

Children of God | Living with God as Your Father

Family Freedom

Mathew 6.1-9; Colossians 2.13-3.4

8.9.15

We've been looking at the truth in the Bible and especially seen in and the New Testament that God adopts us when we believe in Jesus Christ...and we become children of God. God becomes our Father.

This series has looked at the effects of that truth – how it changes the way we relate to God and to one another in the Church and in the world.

Last week we looked at the double-dispatch: God sent/dispatched His Son into the world and then God dispatched the Spirit of His Son... The Spirit is sent to apply what Jesus Christ achieved to actual lives. The Spirit awakens us to believe and to receive this adoption that God has for us.

And those passages where St. Paul spoke of this “Spirit of adoption” do it by way of a contrast. There's a new way of relating to God, not based on

fear of punishment but based on the confidence of our being included in God's family: the contrast of the Slave Mentality and the Son Mentality.

We ended by wondering: why would anyone want to be a slave when he/she could be a son or daughter? And yet, we DO! There's something IN us that finds freedom... uncomfortable, unnerving and even scary. The people of Israel wanted to return to slavery in Egypt rather than trust God and be free. Why IS that? Why is freedom and liberation hard to handle and why do we opt for slavery? The Bible writers ask those questions and SO will we.

1. The Mysterious Allure of Slavery
2. The Vastly Better Way of Family Freedom
3. How This Freedom Looks in Our Daily Routines

First, The Mysterious Allure of Slavery: We don't really call it slavery...mostly we don't call it anything. Mostly it goes unnoticed. When we do opt for it,

when we leave freedom and return to this slave mentality we often call it things like: “principles for living” or Positive Peer Pressure or accountability. But what it really is...whatever we call it is FEAR.

The way of the Gospel and of grace, the way Jesus Christ offers us is liberation from FEAR of punishment and fear of deathand yet something IN US wants to be subject to slavery and fear.

You see it in addiction...relapse into the habit of the substance or the process to which the addict was once enslaved. And people/loved ones are bewildered and ask “Why would he return to that habit?” People will return to destructive relationships after being liberated. Ex-convicts will sometimes mysteriously return to crime (recidivism).

But the slave mentality Paul is discussing is a special brand...as we saw last week...here again in v. 20 he

calls it, a return to the “elementary principles”. Stuff the world or society of our upbringing or a religious group or our own misguided selves – any of these requirements or rules or conditions that promise LIFE.

“If you want to grow...if you will become all you were meant to be...if you would be a whole person, a significant person with real identity and purpose and value YOU MUST DO THIS...and THEN you will have life!”

Last week I saw an article in the New York Times. It resonated with so many women that the next day they published a follow up article. It was titled “I’m not mad. That’s just my RBF.” That stands for Resting Grouch Face (or something like that).

So many female actors are fed up with having to always smile...and if ever they let their facial muscles rest for a moment they’re labeled angry or grouchy or other things. And I know...that’s a “First World Problem” and can people who live on Red Carpets

really complain about that? BUT...so many women readers felt the same way... The comments in the follow-up article made it clear that IF American women (not men! Men are allowed to rest their faces and usually they're not called grouchy) but if American women are going to be deemed good, happy, fulfilled, submissive, feminine – THEY had better keep smiling and not let their faces rest.

Our own society that YOU may think of as VERY lax and morally permissive and FREE...is actually loaded with social constraints, WAYS society demands that if YOU want to measure up...YOU HAD BETTER DO THIS!

If you ever read “The Onion” (the satirical newspaper that spoofs a real newspaper) and seen their video segments for “MotherShould” – very funny and often irreverent... that whole segment is devoted to the observation that we may have gotten

rid of God's laws in this country...but we're still bound...in fact still enslaved to new laws... It's a hilarious way of looking at Modern Motherhood (MotherShould) and the laws society imposes on modern moms...and which they often WELCOME because... if they measure up...they feel worthy.

All these "shoulds"... "You should do this and should do that... IF we can meet the standard of the car-seat made of recycled material and the perfect organic sugar-free diet for our kids...THEN we are good and significant and valuable mothers who have REAL LIFE!

And what we are really LOOKING to in these situations is NOT so much the rules and behaviors to give us life...IT'S the approval of others. It's some catalogue that SHOWS what the good life looks like... some beer commercial...some movie...something

we've heard from our friends or fellow-students or coworkers.

Jesus Christ saw it at work even in religious communities...ESPECIALLY in religious communities; this very strong impulse to relate to God...but to do it NOT to get close to Him...not to know Him but to be recognized by the crowd. We relate to God by faith (and faith is unseen, un-felt, intangible) but the applause of people (which we may get from saying great fancy prayers or giving big donations or showing self discipline) that applause is NOT by faith! We can hear it, feel it, see it...and it feels great!

Applause...is glorious! And when we get it, it feels like LIFE...like air to our spiritual lungs!

But Jesus Christ says, and Paul after Him – the real source of LIFE is the Father! In today's bulletin, we bolded the often repeated use of "FATHER" in Jesus

Christ's words. "If you seek recognition from PEOPLE for your spiritual deeds... then you are looking for life in their recognition...and forgetting YOUR FATHER!"

