

Celebrating Freedom

Romans 6:15-18

Intro: A Place for Celebration

Many church cultures can put off a vibe of chipperness and happiness, that lacks depth of joy. Like, the songs (for example) that are song are basically different versions of “I’ve got the joy joy joy joy down in my heart. Where?” OR there’s no real burden-sharing. No actual letting people into the troubles we’re experiencing. Just show up on Sunday with plastered smiles and shallow greetings.

And that has left many Christians who are experiencing deep troubles in their souls feeling like they can’t come to church because they don’t feel chipper. Carl Truman makes this very point in an article he wrote called, “What Do Miserable Christians Sing?” He essentially argued that, there are few options for Christians who are really struggling emotionally to sing songs that minister to their souls because their souls are not feeling chipper; they’re feeling miserable; but the church culture puts off the

impression that to belong here, you have to feel chipper.

So it is important to leave room for songs that allow those who are hurting and suffering to sing. And we gotta make sure church is a place where those who are suffering can gather, and have their souls refreshed and not feel like outcast because they're not feeling happy like everyone else.

Now, by God's grace, I think, by and large, that is the culture of Kinney. We share each other's burdens; we're not fake with in how we relate to one other. We sing songs that are reflective and serious, that make room for miserable Christians to lament, like, "Oh Lord, my Rock and My Redeemer; strong defender of my WEARY heart..." OR "Oh Lord, my Rock and My Redeemer; gracious Savior of my RUINED life."

That's lament. And we need to leave room for that. We can feel weary. Our lives can be messed up, and we need to be able to cry out to God when they are.

HOWEVER, there is a danger in taking this too far. It is taken too far when we neglect another very important marker of church culture, and that is: ***celebration***. We need, as Christians and in our church, to *celebrate* the gospel together. There are truths in the gospel so profound and so glorious and so wonderful that real joy, so deep and so steady, ought to overwhelm our hearts leading to meaningful celebration.

Not chipperness. Not “I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.” But rock-solid joy rooted in deep thankfulness to God for what he’s done for us in Christ. Some of us shout “Amen” and some of us raise our hands, while others of us internalize it and celebrate very quietly.

The point is not the MANNER in which we celebrate the gospel. The point is the necessity of celebration in the culture of the church—a praise-filled, gratitude-expressing culture...one that is not merely somber and serious and reflective.

A Celebration of the Gospel

In Romans 6:15-18, Paul celebrates the gospel. But he does so by first revisiting the same question he raised in [6:1]. Now look at [6:15].

Sound similar? There may be a slight difference regarding WHEN grace is shown (like, “Should we continue in sin *so that* we’ll GET grace?” vs. “Should we continue in sin BECAUSE we’ve already been given grace.”) But I think he's intending to ask the same basic question: In light of the fact that God gives grace to sinners, and right standing with God is on the basis of grace, not works, does that give us the freedom to pursue sin?

Now, the reason why he raises this question is because he just made the breathtaking statement in v14 that sin will never be our master is because we are NOT under law but under grace. Which means, the way God relates to us is not through our ability to keep his law, but through his grace towards us. That’s how God relates to you who are in Christ.

And when some people hear that (and apparently there were people in Paul's day who heard it and did not like it because) they thought the message of grace gives us freedom to sin. And Paul has been laboring to show, it does the opposite! **[v15, "By no means!"]**

As I've said before, that's the strongest way Paul could say "No!" Now, to support that point that we in no way have freedom to sin because we're under grace, Paul takes a different route than he did before. Before he said, "Of course we don't pursue sin so that grace may abound BECAUSE we're dead to sin! That's not who we are! So why would you BE someone you're not!" That was 6:1-11.

But here he goes a little different route. He takes us down the road of what it would mean if we DID give ourselves to sin. "If you give yourself to sin, what's gonna happen?" That's the path he takes us. And he does so by providing an illustrative analogy. "Here's what it's like to give yourself to sin—it's like giving yourself over to slavery."

