

“You Are a Slave, Yet You Are Free in Christ”

1 Corinthians 9:16-27

I am a slave. You are a slave. Yet we are free. You have always been a slave. You were born a slave, and you will die a slave. Yet, you are free. Throughout his writings, St. Paul discusses slavery – and freedom (both in regard to the enslavement of the downtrodden in Roman society – in some regions, as many as 60% of the people were slaves – but even more so, Paul writes of the slavery to sin). However, here in our Epistle reading, he says how he is compelled to preach the Good News of Christ. “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.” He has made himself a slave to everyone.

But his compelling urge to preach was not self-motivated or of his own will. He became a slave to everyone because he was first a slave to God. Most of the time when God’s people are referred to as slaves in Holy Scripture, we miss the punch of that concept because the modern translators find the word “servant” more pleasing to the ear. We like to think of ourselves as faithful servants with a free will and we choose to work for God. But the word in the Greek is “doulos.” We are slaves. Our Father in heaven purchased us at a very high price – the broken body and shed blood of His only-begotten Son.

Now as I said, you have always been a slave. You were born a slave – but at that time you had a different master. You were a slave to sin and Satan. Then God redeemed you. He paid the price to free you from that awful master, and made you a slave to righteousness.

We are free in Christ, but still slaves. St. Paul even says in Galatians chapter 4 that our freedom from slavery to sin has given us the full rights as sons of God – the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven is ours. Our Father no longer treats us as slaves. This is true.

God sees us as His adopted children through Baptism. He loves us and cares for us as a Father, not as a Master. But we are still slaves. We are compelled to do our Father's will. St. Paul is compelled to preach the gospel. He has been entrusted with a stewardship. He must do the will of His Master.

We are slaves to righteousness. We are stewards of the things of God. We have nothing of our own. Out of love and devotion for our Master, we give thanks through striving to be always be ready to do His will. After all, God has purchased you at a very high price.

Now there may be some who would hear this message and say, "I like being God's child, but I can do without that whole slavery stuff. I'm still my own person." St. Paul says, "No, you are not." As I said before, that is not an option. We heard Paul say in our Epistle reading a few weeks ago, "You are not your own." We are talking about this in our Wednesday 1:00 Bible Class this week. No matter what we say or do in this life, we are slaves. The only question is who our master is going to be.

We can remain children of God and slaves to righteousness showing our love and devotion to our Father in heaven. Or we can go our own way and shackle ourselves again in slavery to sin – foolishly thinking that that constitutes "freedom." Christ has already paid the price for you to be free from the wrath of the Law. You do not want to go back under that authority.

As God's children, as Paul says to the Corinthians, we are not under the law – that is, we do not need to fear punishment under the law. Of the

faithful children of God, Jesus is the only child of God who will be punished for sins committed. We have been freed from all guilt, and it was placed on Him.

Yet, we are not free from God's law so that we can act lawlessly. We are slaves to righteousness. Yet, that does not mean that we will act in a perfect, righteous manner throughout our days on this earth. We certainly strive to please the Lord, but we understand that only through forgiveness, mercy, and compassion can we stand before our Lord and be righteous in His sight.

Our attempts at keeping God's Law, which would be called feeble at best, are all motivated from the Holy Spirit. We really can't take any credit. Our good works are like the "help" that your three year old child or grandchild offers to you while cleaning or organizing the house. It is going to be far from perfect, but our Father in heaven loves to see us doing this work anyway.

God has purchased you out of your slavery to sin. You are His slave, but He loves you like a child, and He has even adopted you and promised you a portion of the inheritance of His kingdom. In Baptism, He made you His true child. He even gave you His name, as you were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. You carry that name with you and you are family. He wants to have a relationship with you.

We understand the nature of a loving relationship. Even with our human relationships, for those whom we love, we are inwardly compelled to please them. But look at our lives – every day we fall short of doing what we could to help and show love toward our spouse, children, and friends. Very often it's a big mess. Yet, our relationship with them is not over. Forgiveness abounds and we move forward together.

We are a family. No one in your family is perfect, and that includes you – and it certainly includes me. The same is true within your family of the church. The family of the church is a real family. The Father gathers His children around His table and we eat together. We spend time talking with our Father – in prayer. The children do not always get along as the Father desires, so confession of sin and the announcement of forgiveness happen on a frequent basis. Real and genuine forgiveness is a necessary component in any relationship. We certainly could not stand before our Father in righteousness without it.

The danger is when we cease to treat our Father like a Father. What would the relationship between you and your earthly father be if you completely ignored him and refused to speak to him except on his birthday and maybe his anniversary? On those days, you talked, hugged, acted as if you have the best and closest relationship, but you basically avoided him and had no contact with him otherwise. Would you call that a good or loving relationship?

What about the person who only acknowledges God at the birth of Christ or the anniversary of the resurrection? We are a family. We have been adopted. Yet, we are slaves. But our new Master has given us a labor of love. Our new Master wants us to call Him Father. Our new Master has promised us the inheritance of all that He has.

I fear for and genuinely pity those who are outside of the comfort of God's forgiveness. They search for freedom in this world and end up being slaves to a very harsh master.

I am a slave. You are a slave. Yet we are free. You were born a slave, and you will die a slave. Yet, through our adoption in the waters of Baptism, we are free in Christ. Amen.