is a term Paul uses to refer to our sinful DNA. What happened to our sinful DNA when Christ took it? It was crucified WITH Him. It was put in the grave. I praise God for this. Our sinful DNA was defeated! It was laid in the tomb. And when Christ came out of the grave, did He still have our sinful DNA? Paul says "our body of sin was done away with". When Christ was raised from the dead, He left our sinful DNA in the tomb. He didn't have it anymore. This is SUCH good news.

I'll show you why. Turn back to Romans 6 with me. We'll read verses 10 and 11. (pg. 1003) Paul says that when Christ died, sin died with Him. Because of this we are to "reckon" OURSELVES to be dead to sin. The word translated, "reckon", could also be translated "consider". But a more literal or rigid translation would be "tell yourself". Tell yourself that your sinful DNA is DEAD. Live like your sinful DNA is dead. Or in the words of our fifth option, sacrifice it.

You may remember that in the Old Testament the Jews sacrificed animals in the sanctuary services. To sacrifice something meant to kill it. It also meant to lay the animal on the altar, and walk away. When you and I sacrifice our sinful DNA, we, in a sense, lay it on the altar and walk away.

This is the death that brings us freedom, not fear. When our sinful DNA is dead, we are free from it.

So what does it look like to sacrifice our sinful DNA?

It has helped me to see our sinful DNA as a flu virus. A flu virus changes forms. That's why a new flu vaccine must be developed every year. The flu virus that you vaccinated yourself against last year, has taken on a different form this year. It's interesting because the most common theory says that it is our body's antibodies (our immune system) that cause a flu virus to change. The flu virus tries to survive our immune system by changing its form. Each time a flu virus is passed from one person to the next it changes form.

Adam was the original person infected with a sinful DNA. Since then over thousands of years the sinful DNA has changed forms going from one generation to the next. Even though everyone has a sinful DNA, each of us has a different form. Each time it is passed from parent to child it changes, just like a flu virus. That's why my sinful DNA may look so different from yours.

This makes sacrificing our sinful DNA a bit challenging. Our sinful DNA doesn't always look or feel the same when it flares up. Sometimes it causes me to feel miserable. It brings a dark cloud over me. Other times it causes me to feel so stimulated I can't even sleep. Sometimes it causes me to get so focused in on my little world that I forget about everybody else's needs. Then other times I get stressed trying to solve the world's problems. Sometimes it causes me to do bad things. Other times it causes me to do good things for the wrong reason. The list goes on and on. The strains of this virus are endless. So, learning how to sacrifice our sinful DNA can get complicated.

On top of that it's almost like you're sacrificing yourself.

There's this somewhat lighthearted song entitled "So Long Self". Here are some of the lyrics:

"So long, self
Well, it's been fun, but I have found somebody else
So long, self
There's just no room for two
So you are gonna have to move
So long, self
Don't take this wrong but you are wrong for me, farewell
Oh well, goodbye, don't cry
So long, self"

Sacrificing your sinful DNA is by no means lighthearted, but it really is like saying, "So long", to yourself. Our sinful DNA has been with us from the day we were born. It may seem like an old friend. But it has to go so we can experience our completely new DNA, which God gives us when we become Christians. We must sacrifice it. We must say, "I don't want to live like this anymore. I don't want to FEEL like this anymore. I don't want to SAY these things anymore. I don't want to DO these things anymore. I want to be a healthy Christian."
I wish I could tell you that you would only have to sacrifice your sinful DNA once, and that would be it. But the reality is it must be sacrificed, over and over. I can't tell how many times this virus will flare up in one day. It might be a hundred times. But each time it flares up, we must lay it on the altar, and walk away. That's the only way to be a healthy Christian.

If you would like to make a commitment with me today, to do this in your own life, I invite you to stand with me.