

## Commentary — From the Margins

### *For the Love of a Slave*

---

Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus—I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to men.) I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free. (Phil 8-14)

---

A favorite ploy of disciples convinced that observing any day as the Sabbath is contrary to the precepts of Christianity involves using the case of a hypothetical slave in the Hellenistic world whose master prohibits the slave from observing a day of rest. The question posed is, does this slave sin by not observing the Sabbath commandment? The answer sought is that God will not hold it against the slave if he or she has to work on the Sabbath because the slave's master demands such work. And extrapolation of this answer into the present era is that God does not today hold breaking the Sabbath against disciples, especially if jobs require that the disciple works on the Sabbath.

The problem concealed within this ploy is the error of making a disciple either free or bond: no disciple is born as a bondservant to disobedience or as a bondservant to any man or spirit being other than Christ Jesus. The answer sought is problematic. If God called a Hellenist slave to repentance and righteousness, thereby purchasing the person from the prince of this world with the blood and breath of the man Jesus of Nazareth, why would God not condemn the slave for making preservation of his or her physical life of more importance than obedience to God? By obeying an earthly master, the slave disobeys his or her heavenly master, thereby placing more importance on those things of this earth—including physical life—than on the things of God.

A slave in Greece or in Rome or in any Hellenistic colony who has been called as a disciple received from God no license to break any commandment of God, but rather, was mentally set free from bondage to disobedience so the person could keep the laws of God. If this requires the death of the flesh, then the flesh shall die but the Spirit shall live and shall receive great honor for the righteousness that came with the faith to believe God to the death of the flesh. Only the person who remains physically minded would seek an accommodation between God and man that would allow the flesh to live in sin and the spirit not to perish.

For a disciple, it is better to obey God and die than to live as a person who has returned to disobedience. Though this position seems radical, without love, and extremely hardline to old hippies who marched forty years ago with placards reading, *Better Red than Dead*, the position is identical to the one taken by Shadrach, Meshach,

and Abednego, who would not worship King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image (Dan chap 3).

There would, indeed, have been consequences for a Hellenist slave who chose to observe the Sabbath commandment against the wishes of a human master, but Jesus' explicit instructions are, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul [*psuche*]. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell [*Gehenna*]" (Matt 10:28). If the slave's master places no more value on the slave than to kill him or her when God calls the person to repentance, it might well be that the master's life is in jeopardy from God protecting a newly born son of His. Regardless, obedience is not the issue; whether the person loves God more than he or she loves self is the issue.

Besides, is breaking one commandment acceptable whereas breaking another is not? Is breaking the Sabbath commandment different from breaking the commandment against adultery? Is it acceptable for a Christian wife to work as a whore? It is not! Nor is it acceptable for her husband to steal his neighbor's car, or for the neighbor to murder the husband, or for her son to become a Buddhist, thereby placing another God before the Most High. All commandment breaking is disobedience, which for the person not yet born of Spirit is "covered" by the person being the bondservant [slave] to sin and to the prince of this world. This person is not under Grace, nor does this person today have the need for Grace—this person has no life but that which comes through the cellular oxidation of sugars. Only when this person is born of Spirit, or born from above, or born anew, or born again—all expressions for receiving a second life that is not of this world through receipt of the Holy Spirit [*Pneuma 'Agion*], the divine Breath of God, a metaphor for supra-dimensional life sustaining force that is analogous to the deep breath of a person—only when this person receives life that does not originate in this world does the person have life that will cross dimensions, that will enter the heavenly realm. And only when a person can commit sin in this heavenly realm does the person need a covering for sin in that realm. Only then does a person need Grace; for in this present era, the flesh of a person will die thereby paying the wages for sin in this earthly realm.

