

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity
26 July, Anno Domini 2020
Romans 6:19-23
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

When we think of the relationship between the Christian and God, the first image that pops into our mind is probably not one of slavery. Admittedly, the Greek can be translated as “slave” or “servant”. But, St. Paul is setting up a contrast that is very important. However, notice that the contrast here isn’t between slavery and freedom, like we might expect. The contrast is really between the masters. We will be slaves. We will serve the will of another, either the one who created us, or another to whom we submit our wills and minds and bodies. Slaves are not independent or, obviously, free. What the slave wants, what he thinks is good - these things are completely irrelevant. He serves the will of his master. The apostle, in addressing the issue of sinning more so that grace may abound, is teaching us that the contrast is not between slavery to the devil and freedom to be independent. It is a question of whom will you serve? In this case, will it be righteousness or unrighteousness, life or death, God or the devil?

When you are a slave to Satan, you are a slave to your own eternal death. When you carry out his will, the rejection of all that is of God and His Word, you are carrying out your own destruction. The will of Satan is your destruction which is accomplished by leading you in the way of unbelief. But unbelief wears a pretty mask. It looks like you’re loving yourself. It looks like carrying out your own will, doing what you want, letting others do what they want, being tolerant. It feels good. It’s fun. It’s easy. We call it freedom but, in truth, it’s slavery - slavery to our desires, slavery to the devil, slavery to death. We have a very warped definition of freedom. The very common but wrong understanding of freedom is a total lack of constraints - no rules, no definitions, no boundaries. That is why the world is what it is today - freedom is understood as nothing more than officially sanctioned debauchery; it is to indulge your every desire under the delusion that there is should be no cost or consequence of your action for you or anyone else - no-fault divorce, children without fathers, pornography, speeding, bullying, denying what it even is to be male and female. It is to completely unhinge yourself from the Creator and your neighbor. You and the moment and your emotion are the only things that matter - not what is good or beautiful godly or just. Nothing is ordered by the good of your neighbor or the will of God. You are a slave to

lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, giving your flesh whatever it demands right now.

But what does that kind of so-called freedom actually gain a person? Is there really anything gained by selfishness, by looking out for your own interests? Was peace ever achieved by neighbors obsessed with themselves? What fruit is gained? Anger, jealousy, broken homes, riots, abuse, war, coveting, adultery, divorce, despair, murder, gluttony, anxiousness, gossip - these are the fruits reaped when we present ourselves as slaves to the desires of our flesh. These all lead to death. These are ways of lovelessness and lovelessness is lawlessness because love is the fulfillment of the Law.

The purpose of law is to curb and restrain the loveless desires of the flesh, to protect our neighbor from our selfishness. This is sometimes referred to as the 1st use or function of the Law. It keeps you in bounds as the curb keeps your car from jumping off the road onto the sidewalk and running over pedestrians. Our flesh needs restraining so that, even if the only reason we don't hurt our neighbor is because we are afraid of the executioner, at least our neighbor is kept safe. But the Law of God demands far more. The Divine Law IS concerned with the intents of your heart. Scripture as well as experience clearly teaches that the desires of the flesh are unholy and contrary to the Divine Law. And our slavery to the flesh is never felt more than we find ourselves doing those very things that we hate because they are contrary to the Word of God. Why do you do these things? Why are you even tempted to do these things? Because though you are Baptized, though you are forgiven, sin and unbelief remain in the flesh and refuse to believe that God is good and will give you that which is good.

Repent because the Lord has set you free. And if the Son sets you free, then you are free indeed. You are free from the slavish addiction to the desires of now. You are free from having to scratch and scrape to make sure that you are taken care of. You are free from death because the Blood of the Lord Jesus has dissolved the chains of guilt that bound you and opened the prison doors of the grave. You are free - truly free. You are free now to present your members as slaves to a very different master, to God who made you and redeemed you. Having done its job of exposing your sin and driving you the mercy of God in Jesus, the Law of God now instructs you in the way that is good, in how to love both God and your neighbor.

The will of the Divine Master, contrary to the will of Satan, is your life, your good, your salvation. When you present yourself as His slave, you are placing yourself in the service of righteousness which actually turns the tables and makes lords of

the slaves and a slave of the Lord. He humbled Himself and took on the form of a slave to save us rebellious slaves and wash away the filth of our sin by His cleansing Blood. The Master served those who should have served him but instead beat his servants and killed Him. And in presenting yourselves in faith as slaves to Him, He bestows upon you the fruits of His labors - righteousness, peace, forgiveness, and eternal life. He makes you holy by bestowing His own holiness upon you. He robes you in the white robe of His own purity and obedience. The Author of the Law submitted Himself to His own Law and received in His own flesh the wrath of God against your sin. In this way He truly fulfilled the Law by lovingly obeying the will of God and saving you, His enemy, and making you instead a friend and child of God.

You now belong to God. He is your Lord, your God, your master. As one redeemed by Christ the crucified, as one made righteous and set free, you present your body as a living sacrifice for the accomplishment of His will. You are now given to works of love, sacrifice, mercy, forgiveness, and peace. You are not your own. As Paul wrote in the letter to the Ephesians "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we might walk in them." You were once dead in your sin and your trespasses and your lawless living. But God has made you a new creation. He has rescued you from death. You have been given the free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus to walk in the freedom of love.

In the Name of +Jesus.