

Serving Christ: Part 1

Romans 14:18a

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

It's really great to be free, isn't it? Good to be in a free country where you can do what you want. It's great to be free to not send the mortgage payment next month if you don't want to. It's great to be free not to send the car payment in next month if you want to. It's great to be free not to go to work tomorrow if you don't want to, or not to go to school if you don't want to. But you are saying, "Wait a minute, yeah, it's good to be free but I am not actually that free." Well, aren't you? Aren't you that free? I mean you just don't send the money in and you say, "Well, yeah, but I don't feel free not to send it in." Well, why do you not feel free not to send the mortgage payment? Why do you not feel free not to send the car payment in or the payment on the stereo? "Well, because I'll lose them, I mean they'd take my car; they'd repossess it, they'd foreclose on my home."

Well, I mean wouldn't that be all right? And you say, "No, no I don't want that to happen. So I am not free not to send the mortgage payment in or not to send the car payment." Well, why don't you let that happen? And you'll say, "Well, there are certain things you need in the world. You need somewhere to live, you need a car to get around in today's world and you need a little bit of recreation and enjoyment in life and you need people to like you, or you need some meaning for being here, so you need to meet these needs and so you need to get these things." And that's really the way it starts off, isn't it? We all feel there are certain things we need, just to make life kind of enjoyable, or worth anything in this world, and yet you must admit, it is amazing, isn't it? How many of those needs begin to dominate us? We kind of will those things into existence. We will the monthly car payment into existence. We will the mortgage into existence. We will our job into existence. We actually will these things into existence. But it is incredible, how gradually we begin to feel they are exerting their will on us. And they do affect our freedom.

And it's surprising how many of us here this morning know we are in a free country, but there a lot of things we are not free to do at all however we talk about it? We are not free not to send the mortgage payment. We are not free to not send the car payment and we are not free to not go to work. We are not free. Some of those are just mature responsibilities. But how many of us begin to feel almost driven by these things and mastered by them? In fact, it's interesting there's a word that is defined in the English dictionary and the definition, I think describes the way many of us here this morning, feel about things in our life. Here's the definition, then I'll tell you in a moment what word it defines, but here is the definition. "A service which is not a matter of choice for the one who renders it, which he has to perform whether he likes it or not because he is subject to another's will." I don't know how many of you have felt that, that a lot of the things you do day by day, are like a service, which is not a matter of choice for the one who renders it, which he has to perform whether he likes it or not because he is subject to another's will. Do you know what word that defines? A 'slave,' that's the definition of a slave in the English dictionary. And it does seem that more and more of us in our kind of automated society feel that we slave for things, don't we? Sometimes you wonder who possesses whom? I mean, do you possess your possessions, or do they possess you? Is it your job or does the job own you?

And repeatedly we feel that we are acting more like slaves. There are fewer and fewer things in our lives that we have real discretion about, and there are more and more things in our lives that kind of drive us, whether we want to be driven or not.

And it's amazing, how our choices seem to narrow down. Of course, some of us get ourselves in such a tight little narrow box, that we can't move. Our elbows are squeezed into our ribs; we're almost suffocated because everything is set for the next five or six years, such as with the payment systems we have, or with the obligations we have. We are set in the obligation we have to ourselves, because a lot of them are just driven by what we want for ourselves, and what we want other people to think of us. We end up just performing in order that all these things should come about. Now loved ones, that's what this dear Book says, it's the situation for everyone in this world, and it says that everyone in this world, is actually a slave -- actually a slave. There are people that are performing a service whether they want to or not and they are often performing at the behest of a will that is other than their own.

Now, I will show you the piece of the Bible where it says that, it's Galatians 4:3, "So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe." I don't think for a minute, that you think you are a slave of a Barclays bank, or a Northwestern bank, I don't think we do. I don't think we feel we are slaves of Midwest Federal. I don't think we are in any doubt, we aren't their slaves. But you must admit there are psychological and psychic and emotional forces that seem to be connected in some way with the obligations that we have to those financial institutions and the obligations that we have often to other people that we want to please. There are psychic and psychological and emotional forces that often compel us and force us to do things that don't make us feel really free about life. And that's what that verse means, loved ones. When it says, "We are all slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe." It means there are forces that are abroad in this world, that operate on people who don't believe God is in charge, and those forces squeeze those people more and more, until they are virtually slaves.