Every son of God is born into the common pool of those who have been drawn and called by God (John 6:44; 15:16). Although it is easy—and logical—to say that the self-identified Christian who will not keep the commandments does not have the Spirit of God, the truth is more complex: the disciple who will not keep the commandments is "free" not to keep the laws of God, just as God is free not to choose this disciple to be numbered among the few who will be chosen to be glorified (Matt 22:14). The disciple who will not obey God in the little things such as when he or she enters or attempts to enter God's rest or what meats the disciple will or won't eat chooses not to leave the common pool into which he or she was born. As Satan is the prince of this world, he is also the prince of the power of the air. As such, he is the prince over the common pool into which every disciple is spiritually born—this common pool is in spiritual Babylon, and is analogous to Ur of the Chaldeans in Abraham's day, and Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon in Ezra's day. And the disciple who will not leave this common pool becomes an active member of the synagogue of Satan ... the disciple over whom sin had no dominion, by taking sin into the person [the disciple does this by breaking commandments] transforms him or herself into a willing bondservant to sin (Rom 6:14-

16), and by extension, a voluntary member of the synagogue of Satan. So it is not true to say in every case that this self-identified Christian has never been born of Spirit. What's true is that this disciple will not be numbered among the chosen despite the disciple's vigorously objections to the contrary.

The disciple who has chosen to be special does not need to argue with the disciple who desires to remain in the common pool although out of love for the other it is difficult not to argue and thereby attempt to save the one from the fate of the "common," but these arguments will fall on deaf ears just as the words of the prophet Isaiah fell on the deaf ears of physically circumcised Israel. It is, for most newly born sons of God, scary to leave the common pool where "many" huddle together as lost sheep. There are wolves and lions in the dry arroyos and wide desert expanses separating Babylon from Jerusalem. But Christ as the good shepherd seeks those sheep who venture out alone as if they were somehow special—and the sheepfold to which He returns them is within the theological boundaries of Israel, a chosen nation and the firstborn son of God, with Christ being the First of the firstfruits. He does not return them to Babylon. Satan does that when he recovers strays that left the common pool. So those disciples who are of the synagogue of Satan have been born of Spirit and could have been sculpted into vessels for honored use if their love for God would have been strong enough for them to overcome their fear of being "different"—and observing the Sabbath in this world, consigned to disobedience by the sin of the first Adam, will indeed cause the person to be different from his or her neighbors.

Both the disciple who remains in the common pool and the one who chooses to be different were of the common lump from which the Master Potter sculpts vessels for honored and dishonorable use, with the vessel for honored use to receive glory while the vessel for dishonorable use is a vessel of wrath, prepared for destruction and endured for a season (Rom 9:20-24). And because the ones who remained in the common pool were cowards, fearful of being different, they voluntarily returned to disobedience when the choice of life or death was set before them. They would, in truth, rather *die* spiritually than be *different* from their neighbors and fellow "Christians." And Christ will honor their choice of death over obedience to Him.

Now, back to the hypothetical slave not free to keep the commandments, as a matter of conscious, the disciple who is a slave of a human master will serve this master until obedience to the new creature's heavenly master conflicts with obedience to a human master. When a decision must be made as to whether to serve man or God, the principle expressed by Peter and John, who told the council, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20), takes precedence over any twisting of the law into justification for disobedience. If this means that the disciple dies for his or her violation of the disobedient dictates of this world, the slave does no more than his or her Master did at Calvary, for the slave shows God and Christ the person's faith by his or her actions.

The born of Spirit disciple who will protect physical life by transgressing a commandment of God is a coward, and does spiritually what Esau did when he sold his birthright for a bowl of lentils—this disciple is of spiritual Esau, the hated son of promise, and this disciple by his or her actions, takes God's name in vain, not by

mispronouncing it, a foolish doctrine, but by claiming that God is this disciple's father when the disciple shows by his or her actions that the disciple does not really believe that He is.

But, the one who holds every day alike will argue, Christ at Calvary abolished the law, all of it, not just "ceremonial laws" concerning animal sacrifices.

