

## **If the Son Has Set You Free You Are Free Indeed!**

*sermon for Sunday, August 14, 2011 by Randy Gehlert*

If the Son has set You free, You are free indeed!  
So, why do we live in slavery and bondage? Why?

This morning I would like to look at two reasons why we - the children of the most powerful, most awesome, most bodacious God - should still be in slavery even though we have already been set free. And maybe you don't even realize that you are living in any sort of slavery or bondage. Maybe you think you are already free? Maybe you truly are?

Galatians 5:1 says: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery."

If you are truly a Christian then You **have** been set free. That means you **were** in slavery. And why have you been set free? - in order to have freedom. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." But this passage is warning us to stand firm, so if the author is giving us this warning than we must be at a great risk of being slaves again, or at least burdened by effects like slavery.

So, let us begin by seeing what freedom looks like. What kind of freedom do I mean? Please turn with me to Acts 16:16-34. If you are using a pew Bible the passage can be found on page 1,721. This passage is about two men named Paul and Silas. These two men are travelling throughout what is modern day Turkey preaching the gospel. And one night, in a vision, a man from Macedonia - which is in modern day Greece (not modern day Macedonia) - this man pleads with Paul to come over into Europe and to share the gospel with him and his people. So, right away Paul and Silas prepare and set out for the city of Philippi. In our passage that is where they are preaching the gospel.

Let us read what happened: Acts 16:16-34

<sup>16</sup> Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." <sup>18</sup> She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit,

“In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her.

<sup>19</sup> When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. <sup>20</sup> They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar <sup>21</sup> by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”

<sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. <sup>23</sup> After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. <sup>24</sup> Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose. <sup>27</sup> The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

<sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

<sup>31</sup> They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” <sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. <sup>33</sup> At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. <sup>34</sup> The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.

So, I would like to make the case that even when the bodies of Paul and Silas were in prison, Paul and Silas were truly free. And this is the kind of freedom I would like to talk about this morning.

So, how do we know that Paul and Silas were truly free even while (vs 23) - After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.

How do we know they are free after that?

Well, it is clear that they are free by their **actions**.

They were in prison, having been beaten, and they were praying and singing hymns to God.

Imagine this for real. In your mind sit on a hard stone floor with your feet in stocks. You are REALLY sore from being FLOGGED! And you are singing - "You are stronger, You are stronger, Sin is broken. You have saved me. It is written, Christ is risen, Jesus You are Lord of all."

And not only singing, but they were telling the others prisoners about this great God they serve and the freedom He offers. (And you can imagine that until the earthquake the other prisoners were like - yeah, right, you were set "free" - here in prison - by your God. And of course then the earthquake comes and they realize - oh, you are free.)

We can also see that Paul and Silas were truly free because they persuaded the jailer not to kill himself. In human terms he was their enemy. But in their minds, he was a future brother in Christ. His life mattered to them. From the context it seems that they genuinely forgave him - they didn't hold anything against him. They were "free" to share the gospel with the jailer **and** his household which led to the whole family coming to salvation in Christ. And that salvation lead to JOY - verse 34 says - the jailer was **filled** with joy.

So, it is clear that even though Paul and Silas were whipped and put in prison they were still free in some way.

Are you free like that? Can you have a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day and still be at peace; still bring joy to others? Does the stuff from life just not stick to you? Like the children's rhyme - "I'm rubber. You're glue. Anything you say just bounces off of me and sticks to you." Except now it's: "I'm loosed. I'm free. All that junk and those lies just fall off of me." But I think more often we feel like fly paper and too much junk and too many dead corpses just cling to us and bind us up.

So, we need this freedom. I think we want this freedom. But what is it really? Let's find out. Please turn with me to Romans 6:6-23.

That is on page 1,754 in the pew Bible.

<sup>6</sup> For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with,<sup>[a]</sup> that we should no longer be slaves to sin—<sup>7</sup> because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

<sup>8</sup> Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup> For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. <sup>10</sup> The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

<sup>11</sup> In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. <sup>13</sup> Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

<sup>15</sup> What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! <sup>16</sup> 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? <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

<sup>19</sup> I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. <sup>20</sup> When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. <sup>21</sup> What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! <sup>22</sup> But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. <sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So, what this freedom is - is a freedom from sin. Each of us is born in total enslavement to sin. And sin is an evil and cruel master who is leading us to death. But the gift of God is freedom from this cruel master and the obtaining of eternal life. And if Christ has set us free we are truly free! So, why aren't we acting like it? Why are we still more like fly paper with the junk of life still sticking to us?

