

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 5:13-14 and Romans 6:15-18

TEXT: Romans 6:18 “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”

SERMON: Free to Be Slaves

BLURB: This Sunday is the Fourth of July weekend, and we're celebrating our nation's birthday and thinking about the meaning of liberty. We usually think about liberty as the freedom to be independent and life as we want...well at least as long as it is helpful for the general society. But as Christians, we think about liberty differently when it comes to our faith. We think of freedom from sin (thank you, Jesus) and therefore freedom for living as we choose. Christians freely and willingly choose to bind ourselves to slavery to Jesus. Don't miss this Sunday when we take a closer look at this shocking biblical truth: Christian freedom is choosing slavery to Jesus!

PP#1: Free to Be Slaves

“You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” -Romans 6:18

“Free to Be Slaves.” Romans 6:18 “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”

PP#2: *Images of 4th of July incorporating “Freedom”*

Tomorrow is the 4th of July; we celebrate our nation's independence: 240 years ago, July 4th, 1776, John Hancock placed his first signature on the Declaration of Independence. Perhaps the most famous part is the second sentence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” From the very founding of our nation, America has stood for liberty, freedom.

So, this holiday weekend, we celebrate our nation's birthday, and freedom! Originally, it meant freedom of government from Great Britain. But this freedom was set as a basic right of human beings...right to be free. Our government is established, in part, to protect these freedoms for people. And specified these freedoms in the Bill of Rights, including freedom of religion—notice that is the very FIRST freedom guaranteed!!—then speech, press, assembly, petition, and so forth. In America, we commonly sum up freedom as “the right to do as I please!” Freedom is ingrained in the very fiber of us Americans. It is part of who we are!

PP#3: *Image of a kid throwing rocks at a beach*

Yet sometimes I think we can take this a bit too far, or take it for granted. This past week at Red Rock Bible Camp, I was down on the beach. There was a boy there throwing rocks. But before long his throwing got a bit crazy, and one came my way. So, I told him he needed to stop throwing rocks. You know what he said? “I can throw rocks if I want to!” That kid had read the preamble of the Declaration of Independence! The right of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness!” So, since he seemed so familiar with our country's underpinnings of liberty, I decided to get up, and go over to him to discuss the matter in greater depth. But when I got up close to him, and he saw just how big I was and how small he was, he suddenly decided to exercise his freedom to stop throwing rocks!

But that boy thought that freedom meant he could do whatever he wanted. But as we all come to realize, our freedoms have limits, healthy limits!

PP#4: *Image of Oliver Wendell Homes, Jr. (1841–1935)*

As Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Homes, Jr., said, “The right to swing my fist ends where the other man's nose begins.”

Now, freedom is not an American idea. It’s been around since the beginning of time. As the preamble explains, it is bestowed upon people by their Creator. It’s a key concept in Scripture, but it takes some surprising turns for God’s people. So, today, as we celebrate freedom, I want to take a closer look at what the Bible describes what we call Christian freedom. You might be shocked, especially as Americans, at what we discover, so, I want you to open your minds, *free* them from your normal ways of thinking about freedom, and become open to seeing things a bit differently.

PP#5: Christian Freedom

Freedom *from*...

Freedom *for*...

Christian Freedom, just like all freedom, works in two directions. One is freedom *from*, such as liberty from Great Britain, or from some obligation. It was also my liberty from rocks landing on my head!

The other is freedom *for*, such as liberty *for* our own sovereignty, or liberty to throw rocks. Freedom *from*, and liberty *for*. Freedom for sovereignty, and freedom from tyranny. The kid’s freedom *for* throwing rocks and my freedom *from* getting hit.

God created people with the unalienable right to liberty: personal liberty. But in the New Testament, there is also a spiritual freedom given to those who choose to follow Jesus. It’s a freedom to take Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior.

PP#6: Christian Freedom:

Freedom from...

1. Sin!

At a very basic level, this is a freedom *from* sin. The human condition, the Bible explains, is that all people are born in slavery. We are slaves to our sin, to selfishness; we are bent towards rebellion. Reese calls it being anti. We resist anything we don’t come up with. The Bible says, “There is a way that seems right to a person....” We like our own ideas, and we resist any others. And that is also true with God. We resist God’s way. We’re anti! People are born slaves to sin, slaves to our own desires, unable to do anything else. And most of the time, we can’t even see it!