But then, he brings us out of that illustrative analogy and back to the reality of who we are as Christians, and he says, “If you’re a Christian, you’re not going down that road! Because the reality is: You’re free!” And that is something we need to celebrate. Paul celebrates it in this text. So, let’s begin with...

An Illustrative Analogy

In other words, he’s giving us an illustration/ a picture of what it’s like/what is analogous to *giving yourself either to sin or to obedience*. Notice how he puts it in **[v16]**.

What’s his point? What’s the analogy? It’s pretty simple: You become a slave of what you obey. Remember, the word “present” can be translated “offer.” “If you offer yourself to anyone as an obedient slave...” So, what’s the picture here? The picture is that of selling oneself into slavery, which was a common practice in that day. People would sell themselves into slavery, maybe to pay off a debt. It was *willing* slavery. THAT is the picture Paul is painting of what it’s like to give yourself to sin: WILLING slavery.

“Do you not know that if you present yourselves to ANYONE as OBEDIENT SLAVES...” meaning, “You present yourself as a slave to someone for the purpose of obedience to them...” When you do that, what does that then mean you are? **[v16, “you ARE slaves of the one whom you obey”]**

It’s not rocket science. The analogy is pretty clear. If you offer yourself as a slave to someone for the purpose of obeying them AS YOUR MASTER, then that means you are a slave of that person. If you obey them as a slave, then you ARE their slave! Pretty simple logic.

Now, catch the analogy he’s making with this illustration. **[v16, “either of sin...or of obedience...”]**

That’s the analogy. Whatever you offer yourself to as a slave, you become a slave of. If you offer yourself to SIN to obey it, you become a slave OF sin. But if you offer yourself to...WHAT? What’s the contrast? **[v16, either of sin...or of obedience”]**

That's interesting. If you offer yourself as a slave OF obedience to obey obedience, you become a slave of obedience. How do you obey obedience? I think his point is simply to emphasize the importance of giving yourself to OBEY God. That's his point. He's using the concept of "obeying obedience" simply to emphasize the importance of obedience.

And he's personifying *obedience* as a slave owner in contrast to *sin* as a slave owner. "Whichever you GIVE yourself to, you are a slave of. If you give yourself to obedience...what happens?" **[v16, "which leads to righteousness"]**

Which is another way of saying, "Giving yourself to obedience leads to more and more obedience." But what's the opposite? If you give yourself to sin as your master, then...WHAT? **[v16, "which leads to death"]**

Giving yourself as slave to sin and offering yourself to sin to be your slave owner leads to death. Do you realize the imagery here? Sin is a harsh slave owner. It is a slave owner that wants

to *use* you and then *kill* you when it is *done* with you. And the implication is: Don't give yourself to that! Don't go down that path! Don't ever think grace gives you freedom to sin...because that's not true freedom! That's slavery. It's willing slavery.

How can we know when we're heading down that path? Author, pastor, and counselor, Deepak Reju, provides a few indicators (warning signs, red flags) that might indicate we're heading on the path towards willing slavery. Let me give them to you.

1. *When your life becomes oriented around the sin you're pursuing.* You're thinking about it a lot. You're dwelling upon it. You're figuring out how you can give yourself to it again.
2. *You start to hide or lie or manipulate others in order to get the sin or to keep it hidden.*
3. *You start isolating yourself away from people who matter most to you.* Proverbs 18:1 says, "Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire..."
4. *Your heart begins to grow cold towards God.* Deepak put it like this, "...there's a crusting over of your heart." Your enjoyment of

Christ wanes. Your love for the gospel grows cold. Your heart is not affected by, but is indifferent towards, the beauty of the truths of grace that we sing about or hear preached about on Sundays. (Baptist 21 podcast,

Episode 94: Interview with Deepak Reju)

It can happen slowly, but we need to beware of the warning signs.