I am sure there are many answers to this question, and I'm sure there is a deep theological discussion about the problem of evil involved as well. But as I said I want to just discuss two. The first one is this. We don't understand verse 18. Romans 6:18 says: "<sup>18</sup> You have been set free from sin and have **become** slaves to righteousness."

In my mind I often think that I can be free from everything. I believe the lie that there is a type of freedom where I am independent of all other forces and constraints and I can do what I want, when I want and I can do it FREELY.

But the truth is that I am incapable of this type of freedom. Let me give you an oversimplified example. Previously in your life you were a slave to Turkey Hill's Philadelphia Style Vanilla ice cream - because we all know that this is simply the best ice cream on the planet. But then you started to read some health books that convinced you that a steady diet of this delicious dairy product would cause you to have an early demise. So, you started to eat apples and bananas and pineapples and cherries and any kind of fruit that you could buy. You were no longer a slave to Turkey Hill and you expressed this freedom by eating fruit. And all the diet books you bought agreed with you that this was a wise decision. But in your freedom from Turkey Hill you were still a slave to some sort of nourishment. Until you die you will always be a slave to food. In fact you will also be a slave to water and air and heat. In our spiritual lives we are equally a slave. We are simply incapable of being truly independent. You might not be a slave to sexual sin. You might not be a slave to greed. You might not be a slave to fear. But if you are not a slave of Jesus Christ and His righteousness then you are a slave to some kind of sin. To say, "I am no longer a slave to sin. I am now free to be myself" is only to say that you have become a slave to those sins that make up the sinful person that you are.

Another simplified example would be if you were to climb up in a tree. At that moment you are a slave to that tree. You must hold on or you will fall. Sure, you can put up a tight rope, you can be suspended from a helicopter, you can put on a jet pack - but you are only trading one master for another. If you decided you had enough of these cumbersome masters and decided to go it alone - no tree, no rope, no helicopter - you were doing what you wanted to do - then you would simply become the slave .....of gravity.

So, the first reason we do not live in true freedom is because we think freedom is doing whatever we want. And the reality is that "doing whatever you want" is just another kind of slavery. The problem in "doing whatever I want" is the "I" part. My nature, me, myself - is totally corrupted by sin. If you go back and read Romans chapters 1, 2 and 3 this is very plainly laid out for us.

The only solution is slavery to righteousness. If you are up in the tree and you want real freedom, if you want to fly - then you need wings. At salvation God gives you a new nature through the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit indwells you. He gives you those wings. You are a new creature. But let's not fool ourselves. Winged creatures are no more free

from gravity than non-winged creatures. There are still laws of lift and drag and thrust. These are like being a slave to righteousness. By being a slave to these laws you are freed from having to hold on to the branch or hang in a harness. (Now please do not misunderstand my illustration. I am not talking about following laws in order to earn salvation. I am merely expressing the inevitability that you will be a slave to something.) The only way to be truly free is to be bound to Christ. This freedom is not a freedom to do whatever I want. It is a freedom to do what God wants. It is only in this type of freedom that you are truly free.

Now many of you are probably not comfortable at all with what I just said. You may want to be free. You may realize that living in sin is enslaving. But the idea of being in bondage to righteousness sounds just as stuffy and stifling. In your life you want to run free. You want to fly and you are not convinced that slavery to righteousness is the way to do that.

I will offer you two scripture passages:

Let's turn first to James 1:22-25. This can be found on page 1,881 in the pew Bible.

<sup>22</sup> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup> But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

James tells us that contrary to what we fear - the perfect law - the righteousness of God - doesn't fill our lives with dullness and gloom. It gives us freedom.

And let's look at one more passage. Please turn with me to Psalm 119:32. That is found on page 958 in the pew Bible.

<sup>32</sup> I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.

Do you see the words here - "I **run**...for you have set me free." And "I'm running...in the path of His commands." I'm not plodding along with heavy chains. I am not wearily walking

down the horrible path that God has laid out for me. I am free to run, because I am in the path of His commands. And I am full of joy!

Talking about no longer being a slave to sin so you can be a slave to Christ is a bit prickly. In our Romans 6 passage Paul said in verse 19 : “<sup>19</sup> I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.”