And so, everybody in this world, this dear Book says, is a slave to these elemental forces of the universe. See it's silly, but it comes into little things. We all know how we performed before we got married; and many of us who aren't married here know how we are performing and often we aren't performing in freedom. We are trying to compel, we are compelled. It's a continuous search; a continual drive to get the right one, or a continual drive to get anyone. And so it's a slavery, it's not a freedom, it's not a liberty; and it's driven by forces that are unseen and invisible. We often, you see, make the mistake, we think, "Oh, no I have stopped being mature, I am being silly." Well yeah, you are not being mature and you are being silly, but actually the powers that are enforcing themselves upon you are greater than you. They are deeper and more powerful than you.

For example, when a husband and a wife end up slashing each other because the finances are in trouble that's not just because they are worried in their minds. It's not, you know that. You know when you end up like that; it's as if a force has taken hold of both of you that isn't normal. I mean, you are not just disagreeing over which bill should be paid, it's a panic almost and a fear that gets hold of you. It's the same that occupies so many of us, in our relationship with people when we want people to think well of us. And somebody has criticized us and our reputation is going down the drain and then there's a force gets going inside you that you must admit seems ridiculous. It seems out of proportion to the trouble. And it gets a hold of you, and here's the proof that you are a slave to it. You try to stop thinking about it -- you try to stop thinking about it. Your mind -- you have a free will, you should be able to stop thinking about it. But you know fine well, that the more you try to stop thinking about it, the more this force works within you.

That's why the Bible says, "We are slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe." Not just slaves to ourselves; not just people who are making a wrong choice. But we are slaves to elemental spirits

of the universe. All of us are, except for one person. I'll show you, John 8:35: "The slave does not continue in the house for ever, the son continues for ever." So, if the Son makes you free, you will be free, indeed, that's it. Everybody is a slave, except the one who has been freed by the Son, Jesus, the Son of God. If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

Loved ones, there is a way to be free from those forces, but it requires somebody that is more powerful than those forces, to free you from them. But there is a way to be free. And I'll show you it; it is stated very clearly in this dear word. It's Colossians 2:20. "If with Christ, you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world?" If with Christ, you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, that's it. That's how the Son has made you free. When he died to these forces, you died with him. You are freed from those forces. And maybe you sit there and you say, "Yeah, but that's the problem." It says, "If I died with Christ -- I don't think I died with Christ. I mean, that's probably why I am having my troubles. But I don't feel I died with Christ." Loved ones, you did. You did die with Christ.

Even if you are here the first time this morning, even if you have never believed in God. Here is a verse that might be good to look at, especially those of you who wonder. 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died." You died with Christ. God put you into His Son Jesus and separated you from these elemental spirits of the universe. Now if you say, "Well I mean, I haven't experienced that; how do I experience it?" The Bible says, "Reckon yourself to be dead indeed unto sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Just believe that, believe it now. Believe that what God said he did to you and his Son Jesus, even if philosophically it's beyond your understanding just believe that what God says he did to you and his son, Jesus, he did. And that he put you into his son, Jesus and he destroyed you there. And the moment he destroyed you, he freed you from the power of these elemental spirits of the universe. And loved ones, if that didn't happen, as long as you are alive those things will drive you to death.

If you have any question of whether they will drive you to death, think about this. Many of us know of the tragedy of Pritikin's death. It is a tragedy, isn't it? Pritikin, he holds a billion patents and yet he was another Howard Hughes. He holds more patents than many other men for billions of inventions in his early years. And then you remember he had heart trouble and he started that whole regimen that many of us have benefited from – the Pritikin diet. It was for people with heart disease and the Pritikin clinics are famous throughout our nation. And what happened last week, Friday or Saturday. He slit his wrist and committed suicide, because he has leukemia. If you don't get free of these elemental spirits of the universe, they will not only make a monkey of you, they will destroy you.

