

“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 lesson, he says how he is compelled to preach the Good News of Christ. 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. 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, but out of love for Him, not just because He tells us what is right and wrong. This the Third Use of the Law we learn in Confirmation class.

Remember the curb, mirror, and ruler. The Law is used as a curb – for fear of bad things happening, it keeps you on the straight and narrow. The mirror is your conscience that shows you your sins. And the ruler, the third use, is only for God's children. It is the measuring stick by which we measure up to see if our life is God-pleasing. This use of the Law is for Christians to demonstrate our love for the Lord.

We are slaves to righteousness. We are compelled out of love for God to give thanks through obedience to His will. After all, God has purchased you.

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 to righteousness 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 lesson a few weeks ago, "You are not your own." 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 out of which Christ has purchased us.

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. Christ is the only child of God who will be punished for sins committed. We have been freed from all guilt.

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 and mercy are we deemed righteous in God's sight.

Our attempts at keeping God's Law, as sometimes feeble as they are, are all motivated from the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, and are a response to God's love for us.

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 – we daily fall short of doing everything we

could to help and show love toward our spouse, children, and friends. Yet, our relationship with them is not over. Forgiveness abounds and we move forward together.

We are a family. Not everyone in your family is perfect, and that includes you. 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.

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 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 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, we are free in Christ. Amen.