A persistent problem has existed for centuries in Sabbatarian apologetics, where a distinction has been made between so-called moral laws [i.e., the Ten Commandments] versus ceremonial laws. There has been long term agreement that animal sacrifices were abolished at Calvary, but the sacrificial laws were labeled as ceremonial, thereby permitting them to be abolished without any harm being done to so-called "moral laws" that regulated how a disciple was to treat his or her neighbor. And the person who argues that any distinction between ceremonial and moral is not evident in Scripture is absolutely correct: no such distinction exists nor was ever intended.

Israel is not today the physically circumcised nation that has descended from the patriarch Jacob, but rather, a people who was not before a people, a people inwardly circumcised of heart by Spirit and not outwardly circumcised by human hands (1 Pet 2:9-10; Rom 2:26-29; Col 2:11). The so-called ceremonial laws that had physically circumcised Israel covering sins with the blood of bulls and goats, when moving from physical to spiritual as the nation of Israel moves, has spiritually circumcised Israel covering sins through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God—these ceremonial laws do not cease to exist, but move from animal sacrifices to the sacrifice of time spent in prayer as the so-called moral laws move from regulating the actions of hands and bodies to regulating the desires of hearts and the thoughts of minds. It is folly to claim that some of God's commandments are ceremonial and thus abolished while others are moral and thus permanent: they are all permanent, but they have moved inward from hand to heart, from a bleating lamb to the praying Lamb of God, from being written on two tablets of stone to being written on two tablets of flesh. The words of a prayer of repentance are analogous to the blood and breaths of livestock sacrificed under the ceremonial law as the sin offerings of Israel.

The above cannot be stressed too strongly: the so-called ceremonial laws that had physically circumcised Israel offering the *daily* [the morning and evening sacrifice], making sin offerings, and however many more offerings there were did not dissolve into nothingness at Calvary, but rather, remains in force after moving from physical to spiritual. Prayers are offerings. The *daily* is now the putting on of Grace, the righteousness of Christ, as a disciple would put on a garment, with this putting on coming through prayer morning and evening. Sin offerings are prayers of repentance in which Christ's sacrifice is invoked. The eating of the Passover lamb is the taking of the sacraments of bread and wine on the night that Jesus was betrayed.

If the so-called ceremonial laws were not now in effect (though having moved from physical to spiritual), there would be no reason to humble oneself and ask the Father for forgiveness in a manner analogous to an ancient Israelite offering a favored animal to God. The words of a disciple's prayer have as much "life" in the heavenly realm as the blood and breath of livestock have in this earthly realm, a realization that should cause a disciple to whine less to God, thereby keeping his or her words few—and a disciple can

begin to understand why the vain repetition of the words uttered through laps around prayer beads is especially irksome to God.

The so-called moral laws today do not permit a disciple to hate his brother without the disciple subjecting him or herself to the second death, for these moral laws no longer focus on the outward acts of the person but in the thoughts and desires of the person. Hence, really nothing has been abolished except the importance of the flesh and whether the flesh is circumcised or uncircumcised. The covenants of promise from which Gentiles were once separated by their lack of circumcision remain in effect, for these Gentiles have been brought near to these covenants by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:12-13). The commandments that required the flesh to do this or do that were abolished as far as the flesh was concerned, for they moved from outside the Israelite to inside the disciple. Both Jew and Gentile, male and female, free and slave can now be part of the holy nation of God if they are circumcised of heart, with this circumcision coming after the heart has been cleansed by faith made evident in a mental journey from disobedience to obedience—cleansed in a spiritual journey of faith that is equivalent to Abraham’s physical journey of faith from Ur of the Chaldeans to the land of Canaan.

What was abolished was the distinction made in the flesh by circumcision.

Thus, from henceforth the distinction between ceremonial and moral law should be abandoned by all teachers of Israel. Without the ceremonial law remaining binding, disciples would not need to put on Grace as if it were a garment, nor would they need to ask for repentance ... God does not need a disciple to ask for repentance in order for Him to forgive the disciple unless the ceremonial laws concerning sacrifices remain in effect. The adage *once saved, always saved* would be true—this adage, however, would make a mockery of Jesus saying, “Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His [the Son of Man’s] voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrect of judgment [condemnation]” (John 5:28-29). The person who has not yet been born of Spirit is not presently under judgment but will appear in the Great White Throne Judgment. Only those of the household of God are presently under judgment (1 Pet 4:17)—and it is those who are of the household that do good who will be resurrected to life whereas those who do evil will be resurrected to condemnation.