PP#7: Romans 6:15-18

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Turn to Romans 6, starting with verse 15, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to

obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”

We are slaves to the one we obey...we are slaves to our own selfishness. Without Jesus, we are trapped in sin. We may want to become good people, mastering our lusts, laziness, our selfishness. But it gets the better of us. It wears us down. When we are honest with ourselves, we admit that we are stuck. We want to throw rocks, and we don't care who it hurts!

But Jesus came and broke that power in us; He broke the power of sin by earning forgiveness by dying on the cross. And He gives us His power to act differently. We now have the ability not to sin! We still do, but now we don't *have* to sin, we can curb it, we can stop! Jesus gives you the power to resist your anger, to not look at what tempts you, to curb your desire, to not take that drink, to let go of your pain, to offer forgiveness.

PP#8: Christian Freedom:

Freedom from...

1. Sin!
2. Death!

Sin leads to death. We turn away from God and God's way, and in so doing, turn away from life, which only comes from God. St. Augustine said that because of our sin, we have jumped on a conveyer belt to death, and there we are stuck. Yet in Christ, God reaches down and pulls us off and, as the psalmist says, and places our feet on solid ground. Jesus did this when He was raised from the dead, breaking the power of death. Christians are freed *from* the death that sin brings to us.

PP#9: Christian Freedom:

Freedom from...

1. Sin!
2. Death!
3. The Law!

Because of Christ we are also free from the Law. There are 613 laws in the Old Testament. These laws were all the rules and regulations you must live by to try to stay off the conveyer belt. The problem is that every little sin put you back on it again! So, not only is sin itself a trap, but also trying to stay out of it, is a trap. We try but we cannot! We continue to mess up! What a miserable state indeed! But Jesus came, the Bible says, and by being perfect, satisfies The Law!

PP#10: Christian Freedom

Freedom from...

1. Sin!
 2. Death!
 3. The Law!
 4. Earning salvation!
- Spiritual Slavery!*

We have been freed from earning our salvation; we can't, and we don't have to! Jesus did it for us! This is why Jesus is our Savior! We are freed from the former slavery to sin and death. Jesus opens up a new life for us.

PP#11: Christian Freedom

Freedom from...

1. Sin!
2. Death!
3. The Law!
4. Earning salvation!

Spiritual Slavery!

[With John 8:36 written over it, like cancelling it out. "If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed!" John 8:36]

As the Bible says, "When the Son sets you free, you are free indeed." (John 8:36) Free from sin, death, the Law, earning your salvation, spiritual slavery! Freedom *from*! Praise God! Free indeed! Thank you Jesus!

PP#12: Christian Freedom

Freedom from...

Freedom for...

1. Life with God!
2. Life abundant!
3. Life eternal!

But that's only part of it. It even gets better! Christian freedom is also "freedom for...." It's freedom for life: to live with God, to walk with Jesus, to have all the joy and blessings God gives. It is life abundant here and now, and life eternal ever after. It is freedom for being all that we were created to be. We find that what we wanted all along, and were trying hopelessly to get on our own, we receive when we receive Jesus. We no longer resist God's way, and we have the way that leads to life..full, joyful, rich! We are free *from* our slavery to self, to sin, and we are free *for* choosing God's way.

PP#13: Christian Freedom

Freedom from...

Freedom for...

1. Life with God!
2. Life abundant!
3. Life eternal!
4. Slavery!

Yet the amazing thing about Christians is that once given our freedom, we purposely...willingly and eagerly, choose slavery again! We choose to bind ourselves to Jesus! We agree to live God's way. We relinquish trying to do it on our own. We did that. It didn't work very well. So, we become slaves to a new Master. We bind ourselves to our Liberator. Yes, we have a new master, but our Master is now good!

This is where our American sensibility begins to get confused. Christians have been set free, but in so doing we commit ourselves to be slaves of Jesus. So Christian freedom is, *freedom to choose to become slaves to Jesus*.

PP#14: The lie of the autonomous self!

What the Bible does is it unmasks the lie of the freedom of the autonomous self. We believe that above all else, I am free to determine my own self, my own destiny. I am the keeper of my life; I determine it all; it's all me! But Scripture reveals that we don't have the freedom to be completely by ourselves, or complete by ourselves! Those who try to go out and do it all on their own, if we're honest, aren't people who experience fullness of life. When we tell ourselves that we are free and on our own, we find that our way of life is a trap, it imprisons us. How miserable those who have it all really are! How many people that we think have it all, are consumed by their lifestyle! Prince is just the most recent example of this, as painful as it is for us Minnesotans! His lifestyle mastered him! He wasn't free. He was stuck!

