



TOUCH POINT

Religious Slave-dom – TouchPoint for March 24, 2021

Philippians 2:5-11 MSG *“Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what.*

Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

⁹⁻¹¹ Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.”

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;”

Ok, you’re going to have to help me out here. I’m a little confused.

The Philippians passage says that we are to have the mind of Christ, and that means not counting equality with God as something to be grasped, exploited, taken advantage of. But isn’t that the goal of Christianity and religion in general. To become god-like. To be equal in purity with God. To declare that I have the righteousness of God within me and impose it on others?

Also, isn’t that what we want when we say that with God, “All things are possible.” After all, think of the advantage you will have when God is on your side. As a nation we will win our war against the pagan, heathen hordes. As an athlete, I will defeat my opponent. As a business person, I will make more money.

Why, if we just grab hold of God and use God, think of all the possibilities and advantages that exist for us. That is the essence of the prosperity gospel.

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So, I’m confused. I mean, what’s the advantage of having Christ in my life if I can’t take advantage of that advantage?

“⁵⁻⁸ Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human!

(He) took on the status of a slave, became human!”

Well, that is certainly a different way to look at being a human... as a slave. Because if it were true, then the question becomes, what are we slaves to? What are you a slave to? What am I a slave to?

And the biblical answer to that is not, I need to escape being a slave, but rather, whose slave am I? And how can seeing myself as a slave of God be the truth that will set me free?

What a reversal, because you see, we talk so much about religious freedom these days. Do we have it? Are we losing it? Is there a war on Christmas? Why do I have to wear a mask when God has given me an immune system?

So much talk about religious freedom these days. Why, we seem to be in bondage to it! And one might get the idea that is the reason Jesus came to earth, to give us religious freedom. Freedom to pursue our dreams of greatness, fame, riches, personal happiness.

Why, *“With God, all things are possible.”* Right?!

What freedom our religion brings when we can practice it freely!

So, what do we do with this passage from Paul?

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ, who... took the form of a slave...even to death on the cross.”

I'm just curious – where is the talk about religious slave-dom?! Not religious freedom, but religious slave-dom!? Where is that conversation? How come no one is clamoring for that! And do I really want to be a slave of Christ? Hey, *“With God, all things are possible.”* Even my becoming a slave! Now I'm not too sure I want to frame that bible verse and hang it on my wall!

From one perspective, I suppose, Jesus tried religious freedom. He went about forgiving people freely. He went about healing people freely. He went about pronouncing salvation on people freely... And you know what we did to him? We hung him on a cross. We tortured him and killed him.

So much for our believing in religious freedom... The cross mocks the hypocrisy of our beliefs.

WE want religious freedom, but not so much for others. ESPECIALLY JESUS! Forget about religious freedom for the Buddhists and Hindus and Muslims. We absolutely CANNOT let this Jesus have religious freedom...and that is our bondage! Because his having freedom of religion means the death of ours. And so, we kill him.

Yet, here's the weird thing. Jesus takes our torture. Jesus takes our death. He doesn't demand his religious freedom, as we would. He doesn't come down off the cross under his own power. No, he is taken down as a dead and lifeless body.

Jesus stays a slave to the end. A slave to the God of grace and mercy and forgiveness.

Even on the cross he pronounces forgiveness. He doesn't exercise his freedom to exact revenge. He doesn't use his freedom to call down God's vengeance.

Isn't that what we use God for? Isn't that we want God to do? Destroy our enemies! Conquer our enemies. Show God's superior might over our enemies. That's what we want to do with our religious freedom. Dominate others. Subject others. Make others a slave to our religious freedom. What a terrible bondage our demand for religious freedom has become, for ourselves and others

Perhaps John Milton foresaw American Christianity when he wrote in Paradise Lost,

“Here at least we shall be free...Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven.”

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ, who... took the form of a slave...even to death on the cross.”

Jesus understands a different kind of God. Not one of domination and destruction. Not one of conquest and vengeance. Not one of punishment and subjugation.

“If one strikes you on the right cheek...turn the left also” ... so much for vengeance

“Go sell all you have and give it to the poor” ... so much for domination, economic or otherwise.

“Forgive 7 times 70” ... so much for revenge.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ, who... took the form of a slave...even to death on the cross.”

What do we do with this text in a country that was founded on the freedom of the individual for some of us and on the backs of slavery of others? What a reversal this text is! We are to be the slaves. **We don't make others slaves to our religious freedom. We become slaves to God in freedom of service to others.** Where once our demand for religious freedom was our bondage...Now our slavery to God's grace becomes our freedom.

I am reminded of a student I had in Japan when I taught English there. She had lived in the U.S. for 2 years and had recently come back. When I asked her if she missed the U.S. or ever wanted to go back, she said without hesitation, “No, never!” “Why not?” I asked. “Too much freedom” she said. Her words blew me away. As a 22-year-old American I could never imagine having too much freedom. Isn't that the purpose of life, after all?

She continued, “Here I don't have to think about who I will marry, that will be decided for me. Here I don't have to think about where I will live, that will be decided by my husband's job. And I am freed to focus on finding happiness in being the best me I can be...within the structure of my culture.” I thought she was crazy then. I'm not so sure now.

Some of the most peace-filled people I know are those who know their slave-hood. Whether it be from addiction or physical illness, they know they are enslaved by their body's reaction to the world around them. They have admitted their powerlessness. It is the first step to recovery. Yet within their confinement...within their bondage...within their slave-hood, they have found a freedom to live and they are more alive than many people I would call 'free'. For they don't spend their lives trying to prove they are free and they are no longer in bondage to proving it.

You and I live within the confinement of God's grace. We live within the bondage of God's forgiveness. We live within the slavery of God's mercy. It surrounds us and there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

To live as a slave of Christ is to live free. Because there is tremendous freedom in knowing who you are and **WHOSE** you are!

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ, who... took the form of a slave...even to death on the cross.”

Jesus stays a slave to the end – a slave to the God of grace and mercy and forgiveness. So, in the end, we

might **be owned** by **that** God rather than our sin and brokenness. And in this God of grace, mercy, and forgiveness, we become slaves of grace for others. We become slaves of mercy for others. We become slaves of forgiveness for others. And we are freed.

Is this what Luther meant when he wrote,

***“A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none...
A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”***

In the night in which he was betrayed... denied... run away from and fallen asleep on... Jesus stayed a slave to the God of forgiveness and mercy and grace.

“Take and eat. Take and drink. My body and blood, given and shed for you and for ALL people for the forgiveness of sin.”

And so, we take **this slave** of forgiveness into our bodies, into our lives, into our being.

On the cross, and in this meal, our religious freedom dies so our religious slavery can begin. After all, “*With God all things are possible.*”

And to quote Martin Luther King Jr. and the old Negro spiritual.

“Free at last...free at last...Thank God almighty...We are free at last!”

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

See Him

(Keith Duke)

See him: 1) silent and lifeless. 2) alone and forlorn 3) broken and helpless...Crowned with a garland of thorns 4) as son and as brother 5) related to all 6) through the grief of a mother...hurting the most of all 7) as healer and teacher 8) as helper and friend 9) as prophet and preacher...

Ignore Him??? I doubt if you can.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Our Father 3, Choirs of Annunciation Byzantine Church)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.
Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.
Deep peace of Christ to you.