

**Raised With Christ: Set Free**  
**By Pastor Jay Henderson**  
**Romans 6:15-23**  
**July 14, 2019**

Of all the blessings in my life, one that I am extremely grateful for is my father. I want to brag on him for a minute. John Allen Henderson, for better or for worse, is largely responsible for my slightly warped sense of humor, among other things. Don't worry, he was also a positive influence in my life. In my high school years, he had a profound influence on my faith when I witnessed his conversion to Christianity. He claimed he was agnostic for much of his life. Or, as he put it, a member of the "Well, let's wait and see" Club.

He was never really hostile to Christianity. He thought the morals and stuff were good and attended church fairly often with the family. But he didn't really see himself as a "religious" man, with all that spiritual mumbo jumbo. But he's also a bit of an intellectual, so he decided, one day, that he was going to go ahead and read the Bible. Cover to cover. He'd never done it, so he figured he might as well give it a fair shake. So he did – over the course of a year, he chipped away at it and read the whole darn thing. Cover to cover. In the process, he realized, "Well crap. I think I'm a Christian." As a result of reading the Bible, and other influences at the same time, he couldn't deny the truth and the power of the Gospel. A few years later, he was baptized on the same day as my oldest daughter.

Perhaps as a result of his later conversion to Christianity, Dad will often have a "unique" way of looking at situations. And in all his wisdom, he has a knack for saying some profound things in somewhat unorthodox ways. But when he decided to follow Jesus, you know what he said? He said, "You know – sinning just ain't as much fun as it used to be." Which is a great quote. And I think it ties in perfect with our scripture today.

Where our scripture comes from today is the Book of Romans. Here, Paul is writing a letter to an early church. And at the church in Rome, there are two different groups. On the one hand, you have the Jewish Christians. They're trying to figure out how best to follow Jesus Christ and understand how he fits into the first covenant that God made with them – the "Old Testament." Following the law that God gave them was the height of holiness. But how does **Jesus** fit into that story, and how are they supposed to respond?

And then on the other hand, there's this other group: Non-Jewish Christians (Gentiles). They want to follow this Jewish Messiah – but they're not Jewish. What does the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ mean for them? How do they fit into this story of God that's been passed down through the Jews? Because Jesus talked about this **New Covenant** that God has opened up to **all** people. Through baptism and the Holy Spirit, you can be born again. You're made into a new creation.

So throughout the book of Romans, Paul is helping the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians come together, and figure out what it means to follow Jesus.

In our scripture today, I hope you catch the irony here. Because the title for today is "Set Free." And yet the majority of the passage talks about being a slave. How can you be free if you're a slave? Seems like a conflict, doesn't it?

But Paul tells us that, whether we like it or not, we're all slaves to something. Either you can be a slave to sin. Or, because of Jesus Christ, you can become a slave to righteousness. Let's break that down.

First – what does it mean to be a slave to sin? I don't think it takes a genius to see that there is brokenness in the world. People do bad things. We all do bad things from time to time. But Paul is saying that when you are a **slave to sin** – you don't worry about obeying the rules of righteousness. You are **free** in regard to righteousness.

- 1) You don't feel guilty about keeping all your money for what you want.
- 2) You don't care about whether or not your harsh words hurt other people.
- 3) You don't think about what design God has for your love life.
- 4) And you don't worry about who you step on to get to the top.

Paul is saying – “If you are a slave to sin, then sinful things are what you do.” You don't concern yourself with what God wants. Sinful things just don't bother you. But even if it doesn't bother you when you live like that - where does it get you? What fruit are you bearing when you are a slave to sin? What value are you adding to the world?

Because if you are a slave to righteousness, then you are free from **sin**.

- 1) When you are blessed with income, you don't hoard it. You give it to those in need.
- 2) When you disagree with someone – you do it in a way that still honors them.
- 3) When you find yourself tempted by pornography or lustful and deviant desires, you turn from it because you're not just an animal that gives in to primal urges.
- 4) And in terms of the social and economic ladder, you understand that in the Kingdom of God, the greatest honor is to take the role of a servant, rather than making others serve you. You **want** to do good, you **want** to follow God – because you're set free from sinful things.

