

Hy 23:1,2,3,4
 Hy 2
 Baptism: Ps 105:3 – Aiden vanKammen
 Ps 50:1,8,11
 Ps 119:1,3
 Ps 23:1; Hy 23:5,6
 Colossians 1:9-23
 Romans 6:15-23
 LD 13

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Beloved Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ!

May a person redeemed by the blood of Christ live in sin? As an example, may a redeemed sinner let his body and mind be controlled by alcohol or narcotic drugs, be addicted to pornography, etc?

The question is important. It's important because we say of ourselves that *we* are redeemed from Satan's power through Jesus' blood. Yet in our town are persons who give their minds and bodies –time and again again– to the control of alcohol or drugs – and we're naïve to think that such conduct does not happen in the church. The question is important because our country embraces a culture that disregards God at best and blasphemes Him at worst – and yet countless Christians *appreciate* the songs and movies of our land. The question is important because the people of our nation (on average) use their wealth to satisfy selves – and amongst those who confess that Christ is Lord one sees something of the same conduct, spending money freely, for own pleasure, instead of considering how God would have the money be used in His kingdom. Hence my question: may a person redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ live in sin?

The church has learned from the Word of God that this may not be so. It's of this reality that we make confession in Lord's Day 13. We are set free from bondage to Satan *not* so that we might be free to partake of some morsels Satan offers us; we rather are set free from bondage to Satan so that in turn we might become "slaves of God". And slaves of God are Jesus' property, and hence take instructions from their Owner alone. That in turn makes us persons of prayer, persons always seeking from their Lord and Master what His will for them is.

I summarise the sermon with this theme:

SINNERS BOUGHT BY JESUS' BLOOD ARE SLAVES OF GOD.

1. Who are bought
2. Who is our Owner
3. What consequence follows for us

1. Who are bought

It pleased the Lord in the beginning to establish with the entire human race God's covenant of grace. In that covenant of grace, our parents Adam and Eve lived in blessed communion with God. This communion was so good that God Himself said of it too that it was "very good".

At the instigation of the devil we deserted God and joined Satan. So much was this act on our part an offence to God that He pronounced His curse upon us; all who would sin (and we all did) would *die*. That's to say: we'd become dead in sin, slaves to sin. That's the phrase Paul uses in his letter to the Romans; he speaks in Rom 6:17 of being "slaves to sin"

(cf vs 20). And a slave, we need to remember, has no freedom, he is not his own possession, he is owned by his master and therefore must do as he's told. This is God's punishment on our sin of the beginning; we were handed over to the devil, became his property, made slaves of Satan. And our hearts are so inclined to evil that we readily do what this evil master would have us do. Truly, "slaves to sin".

Here is a thought, congregation, we need to have very straight in our minds. We had it so good in Paradise. But *deliberately, in wilful disobedience*, we thumbed our noses at God, chose against Him in favour of Satan. On that score alone, there's surely nothing in us that attracts God to us, that moves Him to deliver us from our bondage to Satan.

Further, Satan is a cruel, an evil Master. The men of Israel in Egypt had to slave from dawn till dark, always with the whip of their taskmasters threatening them. When finally they dragged their dog-tired bodies home in the evening, and then found out that during the day a son had been born at home, it was their duty before Pharaoh to carry the infant to the Nile to drown.... Their lives were bitter with hard bondage (Ex 1:14). That cruelty, that oppression, that downtrodden feeling: that's a picture of how the devil deals with those in his camp. He's an evil master, cruel beyond description – whether people realise it or not.

Such downtrodden people invariably have the downtrodden look. Slaves don't put their shoulders back, don't carry themselves with an air of pride. They're by definition a broken people, unattractive, numb to their true condition. Such was Israel in Egypt. Such were you and I. Slaves of Satan, slaves of sin, and the cruelty of our evil master was written all over us. Look at some of the faces in today's shopping centers, and you see the same sense of hopelessness and listlessness written over them. On this score too, there was nothing in us, nothing at all, that attracted God to us, that moved Him to deliver us from the power of the devil.

In light of that unworthiness, congregation, the price paid for our redemption is astounding. One natural Son God has, His "only-begotten". This Son ransomed us –how?– not with the currency of the market place, but with His "precious blood" (I Pet 1:19). On Calvary He laid down His life, shed His blood to wash our sins away, and in so doing satisfy the justice of God. That act of redemption cost Him His life, but that's what He was willing to pay to rescue us from Satan's bondage. In the words of Colossians 1:

"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13f).