Slavery is a hard word, and understanding this freedom goes beyond using the word “slavery”. But in our sinfulness we just don’t understand it so well. I think this misunderstanding leads us to be burdened again by a yoke of slavery when we really should be completely free.

We are burdened again by a yoke of slavery because we think we are free to do whatever we want and that is not what we were freed to do. You are not on this planet to do what you want to do. If that is what you are pursuing then you will not be free. That is not what you were made for. You are on this planet to do God’s will. You were freed from sin so that it would be possible for you to obey God. Larry Crabb has written: “Our agenda is to fix the world until it can properly take care of us. God’s agenda is to bring all things together in Christ until every knee bows before Him.”

John Piper says, “...realize that Paul is teaching us in this chapter how to live for the glory of God, not the glory of ourselves. That is why God's action is ultimate and ours is dependent on his. That is why God doesn't say, "Just do it." It is why he says, "Because you are under grace, do it." And: "Because you have died with Christ, don't do it." And: "Because you are enslaved to righteousness by God, do it." "Just do it" is man-centered. Do it because "God is at work in you to do it" is God-centered. Putting it this way keeps the work of God front and center in your life. That is where he will get the glory.”

In order to be truly free from sin we must be slaves to Christ. We once were only free to do wrong this is finally a freedom to **do** right.

In Christ, we are free to **do** right.  
We are also free to **know** rightly.

I said that I wanted to mention two of the reasons we are burdened again by slavery. The second is quite simply that we believe too many lies.

In the Romans passage that we already read, Paul contrasts slaves to sin and slaves to righteousness. In our next passage Jesus is making a different illustration and He contrasts being a slave and being a son.

Let's turn to John 8:31-36. That can be found on page 1,663 in your pew Bible.

<sup>31</sup> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

<sup>33</sup> They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants<sup>[a]</sup> and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

<sup>34</sup> Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. <sup>35</sup> Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Often we are enslaved by lies. And it is simply the truth that will set us free. In the passage about Paul and Silas and the earthquake they were free because they knew the truth. They knew that they were soldiers in a spiritual fight. They were walking around in spiritual armor looking to strike down some of the kingdom of darkness. Satan attacked by sending the little slave girl to harass them. They responded by setting the girl free. Satan attacked again by putting Paul and Silas' bodies in prison. But Paul and Silas were still spiritually free. They continued to fight through prayer and singing and through the Holy Spirit they prevailed to the salvation of the prison guard and his whole household.

If Paul and Silas were not focused on these spiritual truths they could easily have been burdened by how the people mistreated them and how the government was corrupt. They were free because they saw past that. They saw that the men who owned the slave girl were themselves enslaved to money. They saw that the men who put them in prison were themselves enslaved to power.

When you are in line at the store and someone cuts in front of you, do you see yourself as just a human, waiting in line to spend the money you had to work hard to get and some jerk is messing with your schedule? Or are you free to look past that? Do you see yourself as a

soldier building God's kingdom. And He has stationed you at this place in this long line for a purpose. He has equipped you with His money to use as a tool to build His kingdom. And that person who jumped in front of you may be someone in need of God's grace and God's promises. You were stationed here to bless him with that.

We miss the spiritual truth - what is really going on, because we think that only the physical matters. And in all realms: spiritual, physical, psychological...Satan loves to lie to us. If you continue to read in John chapter 8 you will come to verses 42-45. Jesus says to the religious rulers:

...“If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.<sup>43</sup> Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say.<sup>44</sup> You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.<sup>45</sup> Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!

We are so used to hearing Satan's lies that we don't believe God's truth. Satan loves to tell us “you're not good enough”, “you're not working hard enough”, “you can't possibly do that, because you're a loser”.

But the truth is we are sons and daughters of the God who made the universe. The truth is that He chose us even while we were in our sins and He freed us. The truth is that we are coheirs with Jesus Christ who was stronger than death and is the ruler of the kings of the earth. The truth is that He has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father. And so we can have GRACE and PEACE from Him.

But do we live that way?

I am going to venture an example here that relates to something that has been lied about so many times that some of you will not believe the truth even when I get to it. My example is the classic wife to husband question: “Does this outfit make me look fat?” This question is layered with lies. It is always assumed that “yes” the outfit does make your wife look fat and the only thing to discuss is if the husband should lie or not. No one ever answers “Oh, wow, you're so beautiful that dress should feel privileged just to know your shadow.”