And so I return to my dad's quote. Because basically Paul is telling us, that if you are a slave to righteousness – **“sinning just ain't as much fun as it used to be.”**

I mean, when you're a slave to sin, doing sinful things seems like a lot of fun. In fact, there's a real sport to it. **“Oh, we're going to the lake and getting wasted this weekend.” Or - “We're going out to the club tonight and maybe I'll get lucky.”**

I mean I've heard a preacher say, “you need to stay away from sin – because there's just no fun in sinning.” I thought, “Are you kidding me?” Of course there's some fun to sinning. Why else would people be so tempted by it? It feels good. It's exciting. “Blowing off a little steam. Having a good time – not like those prudes in the church.” **But that's only true if you're a slave to sin.** Because when you're a slave to sin, you're free from righteousness. It doesn't bother you. Because it is all about you and whether or not you're getting your jollies. It's the **Kingdom of Self**.

But if you're a slave to righteousness – it's not fun. And you know it. Because you realize God has a design for your life and for this world that is far better than you could ever imagine, and far better than the cheap thrill that sin brings. The worst trick of the devil is to take something that is good and wonderful and exhilarating, and then he twists it just a little to make it something that destroys or humiliates you and others.

So many movies and stories think they're being so profound when they have a character that grew up in a Christian household, and that when they finally broke all the rules and began indulging in all kinds of deviant behavior, that's when they really “found themselves.” That's what the hippies tried to tell us, right? But free love didn't end up being so free – did it? Came

at a horrible cost. Destruction of the family, rampant STD's. The US is one of the largest consumers of sex trafficking, a modern day slave trade. Pornography is a multi-billion dollar industry that a recent study shows has more economic impact than Netflix. And it's an entire industry founded on treating people like objects to be used for personal thrill. Think maybe there's a connection between that and all the scandals we hear about in the news? But you know – sex outside of marriage. No big deal. I'm sure it won't hurt anybody. Maybe the wisdom of our forbears wasn't so backwards or out of touch after all.

And what about those drugs that were supposed to open people's minds? Have we not seen by now what the fruit of the drug trade has done to our society? And now, since we've legalized marijuana, it's supposed to be the miracle drug to cure all that ails you. I'd be real careful about that. It's still a drug, and it's going to have side-effects, like every other drug does.

Look, here's a story you never hear. A guy is in a hotel room, and he's at the end of his rope. He's hooked on drugs and drinking. He's lost his family, he's considering killing himself. And then... he looks into the drawer and finds a copy of a Gideon's Bible. He reads the words of Jesus ... **and that's when things got really bad for him!** That's not the story you hear, is it? Why? Because the words of Jesus lead to life! He not only sets us free from what is bad, but also sets us free to do what is good.

This isn't a legalistic sermon crying about the evils of sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll. And I'm not a backwards prude in the church who doesn't understand the "real world." I'm trying to say that Jesus sets us free from sin. And sin leads to death – physically and spiritually. A fast and loose lifestyle is bad for the health. Hatred and anger lead to war and violence. And living a self-absorbed lifestyle makes it difficult to have any kind of a deep or meaningful relationship – with God or others.

God wants to set you free. To be free from sin. To live a life worth meaning – that adds value to the world – rather than grasping for cheap thrills. God's free gift is this – If you live in the belief that Jesus shows us how to live, and if you follow that example – it leads to life. Now and forevermore.

Don't get hung up on all of your past experiences with well-meaning Christians who were maybe a little out of touch. And don't let past experiences with the church prevent you from hearing these words of life. Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. That proves God's love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. And you are set free.

Jesus loves us so much, that he even let us kill him. So that he could come back to life and tell us – "even **that** won't stop me from loving you!" And right now, there's somebody in this room who needs to hear that Jesus is waiting for you. You've been a slave to sin. But you don't have to be anymore. This your invitation. Jesus is extending his hand, and he's saying, "Come, follow me. And I'll show you a life you never dreamed of." Come. Join us. We want to walk with you. If you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, today's the day. Or maybe you find yourself still caught in a trap of sin. Greed. Gossip. Addiction. Lust. This altar is open. And I want to pray with you. I want to help you follow Jesus. We will have some people up front. Don't be afraid. We're not here to embarrass you. We're here to set you free. Come – the altar is open.