And they will finally destroy you completely and utterly because all of us in this world are slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe. We're linked with the one in this universe who is out to destroy, destroy, destroy. And he will make us do the most irrational things that man could conceive of, unless, we allow God to set us free in his Son. And the way to do that, is to regard yourself as having being crucified with Christ, destroyed, dead to all the powers that want to make you feel you should be happy or make you feel you should be secure or make you feel you should have this and have that and allow yourself to be crucified in Christ, and from now on to live in Jesus. Now, that's what the Bible talks about, in the verse that we were studying this morning. It's Romans 14:18. This is the verse we've arrived at in Romans, you remember? We'll only get the first clause done. Romans 14:18a. "He who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men." He who thus serves Christ, that's how to be free from slavery to the elemental spirits of the universe.

And many of us breathe with a sigh of relief and say, "Serve, there is a nice word, good, ah, that's good. I don't like being a slave. I like serving Christ. And that's a dignified word for human beings where you can choose your service, that's what I like to do. Yes, if you ask me whether I would rather be enslaved to the elemental spirits of the universe, or to serve Christ? I choose serve Christ. Because serve Christ has a dignity and a freedom about it, but slavery doesn't." Do you know what the Greek word is, that we wrongly translate serve? It is "douleuon"; it means to be a slave.

We do it nicely in our translations, you know, because we all like freedom. But the word is actually, "He who is a slave of Christ is acceptable to God, and approved by men." In other words, if you say to me, you mean there is no way out of slavery? That's right. That's right, loved ones. We didn't make ourselves; we are not self-existent entities. We didn't make ourselves. We are dependent on the one who made us. There is no way out of slavery. You are either a slave of the elemental spirits of the universe, or you are a slave of Christ, that's it. And when you "consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11), that means Christ becomes the world in which you move. He becomes the womb in which you live. He becomes the surrounding environment from which you get your life. That's what it means, it means you are totally and utterly dependent on Christ and you are his slave. You are owned by him and you give him a service that he demands, without question.

That's what it means to be a slave of Christ. You're either a slave of Christ, or you're a slave of the elemental spirits of the universe. Here is the error you and I make. We think that isn't the choice. We are foolish. We think the choice is between our forms of service, whether we'll be a servant who will choose what he obeys, or whether we'll be a slave who will just slavishly have to obey. We think that's the choice. That's not the choice. The choice is just between masters. Are the elemental spirits of the universe, your master, or is Jesus your master? That's it. It's either one or the other.

And how do you and I get into a carnal life, and kind of that half hearted, diluted Christian life that isn't anything at all? It's because we think that you can choose slavery, or dignified service. We are the same as the Greeks, really. The Greeks loved freedom and the Greeks hated slavery. They hated anything that meant that you were under the will of someone else. They thought it was undignified. They thought it couldn't lead to a full life. They hated slavery. They detested that word "douleuon" in many ways. Aren't we the same? We often think in America, we are really the successors to the Romans and in many ways we are, in regard to our military power. But in regard to our love of freedom, we are in many ways like the Greeks. We detest the idea of slavery. And yet this is the word that the Bible uses. A person who is freed from the elemental spirits of the universe, they are freed to be slaves of Jesus. And if they are not slaves of Christ, they are not really free from the elemental spirits of the universe. And that's what you and I don't realize.

We think we can kind of not be a slave of Christ and yet be freed somehow from slavery to self, or slavery of the elemental spirits of the universe. If you had gone into that room -- I forget which hotel it was you remember, but if you had gone into that room and seen Howard Hughes with the beard and the Kleenex tissues all around, dying of malnutrition, the billionaire dying of malnutrition. If you had gone into that room, after Pritikin said to the nurse, or the doctor just leave me alone for a while. If you had gone into that room and seen that man, one of the foremost men of our generation cutting his wrist, and bleeding himself to death, there would be no doubt in your mind. But there is no freedom from slavery. It is simply, are you a slave to these spirits that will

eventually destroy you, or are you a slave to Christ? And loved ones, there is only one choice.