Because every person in this present era sins, every person falls short of the glory of God—and falling short of the glory of God will cause the flesh that is of this earthly realm to die. Understand, if a person were today without sin, the person would never die from internal causes but would live until the end of the age.

The person who has not received a second life has no other life but that which animates the flesh. This person returns to the dust of the earth. But the person who has been born of Spirit has a second life. Thus, when the tent of flesh in which this second life [which came from heaven] dwells as a sojourner waiting entrance into the heavenly city of Jerusalem dies, the flesh returns to dust but the spirit that came from God returns to God, but does not return in consciousness. Rather, it returns as if asleep—as a human being sleeps, consciously knowing nothing. And this is what is seen in the fifth seal, when the souls or spirits under the altar are told to wait a while longer (Rev 6:9-11).

What will be seen at the [second Passover](#) is liberation of Israel from indwelling sin and death by “filling” disciples with the Holy Spirit so that there is no longer room

within the tents of flesh for anything other than life. Death will not reside within the flesh; thus, barring outside sources of death, disciples will not die, a concept alien to the psyches of people today but a concept seen typologically in the long lives of those who lived before the Flood. And it is here where the hypothetical slave returns as a type of every liberated disciple once the Tribulation begins: the person who has been liberated from sin and death will have no need for Grace and will be spiritually covered by his or her own obedience to God; the Son of Man will be revealed [as in made naked], Head and Body. And the disciple who compromises with the laws of God by taking sin back inside him or herself will have committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and this blasphemy will not be forgiven. No sacrifice remains for this disciple. Therefore, if a disciple, a bondservant of Christ's, loves his or her own life more than he or she loves God, he or she will die spiritually—will be condemned to the second death. Just as the Hellenist slave would or would not die to keep the precepts of God, disciples will be forced to make this decision during the first half of the Tribulation. They will either die physically in obedience to God, or die spiritually in disobedience. And most will take the answer they seek when they pose the question about the slave: they will compromise God's law in order to save their physical lives. The question they pose presents the inner problem that exists within each of them: they love what they know more than they love what they must accept on faith.

Alas, the new creature that is a son of God is born free from bondage to disobedience—is born free to keep the commandments which, until so born, a person cannot do for he or she was consigned to disobedience (Rom 11:32). When liberated from indwelling sin and death, the fleshy tents in which these new creatures dwell will also be able to keep the commandments, and in fact must keep the commandments for no sacrifice remains for either the new creature or the tent of flesh. If the disciple then takes sin back inside him or herself, the disciple condemns him or herself to the second death.

The new creature that is born of Spirit into a tent of flesh arrives in this world in a manner analogous to a human infant being born by the water of a womb (this new creature arrives in this world when a person receives the indwelling of the Holy Spirit). And as a human infant arrives in this world nearly helpless and bawling (consider the prayers of a new convert), the new creature must grow in Grace and knowledge, with Grace being analogous to a garment that clothes a human infant as he or she grows in physical size, with this garment necessarily becoming larger as growth occurs. But spiritual growth is not time-linked as is physical growth. Similar developmental stages exist, but a disciple can pass through these stages quickly or slowly, depending upon the tests and trials that this infant son of God experiences as he matures.

No person is humanly born with indwelling spiritual life in the form of an immortal soul. Every person must receive a second birth through receipt of the Holy Spirit before the person has everlasting life dwelling within the person. Even Jesus of Nazareth visibly received the Holy Spirit when He fulfilled all righteousness (Matt 3:15-17) as a pattern for His disciples; for eternal life comes to a person as the gift of God through Christ Jesus (Rom 6:23).