Do you really think Jesus would look at you and worry about how your outfit made you look? I think that if one of you women walked up to Jesus and said, "Does this outfit make me look fat?" I think He would say, "My dear daughter, oh, how much pain you have had to go through. How many lies you have been told. How many times you have been deceived to believe that you are only worth what you look like. It is true that you live among people who have very unhealthy eating practices; you sit too much and walk too little, and we can work together on those things. But when I see you, I only see beauty. You are my child. I died for you. I sacrificed my life and poured out my blood because I love you. You are valuable to me. Don't believe those bullies who make advertising. They don't love you. They want to use you for money. Be free. Make your clothes serve you as you walk in my joy and build my kingdom. Don't be a servant of your clothes. Bring me glory. By your actions let people see me which is the beauty I've placed in you."

Don't you think that is sort of what Jesus might say? And yet the lie that we are only worth what we look like is so prevalent in our culture that many of you are thinking - "Yeah, that's nice but 'do I look fat'?"

We are not free because we believe too many lies.

The David Crowder Band has a song entitled "Dance". The lyrics go:

"Dance if you're wounded. Dance if you're torn in two. Dance broken open. Dance with nothing to lose. Oh! Perfectly free. Oh! Dance if you want to be. Change your world. Change your soul. Turn it up here we go, here we go!"

Isn't that craziness! Why would anyone want to dance when they are hurt and broken and torn in two. Because, IF the Son has set you free, you are free indeed. Yes, we live in a broken world. Yes, we will still grieve and struggle with sin. But you don't have to be brought down by it. Rise above it. Being a slave to Christ's righteousness - not your own attempt at righteousness - but living in His life gives you the freedom to be truly free. But you need to be on guard.

Examine your life - what is the sin in your life that is making you a slave again to sin and keeping you from "running" in the paths of righteousness.

Examine what you believe - what are the lies that are keeping you from dancing the dance of righteousness and being free in your Christian life?

Maybe Satan is saying that God has forgotten you? That's a lie.

Maybe Satan is saying that you need to work harder to earn God's approval? That's a lie.

Maybe Satan is lying to you about your family or your coworkers? Do they really hate your guts? Are they really out to get you? OR are they just as enslaved by sin as all of us are and they need to find the very same freedom in Christ?

Maybe Satan is lying to you about your role as a father or mother or as a husband or as a wife? Maybe he says you don't have value if you are not married or don't have children or if you aren't making lots of money?

Really? This is not who you are.

Now please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying "Ah, shucks, you're a good guy and you should just have faith in yourself." This is not a humanist message of being confident in the goodness of man. That is a message of slavery. No, you are free because the truth is who you are in Christ. And your role in the world is a great adventure in building God's kingdom and giving Him glory. This is the truth. The lies are all about focusing your eyes on 'the job' and 'the house' and the bodies of people who you see around you. The truth is that the bodies around you - your body - are filled with souls, eternal souls. And 'the house' and 'the job' are just tools for interacting with those souls and the spiritual world around us.

I want to finish my sermon by declaring a blessing over you. But it is only a blessing if you have been redeemed. If you have never come to Jesus Christ in faith, than this will be a curse. For this blessing declares the truth for those who are in Christ Jesus. If you are not in Him than these things are not true of you. And to say they are not true of you is to curse you. And I am sorry to curse you - that is not really my intention. My intention is truly to bless the people of God. But you do not have to be cursed this morning. Now is the time of salvation. Today is the best time to put your faith in Christ and be truly free. If you do that today, than this will be a blessing for you as well.

So, here it is:

(Their name), you are a child of the eternal God who was and is and is to come. Before He created the world this infinite God chose You as His treasure to be the bride of His only Son, Jesus Christ. And there is now no condemnation for You because You are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin

and death. And you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear but you received the Spirit of sonship and you are an heir of God and a co-heir with Christ. And if God is for you, who can be against you? Who can bring any charge against you whom God has chosen? Who can condemn you when God, Himself, has justified you? For Jesus Christ who died and was raised again to life is at the right hand of God and is interceding for you. For in all things you are more than a conqueror through Him who loves you. For neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus your Lord. And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is for freedom that Christ has set you free. Stand firm, then, and do not be burdened again by the yoke of slavery.