What, then, is the conclusion of our first point: who are bought? The persons bought, congregation, are *down-and-outers*, are persons with nothing attractive to them. The very fact, then, that we can speak today about being bought, about being set free from the power of the devil, about being delivered from our slavery, points up the wonderful marvels of God's immeasurable grace. That the price to be paid for the redemption of such people had to be so high: that points up still more how marvellous is this grace of holy God. That He should go so far to rescue the unworthy is expression of His infinite compassion, His boundless mercy! And therefore it's reason to praise this God with adoration unending.

The need for that adoration is pointed up more when we consider our second point:

2. Who is our Owner

In our LD, we refer to the one who bought us as "our Lord". Why do we call Him 'Lord'? What is a 'lord'?

A 'lord', we need to know, is an *owner*, a *master*. A lord can do with his property whatever he pleases. History knows of instances where lords owned slaves –think only of

Potiphar– owned them to the extent that the lord could do with his slave whatever he wills – even sell the slave, whether married or not. That is a lord; he is master of his property, yes, the slave is his property; the lord is the slave’s owner.

At the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven, God Almighty gave to Jesus a throne over all the universe. It’s what Jesus said to His disciples: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Mt 28:18). So Peter on the day of Pentecost could say this of Jesus:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

Notice that: by His triumph on the cross over the devil and his demons, Jesus is made the “Lord”, that is, the Owner of all, the Master of all. Paul says it like this:

“...God ... has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9ff).

See there what it means that Jesus is ‘Lord’!

In the passage we read from Colossians 1, the apostle Paul draws out just how extensive the domain of this Lord actually is. The Lord of whom the passage speaks is the only Son of God, “the firstborn of all creation” (vs 15). That’s to say: Jesus Christ has *inherited* the kingdom of His Father as Isaac –Abraham’s first-born– inherited the possessions of his father. As first-born all in this world lies at his feet, all is His possession – whether things in heaven or on earth, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. Man and beast, demons and angels, rocks and clouds: all are His property, He is Master of all. This Lord, then, is no small lord, is not just owner of 50 hectares, 18 head of cattle and 2 slaves; this Lord is Lord of lords, is Master of the Universe, Owner of all that exists in heaven and earth. God has put all things under His feet so that every creature in heaven above and on the earth beneath and in the waters under the earth are subject to Him. He is what the Bible calls the “Lord of glory” (I Cor 2:8; James 2:1).

Of this exalted Christ, my brothers and sisters, we confess that He is “*our Lord*”. That’s to say: we acknowledge that we are property of this Lord of lords. In the words of our Lord’s Day: “He has ransomed us ... to make us His own *possession*.” He *owns* us as I *own* my shoes.

This is Paul’s point in Rom 6. Paul spoke in that passage of being “slaves to sin” (vs 17, 20). But, he continued, you’ve been set free from your slavery to sin. *We* like to think that being set free means that we are now free to do our own thing; we’re our own boss. But the apostle would correct us. We’re set free from slavery to sin, yes, and what have we become? Says Paul: we’ve become ... slaves! That’s vs 22: “But now that you have been set free from sin, and have become slaves to God...” That’s it, brothers and sisters: we have been *purchased* so that we are no longer the property of our first owner –we are set free from his cruel tyranny– and in the process we receive a *new Owner* so that we are *slaves to Christ*. I remind you here of the terms used in Lord’s Day 1. In that Lord’s Day we say:

“I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood and set me free from all the power of the devil.”

Notice the language of possession in that Lord’s Day. “I am not my own,” we say. My own what? Implicit in Lord’s Day 1 is the word ‘property’. “I am not my own property”; I do not possess me, I do not own me. What then? I “belong with body and soul ... to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.” The word ‘belong’ is again vocabulary of *ownership*. As my shoes

belong to me, so I *belong* to Jesus Christ. He owns me, I am His property. Let no one, then, think that Christ's redeeming work in freeing us from Satan's bondage means that we are free, free as in: we are now our own, and hence we can do our own thing. That simply is not true. You are not your own; you were bought with a price in order to become the personal property of Jesus Christ, Lord of lords, King of kings. In the words of Romans 14: "whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (vs 8).