I remembering hearing a pastor say that one common symptom of slowly becoming enslaved to sin pertains to the gradual change of where a person sits on Sunday mornings. Someone who used to sit near the front on Sundays, slowly, with each passing Sunday, sits further and further back in the auditorium, until they find themselves up in the balcony. And then just resort to watching services online. And before long, they go missing entirely.

It was a profound illustration of what is often a symptom of walking down a path towards slavery to sin. In fact, the week after he gave that as an example of a possible symptom of someone who's becoming enslaved to sin, a member of the church asked to sit down with

him, and said “When you painted that picture of what is a common symptom of the drift of Christians away from Christ... I was sitting in the balcony that Sunday, after years of sitting on the floor towards the front. And my next step was to stop coming to church.”

And right then and there, the person confessed to a sin that had a hold on them they couldn't shake. And they were ready to give in entirely and become enslaved. But they didn't! They repented! And came back.

Now, just to be clear, not everyone who sits in the balcony (or the back row) is drifting towards slavery to sin! But there is often a correlation between hiding from other church members and hiding in our sin. AND I would point out that, one thing about our church is that the progression is usually much quicker. Know why? Because our building and our church is small enough to where you can't hide. And so, there's no comfortable place to sit if you wanna hide.

Which I would propose is a grace of God. You should not want to be part of a church SO THAT

you can hide. We need each other. We need to be seen by each other.

So let me appeal to you who sense a drift and are seeing the warning signs: There is grace for you! You don't have to go there! Know why? Because of where Paul goes next. **[vv17-18]**

A Celebratory Reality

Paul is bringing us back to reality—what is REAL for you, if you're a Christian. He took us down the path of what would happen if we give ourselves as slaves of sin, and it ends in destruction. And the implication is: DON'T GO DOWN THAT PATH. STAY AWAY FROM IT!

BUT THEN...he takes us out of that *illustrative analogy* and reminds us of *reality*—what is actually true of us SO THAT we won't go down that path: *You are not a slave of sin; you have been set free from slavery.* That's a reality! And it's a reality worth CELEBRATING. Could you hear the celebratory tone of **[v17, "thanks be to God"]**

There are gospel realities in vv17-18 that Paul wants the readers to celebrate. He provides four of them. Let's work through them...

Reality #1: [v17, "we who WERE once slaves of sin..."] Implying, "You're NOT anymore! You WERE a slave of sin." It reminds me of what Paul says in **[1 Cor. 6:9-11; read and explain]**

Thanks be to God that you WERE a slave of sin but now you're not.

Reality #2: [v17b, "have become obedient from the heart"] What does that language "obedient from the heart" make you think of? Remember what we read earlier from Ezekiel 36? *"I will give you a new heart...I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh...and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."*

When Paul says, "Thanks be to God that you have become obedient from the heart...", he's alluding to this promise that God would do a spiritual heart surgery in his people so that they can obey him...and the WANT to.

Listen, true obedience is NOT begrudging obedience. True obedience is from the heart. You love to obey because you love your master.

This is why I get very concerned about those who seem to have a pattern of begrudging obedience. Christians who do not have a pattern of delighting to do things that Christians do—like, coming to church, being discipled, sharing the gospel, reading the Bible, killing sin. Of course, these things can be a struggle. But if they're never a delight, something's wrong with our hearts.

Parents, you can tell that with your kids. You can tell when they obey with a bad attitude and when they obey happily. What makes you happy, as a parent? It's when your kids are happy to obey! But what are we to obey? [v17]

The word “committed” can be translated “delivered.” We were “delivered over”—like a slave is to a master—we were delivered over to a “standard of teaching.” I like the way the NIV translates it: “the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.” In other words,

this “standard of teaching” has laid hold of our hearts.

What is it? “The pattern of teaching/doctrine.” I think he’s just talking about the ethical implications of the gospel. Put really simply: it’s what the Bible says we’re to do as Christians... what God commands of us as Christians. We’ve become obedient from the heart because we love what God says. We WANT to obey him.