Paul says the same thing...in the final words of the reading, "Christ who is our life!" It's because of Jesus Christ that we are counted significant, glorious, good and valuable. He lived and died and rose again to satisfy all the demands. HE fulfilled the real requirement: HE DID THE LAW OF GOD FOR ME! And if He did the Big Stuff for me – it sort of neutralizes the small stuff like "Good women ALWAYS have to smile!"

In v. 13, He made us alive – gave us His indestructible life. In v. 14, He canceled my debt – all my sins (past, present and future) all MY CRIMES were charged to Him. In v. 15 the spiritual forces of darkness, the sinister and mysterious unseen powers in the supernatural world (that Westerners seem to have

forgotten – except in horror movies) – He, Jesus Christ disarmed them.

AND v. 16 – the crowd – my peers whose applause promises life...whose criticisms and judgments I fear – THESE TOO, HE LIBERATES me from that Jury, “Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day...”

Whether their voice is telling me that I must always and only smile...or what to eat and drink (or NOT to eat and drink)... imposing rules on me that God Himself does not require OR making MY DOING OF GOD’S LAWS the basis of my spiritual well-being – NO! The substance of my life is Christ! My bad karma fell on Him – my just deserts, the consequences of my disobedience against the True Jury, against God Himself...when Jesus Christ died, my record died too.

Now how does this freedom look in the daily life of the believer in Jesus Christ? When we say, “FREE” what exactly do we mean?

Well to start...the way the freedom is gained or received and then maintained is faith. That’s how we received God’s gifts – by faith. Even the gift of prayer and the “gift of giving” and of fasting or self-discipline as Jesus described those gifts in the Sermon on the Mount – they don’t work as magic spells or potions. It’s not just saying the right words – these guys to whom He was speaking were saying the words of the Psalms and Prophets (eloquent and true words) but NOT prayed in simple faith.

That’s why He says, “Throw away all your eloquence which you use to impress one another...and rather say these very few words – like spiritual baby-talk but speak them in FAITH. Speak them as a child in need would address His loving Father...trust.

Without trust toward your heavenly Father all your spiritual exercises are play-acting.

Faith...that's Paul's emphasis as well. Rehearse the vast benefits that we in Christ possess. Not simply that God blesses us with a good place to live and with enough food...but GO SPECIFICALLY to these results of Jesus Christ's work. Follow Paul in this: he does it often, looking at Jesus Christ's death and rising. He took our charges. He defeated our enemies. He silences our judges. He liberates us from the requirements and superstitions of people. So, remind yourself of this and trust...receive it as YOUR life!

And think too of that future component when the Old YOU...catches up to the New YOU. "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." This is a verbal device to get us to

think, “IF...IF...IF I have been raised with Christ...Why...yes! YES I HAVE BEEN raised with Christ! That’s where my life is! That’s my destiny and I will keep believing...keep trusting and seeking the things that are dear to the heart of Him who is preparing a place for me!”

We believe. That’s how the freedom is enjoyed and how it begins to actually liberate me...It’s as I believe that these rules and regulations that make it all dependent on ME ...in believing I see more and more: NO! My life is Christ!

Am I free to do anything I want? Well, free of all Masters but One...and this Master is also Our Father. This really is the Father who knows best so I am trusting Him. Sometimes what He calls me to is hard. Sometimes it’s counterintuitive (in fact quite often) but as I am free from the decrees of others, I am also free from the dictates of my own heart...I am

recognizing more and more that I just don't KNOW what I want and DON'T know what leads to joy and happiness and freedom... SO...I am learning to lean. He is leading me into that "blessed self-forgetfulness" that leads to joy and peace and everlasting significance.

And in my freedom from the decrees and demands people try to foist on me ("If you're really a good person...a good mom...a good man...a good Christian... YOU HAVE TO DO THIS!")... in my freedom from those burdens... I'm not disregarding people – I'm concerned about "the weaker brother" as Paul says elsewhere (and that's another sermon though it is addressed in Fergusson's book if you've been reading).

But instead of being enslaved to the opinions and judgments of people...instead of fearing people and being approval seekers...we can instead AND MUST be connected to people. This whole section of

Colossians is about that connection. It's introduced here by the overarching metaphor of the Body in v. 19, "holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God". See we are deriving life from Jesus Christ the head but we're also connected to one another.

There is a kind of proper accountability... not based on fear but on family freedom. And in our daily routines we're NOT simply on our own isolated and separate journeys – we connect to other believers in the Body. That's where it happens, "being supplied and held together". We're getting God's grace and help and wisdom from Christ and in the context of true community – like organs in a Body...organic growth based on love not fear.

All this equates to a simpler exercise of the spiritual life. Everyday we're looking to what Jesus Christ has

done...is doing ...and will do. That becomes the primary STUFF/substance of the spiritual life.

And trusting in that...faith expresses itself in love within the Body...Jesus Christ is our life (not the recognition we get from people or society or from ourselves) Christ is our life...and even our prayers are very simple child-like...not trying to prove ourselves to a distant deity by our many and fancy words...but simply coming with these 75 words, "Our Father..."

This is the family freedom and this is a little of what it looks like on a daily basis.

If this is new to you and you'd like to step into it or walk deeper with us as a Church...come talk to me after the service today. Let's pray.