Let this be fixed in our minds, congregation: there is no such thing as a neutral position. One is *either* the property of the devil *or* one is the property of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no in-between. And Yes, that means too that ultimately one is never one's own boss. The fact of the matter is that everyone is a slave either of Jesus Christ or of the devil. Through our fall into sin we all joined the devil and made ourselves his property – and it's cruelty to be a slave of the devil. The good news is that God sent His Son to ransom from Satan's clutches all those chosen to life and make them His own possession – and it's a privilege to be a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. You can refuse to accept the notion that you're somebody's slave, but that doesn't change the facts any; it simply means that you've fallen for the deceit of the liar from the beginning.

No, brothers and sisters, you are either slaves of sin and Satan or slaves of God in Jesus Christ. And in the covenant God made with you so long ago, God promised to be *your* God, to ransom you from Satan's bondage through the blood of Jesus Christ, to dwell in you through His Holy Spirit. He has promised, then, to include you among His blessed slaves. And since He does not change, you may know yourself in fact to be a slave of Jesus Christ; God does not lie.

3. What Consequence follows for us.

What consequences follow, now, for the bought? I draw out with you two consequences. The first relates to the Owner's responsibility to His possessions. In other words, what kind of Master have we? Joseph was sold in Egypt to Potiphar, who first raised Joseph to great heights in his house, then at a whim locked him in prison. Is our new Master like that? Israel came to Egypt at the time of the famine, and received a red carpet treatment, the best land was for them. But in the course of years the attitude of the Pharaoh changed, so that the Israelites had to slave from dawn till dusk, and then drown their newborn sons. Can our Lord change like the Pharaohs? Those who fall into the hands of the devil initially perceive their master to be gentle, soothing, providing pleasures. But in the course of time those ensnared to idolatry come to taste the vanity of false religions; there is no comfort, no perspective, no hope. And in the course of time those who thought that the approval of their peers was so great, and the taste of the bottle so exhilarating, and the kick of the drug so stimulating, come to realise that addiction to alcohol and enslavement to drugs is cruel, so cruel. And so, for that matter, is one's hunger for public approval. Is our Lord like that? Would He give us a pleasant sensation today, only to drop us tomorrow into pits of agony? Our Owner is Master of the Universe, can do with us what He wants. Well now, are we safe with Him? Will He care well for us?

This, now, *beloved of the Lord*, is His good news: He has delivered us *from a cruel master*, so that we might become the property of a *Lord who so loves us*, yes loves us so much *that He laid down His life for us!* That is the nature of our Lord: what drives Him is not cruelty, but *love*. We are in no danger, then, of being imprisoned at a whim, in no danger of finding ourselves tomorrow weighed down by impossible burdens He impulsively lays on us, at no risk of finding ourselves enslaved to cruel, life-draining evils. You and I are the property of a Master who loves, and therefore He protects and tends His property with gentle care. Here is the material of Ps 23:

“The Lord is my Shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters....”

And again, let’s make no mistake: this loving Lord is almighty to save. If He’s Lord of the universe, with all creatures at His feet, then no creature can harm me without His will; yes, then He is in a position to mobilise anything and everything –including 12 legions of angels– to secure my protection and well-being. Truly, beloved of the *Lord*, there is such wealth, such comfort in the confession that Jesus Christ is “our Lord”!

There is a second consequence that needs to be drawn out. I have a loving Owner in whose hands I am completely safe. In His love and care for me, this Master gives to me particular instructions, commands I’m to carry out for His glory and for my good. This, then, is the second consequence: that I *obey* this Lord.

This is again the instruction of the apostle in Colossians 1. For he records in vs 9 that he prays for the saints of Colossae that they may be filled with the knowledge of Christ’s will. And why should they be filled with the knowledge of Christ’s will? Vs 10: “that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him.” The point here is that if the ascended Christ is in fact ‘Lord’, then there is a particular way for His people to ‘walk’, to live. His people are owned by the Lord, and therefore subject to His commands. To “walk worthy of the Lord” is then a life of *obedience*, a life of *submission* to this Lord, a life of *acknowledging* that He is your Lord. It’s only the person on top of the ladder who determines His own activities, but once one is *under* another, once one is *slave* to another, one needs to act as a slave, one needs to *do what he is told to do*.