And that's what Jesus said. He said, "No one can serve two masters."--Matthew 6:24. And the word He uses is 'slave'. Nobody can be a slave of two masters and the reason is, loved ones, the definition of slavery. A slave is involved in a service, which has no possibility of evading the tasks laid upon you and no right of personal choice, but must rather do what another will have done and refrain from doing what another will not have done. It is a relation of absolute dependence, involving the total commitment of a douleuon, the slave, and the total claim of "Kurie", the Lord, that's what a slave is.

And reality will begin to come into our lives this morning, if we will see that, that it is the only relationship to Jesus that will fully free us from slavery to the elemental spirits of the universe. It is a service which has no possibility of evading the task laid upon you and no right of personal choice but must rather do what another will have done and refrain from doing what another will not have done. It is a relation of absolute dependence involving a total commitment of the slave and the total claim of the Lord or the Master.

And that's why Jesus said, "You can't be a slave to two masters." In Greece, you know it existed at times, it didn't really work, where two masters would share a slave but it didn't really work because here's what it means. A slave means the total concentration of all your powers in the sense of an exclusive commitment and obligation, and you can't give that to two masters. I mean you can't give a total concentration of your powers, which is an exclusive commitment and obligation to one master, and then do it in the afternoon to another. That's why you can't be a slave of two masters. When you try to be, you end up a slave of one master. Always you must hate one master and you must love the other, and when you refuse to be a slave of Jesus Christ, you end up being a slave of self and a slave of the elemental spirits of the universe.

Now, if you say to me, that's a tragedy, that's an absolute dilemma. I mean, I have only a choice of slavery? That's the end of my life, to end up a slave of Jesus Christ. That's the best of everything. Why? Because he made you -- he knows your intellect, he knows your emotions. He knows the talents that he gave you and he knows the abilities that he has put within you. He knows your heart and he cares for your heart. He cries for you, when you cry. He loves you with all his heart, He loves you so much, he is the only one of us all that has given his life for you. He will die for you. He loves you with all his being and he knows why his Father has put you here on earth. He knows what will fulfill you completely and utterly and absolutely.

And when you commit yourself to Him and say, "Lord Jesus, I commit myself wholly and completely to you as your slave and I will do whatever you tell me to do and I will not question it, and I will do it whether it agrees with what I want or not." When you do that, then you begin to feel his heartbeat. I'll show you his heartbeat. John 15:13, and the moment you do commit yourselves, loved ones, to him as a slave, you begin to hear, and you begin to feel the heart of Jesus beating, as He says to you in John 15:13-16: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants." You see they didn't put "slaves". "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me but I chose you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give it to you." That's it.

If you are willing to bind yourself to Jesus as his absolute slave, you'll begin to hear him whispering in your heart, "Come, I'm not calling you a slave, I know you must be willing to be my slave, so that you can be freed from all other slavery; but I'm not calling you slave, I'm calling you my friend and I'm going to tell you what my Father wants you to do in this life and whatever you need if you ask for it, I will give it to you." That's it.

That's why slavery to Jesus is perfect freedom and anything less than slavery to Jesus is perfect bondage, that's it. So, I have encouraged you in your hearts. If you want to be freed from slavery to all those powers that drive us and will eventually destroy us, bind yourself solemnly to Jesus, as your master today, and commit yourself to him as his willing bond slave. And he will make your life full and complete as his Father intended it to be.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we would commit ourselves to you in that way and bind ourselves solemnly to you this very morning. Just as we are praying, loved ones, if you want to bind yourself to Jesus, then just speak to him now, and just quietly commit yourself to him as his slave and acknowledge to him that you will from now on obey unquestionably, and you will regard your life not as your own but as belonging to him. Lord, we bind ourselves to you, in solemn slavery this morning and thank you for freeing us from these other slaveries that have bound us for so long. Amen.