Although the majority of Christendom holds the heretical dogma of human beings having immortal souls, this majority does not really believe what it claims as the truth. If

it did, it would not vigorously resist death as it does, spending life savings on medical treatments that extend life for only a few months, compromising principles to save life, going to extraordinary measures to prevent the loss of life. Fundamentalist Muslims, on the other hand, believe their version of this heretical dogma as evidenced by the numbers willing to die in *the struggle* to further the spread of Islam. As a result, the conversion of Muslims to Christendom will require a bridging belief paradigm between “humankind being born with immortal souls” and “human beings receiving spiritual life through receipt of the divine Breath of God.” This bridging paradigm will hold that human beings are physically born possessing eternal life that originally came from heaven in the form an angel—and this is the message the false prophet will successfully take to Islam and to the world throughout the first half of the seven endtime years of tribulation, but this is only another heresy that brings death to those who do not repent of it when the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh.

Returning now to the disciple who was a slave: death reigned from Adam to Moses, including over Israel in Egypt even though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob received the promise of inheriting salvation—and death has since reigned “over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam” (Rom 5:14). All have sinned. All have died. Grace does not prevent disciples from dying physically, but rather, covers their transgressions of the law in the heavenly realm. Only when sin and death no longer dwells in the fleshy members of disciples will the flesh not die physically ... a mystery of God that has been poorly understood and even more poorly taught for a very long time is the truth that when disciples are genuinely filled with the Holy Spirit, they will not die from so called natural causes. Because they remain physical beings, they can be killed by outside forces or causes so they will still die (why disciples will see the return of widespread martyrdom in the Tribulation). But if not killed from outside sources, they will live until their judgments are revealed at Christ’s return. And apparently this is what the Apostle Paul expected.

Jesus of Nazareth was not born consigned to disobedience: His Father was not the first Adam, but the *Logos*, who was *Theos*. He was born free to keep the law, and He did. In order for Him to die, He had to take on the sins of others for He had none of His own. If He had not taken on the sins of Israel He would have lived physically until He did sin, if that were possible. But without Him taking on the sins of Israel in both this earthly realm as the reality of the goat sacrificed on the altar on *Yom Kipporim*, and in the heavenly realm as the reality of the *Azazel* goat, humankind would have no covering for disobedience in this world or in heaven, but would necessarily die. The promise of inheriting eternal life from faith being counted as righteousness required that Christ die as Israel’s sacrifice; the promise of receiving eternal life prior to demonstrated obedience requires that Christ covers the disciple’s disobedience in the heavenly realm with the garment of His righteousness.

Israel in Egypt, from the time Joseph was first sold into slavery until Moses, was a nation of bondservants to Pharaoh, and while in Egypt, Israel apparently did not keep the Sabbath, nor was free to keep the Sabbath. But Israel’s transgressions of the Sabbath were covered by the nation being slaves to Pharaoh thereby giving to the Egyptian king responsibility for Israel’s sins. But this is not the case for any disciple—all disciples are born free to keep the commandments even if the flesh is in bondage to a human master

as well as to disobedience. Obedience to God, although difficult to do, becomes a matter of the mind (into which has been placed the law of God) overcoming the desires of the flesh, including the desire to live physically ... no person can serve two masters: a disciple can either serve God or sin, and the Father was well aware of the person's plight before he drew and called the person unto repentance. It might well be that God has more confidence in the person serving Him than the person does when newly born of Spirit.

There are more excuses for remaining in disobedience than there are persons called to repentance, but excuses are only an acknowledgment of the flesh's weakness and the mind's immaturity. A son of God who leaves disobedience for the slums of sin squanders his only chance for salvation—his life may be filled with praise music, but his story is a tragedy of the highest order. His strength becomes his undoing, for his desire to serve Jesus on his terms requires a stiff neck and a hard heart and an unwillingness to leave the “many” that are called but not chosen because of a covenant made with the prince of this world, a covenant that would have a slave obey his master in this world rather than God.

\*

"Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved."

\* \* \* \* \*