And “our Lord” has given us instructions as to what to do. He is Lord of *all*, and therefore *there is not a square inch of life of which Christ does not say ‘Mine’*. He is Lord of all, and that is why His Word is a guide for our behaviour *in every area of life*. Society may suggest that the law of the land has no right to reach into our bedrooms, but the law of Lord of lords most certainly does. Society may have us think that what we do in the shop with the boys after work is finished on Friday afternoon is simply up to us, but “our Lord” would have us know that He wants to be acknowledged as Master in the workshop too on Friday afternoon also – and that’s to say nothing of Saturday nights. Society may teach us that we have individual rights, that we can make certain decisions fully on our own, but the law of the Lord of lords has no room for individual rights; that law would have each of us to know ourselves slaves, owned by Another.

Hence the thought that’s to be on our minds always is not ‘what would I like?’, but the thought that’s always to be there is this: ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Whether I’m choosing what job to do next or deciding what to do on Saturday evening, the question needs to be in my mind: ‘Lord, what do you want me to do? Shall I do this job or that one, shall I go to the soccer finals or watch a movie, shall I drink this bottle of beer or not: Lord, what do you want me to do?’

It’s said that Christians are to be people of prayer, and so it is. But there, brothers and sisters, is the prayer that is daily to be on our lips, Yes, to be on our lips moment by moment: ‘Lord, what do you want of me? Are You pleased if I do this, is it Your will that I do that?’ Slaves of a Master need to obey their Owner. Slaves we are, and so seeking His will and then doing it is imperative for us.

And the laws of your Owner, beloved, are not hard, nor are they restrictive or cruel. You may think they are, but our perceptions –tainted as they are by the fall into sin– do not determine realities. The laws of your Master are gentle, are helpful, are given in love and directed to our well-being.

I realise: something in us bucks against the notion that we're slaves, bucks against the notion too that the laws of our Owner –they're given to us in the Bible– are in fact good for us. But this is faith, that we accept what God says. And God *says* we are slaves, and He *says* that His laws are good for us. Let us then not be wise in our own eyes, and go our own way; let's listen with humility to Him whose possession we are.

What, now, congregation, is the conclusion of the matter? I put to you again the question of the beginning. Can a person redeemed by Jesus' blood live in sin? I'll ask the question differently. *Can a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ listen submissively to instructions from the devil?* Once more, may a person who disobeys God's commands and obeys Satan's wishes consider himself the property of Jesus Christ? The answer jumps at us: a slave of Jesus Christ may not listen submissively to the instructions of the devil. In fact, one who disobeys God and obeys Satan's wishes *has run away from his Lord Jesus Christ, has snuck back to His old master the devil.* That's plain enough.

Why is it, then, dear brothers and sisters, that in this congregation are persons who freely and regularly *disobey* the instructions of the Lord God, and *obey* the wishes of the evil one? And say not that it does not happen. Too many deliberately drink enough alcohol to affect the mind – and that is sin, and you can know it is sin. Too many watch movies –be it on TV or on computers or in the theatre– which blaspheme God's name or display sexual sins or promote a world-view contrary to Christ's Lordship, and quite enjoy such movies too. Too many have a gripe with a brother and do nothing about it – though the Lord has told us to do something about it, told us what to do about it too. Too many spend the pay cheque as if the money were our own and not the property of the Lord of lords. We know these things are sin, for we're not strangers to the Bible.

But you see the contradiction, then, brothers and sisters, is it not? Sunday by Sunday we confess that Jesus Christ is "our Lord". And that simply means that every moment of our existence that prayer needs to be on our lips, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" It simply means that always, always we submit ourselves to the instructions of "our Lord", that always, always we resist the suggestions the old master whispers into our ears. 'Lord, do you want me to listen when your name is taken in vain? Lord, do you want me to spend my income on my pleasures, or are there needs in your kingdom that I should support? Lord, do you want me to spend the evening out in the shop, or at home with the wife and children? *Lord, what is your will??*

If you will confess, congregation, that He is your Lord, then "walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him" (Colossians 1:10). Remember Paul's word to the Romans: "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" (Rom 6:16).

May a person redeemed by the blood of Christ live in sin? It is not for obedience to Satan that Jesus Christ has freed you from Satan's bondage.