PP#15: Free to Be Slaves

1. The Lie of the Autonomous Self

The Bible says that when we are honest, we are made for something greater than ourselves. And that is God. We can only experience full life when we bind ourselves to God. Just stop for a moment and consider how you have tried to keep mastery over some part of your own life, where you want to live your way, where you don't fully subject yourself to God's plan. You want to be in charge, to call the shots, to determine what is good and right. How do you do that? How have you let that lie creep in: But I *really want* this, or that, or the other? But it feels right! But I deserve it! If you are honest, when you do that, you find yourself still a slave to sin.

The way to freedom from sin and freedom for abundant life, is slavery. It's relinquishing our autonomous selves and accepting Jesus as our savior and Jesus' way as ours.

That's why we call Jesus Lord! He is our Master, and we are His slaves. It sounds so awful, doesn't it? To use language that way? But perhaps on this 4th of July weekend, as we think again about freedom, we can begin to be honest enough with ourselves, to speak of slavery to Jesus.

PP#16: Romans 6:15-18

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Let's go back to Romans 6 and look at that again. Hear what it is saying about our freedom: "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

PP#17: Free to Be Slaves

1. The Lie of the Autonomous Self
2. Slaves to Righteousness

Romans 6:18, “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”

We are free *from* sin and slaves *to* righteousness! Before Christ we had no choice: we were trapped in sin. But because of Christ, we now have the option to choose our master. We are free to choose Jesus, a master who cares about our well being and wants the best for us!

Romans 6:18, “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”

It’s kind of like marriage. Married couples freely and willingly choose to bind themselves to their spouses. We choose to deny our freedom to build romantic relationships with other people. We pledge ourselves to just our spouse. We say “no” to other opportunities. Why? For the blessing! Because that slavery brings a blessing and fulfillment of life that we cannot get if we don’t.

PP#18: Galatians 5:13-14

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

What does it mean to be slaves to righteousness?

Let’s look at Galatians 5, verses 14-15. Paul talks about this Christian freedom. “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” When we live as slaves to Jesus, we live as slaves to love: loving God and loving others.

PP#19: Free to Be Slaves

1. The Lie of the Autonomous Self
2. Slaves to Righteousness
3. Slaves to One Another

So, we whose Master is Jesus: we choose to obey; we do not use our freedom for self-indulgence; we love, we bind ourselves to righteousness; we bind ourselves to living the life of loving others and Jesus by serving others.

What does this look like? Let’s get practical: We may have freedom of speech, but we hold our tongue unless it builds someone else up. We are free to keep our own money, but we give it away to those in need. We may be free to pursue compensation for wrongs done to us, but instead we forgive. We may be free to have access to any site on the Internet, but we do not go to the pornographic sites, for it violates God’s holistic purpose of human sexuality. We may be free to drink and smoke and gamble, but because our neighbor struggles with an addiction to them, we refrain from them out of our love for her. We are free to spend all our free time on our own enjoyment, but instead we work in God’s kingdom and serve Him by doing good & going out of our way to serve others. Are you beginning to get a sense of what Christian freedom looks like?

So, before we celebrate freedom tomorrow, we stop to celebrate Christian freedom today. We do that by looking to Jesus, and remembering. We remember the spiritual liberty that Jesus won for

us. And we recommit to living our lives for our Master, Jesus. This is a time of reordering, of noticing the ways we use our freedom wrongly for self-indulgence, and commit to live for righteousness and love for others.

PP#20: *Images of Holy Communion, subtitled, “Free to be slaves!”*

In a moment you will be invited to participate in Holy Communion. In Holy Communion we proclaim that Jesus became a slave for our benefit, He gave Himself for us. That’s the kind of Master we choose! And when we participate in Holy Communion, we are inviting Him into our lives: to be our Master, to take control of our lives, to dictate how we live.

As you receive the elements today, receive Jesus. Thank Him for setting you free, truly free! This was His gift, given on the cross, which we remember at Holy Communion. Then make your offering your whole self. Surrendering your whole self to Him. Volunteer to be His slave! Ask that He make you free...to be His slave! Then, and only then, will you be free indeed!

Amen.