Reality #3: [v18, “having been set free from sin”] Think of the imagery of being set free. What does that conjure up? Broken chains. The jail cell has been opened. By whom? We HAVE BEEN set free. We didn’t set ourselves free. “Thanks be to GOD...”

Reality #4: [v18, “slaves of righteousness”] We’re still slaves. We just have a new owner. Our master is no longer sin, our master is righteousness... meaning, we are free to do what’s right! Being a slave of righteousness is where true freedom is found.

I think there's so many non-Christians (and maybe this is you!) who believe that Christianity is shackling/binding. I don't want to HAVE to...

- Go to church.
- Wait till marriage to be intimate with my girlfriend/ boyfriend.
- Use moderation in my alcohol consumption.
- Be careful about what movies I watch.

I just wanna do what I wanna do and not have anyone tell me what to do!

Maybe that's you, and I'm glad you are here today (when perhaps you'd rather be somewhere else). But listen, you are profoundly misunderstanding Christianity. It's not binding; it's freeing. How many people do you know give themselves to the temporal pleasures of this world, living for the next high, and they are never satisfied? That is bondage!

True freedom is to be a slave of God who frees us to enjoy that which is most enjoyable, namely, HIM. Slavery to righteousness is true freedom. The happiest, most content, most joyful, most satisfied people in the world are

those who love to obey God and do what's right before him.

We WERE slaves of sin, we HAVE BEEN given new hearts, we HAVE BEEN set free from sin, and HAVE BECOME slaves of righteousness. Those are reasons to celebrate. But did you notice the PASSIVE language of each of these realities. We were passive, in the sense, that these were things done TO US, not things we did.

They are realities to celebrate, but where is the focus of the celebration? There's a reason why Paul says, "THANKS BE TO GOD!" He doesn't just give a generic, "Thank goodness this is the case!" What's the implication of thanking GOD for these things? Is it not the point that *God* made these things happen, such that, none of them would be true of us had GOD not done them to us?

- Would you be obedient from the heart to what Scripture says if God didn't give you a new heart to make you delight in what he says here?

- Would you be set free from sin if God had not sent his Son to pay the penalty for your sin and awakened the eyes of your heart to cling to Christ in faith?
- Would you be a slave of righteousness... would you even care about doing what's right...had God instilled that desire in you by his Spirit?

THANKS BE TO GOD...for these things. Oh church, may we never, ever, ever take any credit for even an ounce of our salvation. We don't give God 90% thanks, and then pat ourselves on the back for the remaining 10%. "Thanks be to GOD and God ALONE!"

Conclusion

I wanna close with a little exercise. (I'm not gonna make us do this every Sunday...don't worry!) I would like for us as a church to practice CORPORATE thanksgiving. So, here's what we're gonna do: I'm gonna state a gospel reality—a truth about our salvation (ones we've already heard in Romans)—and I want all of us to respond together with: "Thanks be to God!" after each one.

(But only say it if you mean it! And if you mean, then really say it! Don't peter off! Keep it strong! I'll prompt you. Here we go.) Eight gospel truths about who we now are because of GOD...

1. *You are right with God because Jesus paid the penalty for your sin (3:24). "Thanks be to God!"*
2. *Your lawless deeds are forgiven, and your sins are covered (4:7). "Thanks be to God!"*
3. *You have peace with God (5:1). "Thanks be to God!"*
4. *You who were enemies of God were reconciled to him by the death of his Son (5:10). "Thanks be to God!"*
5. *Your old self was crucified, and you have been set free from sin (6:6-7). "Thanks be to God!"*
6. *You are now dead to sin and alive to God (6:11). "Thanks be to God!"*
7. *You are not defined by your ability to keep God's law; but you are defined by his grace (6:14). "Thanks be to God!"*
8. *You have been given a new heart that now desires to obey God (6:17). "Thanks be to God!"*

Oh Kinney, we have MUCH to be thankful for.
We have MUCH to celebrate if you are a
Christian. Thanks be to God for all that is ours in
Christ! Amen.