

Remaining Free

David C. Grabbe

Given 04-Apr-26; Sermon #1867

In Revelation 18, the apostle John describes his vision of end-time Babylon. In his depiction, John recounts all the things Babylon merchandises in, such as gold, silver, and finery of every kind, because of Babylon's addiction to comfort and luxury. And at the end of his list, John notes that Babylon trades in "the bodies and souls of men" (Revelation 18:13).

What is curious is that it is not just bodies that are part of Babylon's commerce, but also souls. The soul is the innermost, non-material part of a person. The Greek word is *psuche*, and it often indicates the heart. This is a significant aspect of what end-time Babylon trades in before her fall. She owns the souls of people. In other words, Babylon enslaves the heart.

This is highly relevant to us right now for a couple of reasons. One is that we certainly appear to be living in the general time-period of John's vision, when Babylon is constantly pulling at us. In this regard, John heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."

A second reason we began with these thoughts is that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a memorial of God's deliverance, both anciently and personally. He has delivered us from the present, evil age, and from the power of darkness. Yet part of the reason we remember what we have been delivered from is to ensure that we do not become enslaved again. So, today we will be exploring how to remain free, so God's deliverance will not be in vain.

We will begin with some of the basic instructions for this feast, found in Exodus 13:

Exodus 13:3 And Moses said to the people: "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by

strength of hand the LORD brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten.

Exodus 13:7-9 Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, ‘This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.’ It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD’s law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.

This passage teaches that the primary reason for eating unleavened bread and for the feast in general is to remember God’s deliverance. If we were to gather all the instructions, we would find that there are eight references to God’s deliverance from bondage and the environment of sin as the reason for this feast.

We are beginning here to make sure we have the right footing for the rest of the sermon. We must understand that our responsibilities are not the main focus of this feast. The main focus is Jesus Christ, who delivered us and whose life perfectly demonstrated the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Our responsibilities are what we do because of what He has done for us. Our deep gratitude for Christ’s deliverance should motivate us to ensure that we do not become enslaved again, thus despising His gift.

There are a couple of phrases and ideas to take note of in this passage. The first is in verse 3, which mentions the house of bondage. The second is in verse 9, which teaches that the eating of unleavened bread and the avoidance of leavening are a sign and a memorial so that God’s law (meaning His instruction) may be in our mouths or on our lips.

We will explore the usage of the phrase, “house of bondage,” first. It is used 13 times, and always in relation to Egypt. You might recall that in Scripture, 13 is the number of rebellion. In each place the phrase “house of bondage” is used, there is a subtle subtext of rebellion, either because the Israelites have rebelled or else God is warning them not to rebel.

The phrase “house of bondage” adds significant gravity in the places it is used. It reminds the audience what God delivered Israel from (and we have to include ourselves in that as well), and it also implicitly warns that if God is ignored, a return to bondage lies ahead.

The way the phrase is used is similar to Christ’s statement after He delivered a man from affliction. He said, “Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.” Likewise, God’s use of the phrase, “house of bondage,” reminds us of the past but also subtly warns that the past could become prologue. That is, if there is rebellion, the house of bondage becomes the future, and thus, a worse thing comes upon us.

Please turn with me to Exodus 20, where we find the “house of bondage” used again:

Exodus 20:1-6 And God spoke all these words, saying: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. “You shall have no other gods before Me. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

It is common to skip over the preamble to the Ten Commandments, but notice how God introduces His law. He begins with His authority and the fact that He brought Israel out of the house of bondage. Thus, He brings to mind His deliverance, and then states His commands. The unstated implication is that the commands are critical to remaining free. This is backed up by James, who twice refers to God’s law as “the law of liberty” (James 1:25; 2:12). Contrary to common misunderstanding, God’s law is not what puts us into bondage. We were in bondage, and God delivered us, and He gives His law to help us remain free. God’s law tells us what sin is, which is a blessing because sin is what enslaves. God’s law teaches us how to keep from being brought back into bondage.

Notice that God begins with commands against idolatry. His opening statement to the nation is to forbid worshiping any other god, or else worshiping the true God in a way other than how He commands, and specifically with physical representations. Those two commands are foundational to remaining free.

Please turn with me Deuteronomy 5. As we know, God gave the Ten Commandments a second time through Moses, just before Israel entered the Promised Land. One reason was that a new generation had arisen that needed the Ten Commandments reiterated as a foundation for them. Another reason was that the circumstances would be slightly different in the land, and thus, God's commands needed additional clarity. It does not mean that one version is more important than the other—they work together to show God's intent.

But what is noteworthy is that, even though there are slight variations in wording for some of the commandments, God uses the exact same preamble for both versions. Notice Deuteronomy 5:6: "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

This preamble cannot be separated from the Ten Commandments. It sets the stage by reminding God's people of what He has done for them, and thus, their obligation to Him to remain His people, and therefore, to remain free.

Now, notice verse 15, which is part of the Fourth Commandment:

Deuteronomy 5:15 And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Even though all the Commandments were given in the context of remembering God's deliverance, He draws attention to it again within the Fourth Commandment. God directly connects the obligation to keep the Sabbath with His deliverance. The unstated implication is that the Sabbath, too, is a foundational part of not becoming re-enslaved.

While that is not directly stated here, God elsewhere shows that connection between proper Sabbath-keeping and freedom. Israel became re-enslaved

because of her idolatry and Sabbath-breaking. The cause-and-effect linkage is obvious, if one is willing to see it. Remember, the God who instituted the Sabbath as an everlasting covenant is the same One who later said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.”

Just to summarize what we have seen, God delivers His people, and He reveals to them the way of life that will keep them from returning to slavery. That way is the worship of the true God as He specifies, meaning without any additions or deletions. A major part of that worship is the seventh-day Sabbath, as well as the annual Sabbaths, which remind us of His works, including deliverance. We humans are forgetful, fickle, changeable, and subject to drifting, deception, and losing spiritual focus, and so God gives us these things to help us stay on the narrow road that leads to life.

We will go through a few more areas where God employs the phrase, “house of bondage,” as a warning against being enslaved again. The next one is in Deuteronomy 8:

Deuteronomy 8:11-14 “Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;

There is a similar passage in Deuteronomy 6:10-12, which also warns against forgetting God as one’s life improves on a material level, and thus, when there appears to be less of a need to depend on Him. When our physical needs are less pressing, it is easy to forget about the Supplier of our needs. It is easy to forget where we came from. It is not a coincidence that as the prosperity and standard of living in the Israelitish nations have increased that God has been increasingly forgotten, just as these passages warn.

Notice, though, that the warning is not that those who have been delivered would forget that God exists. That is not in view here. One’s worldview can

retain God as the Creator and Savior, and yet He can still be forgotten in the way one conducts one's life. We see this in verse 11 with the two-letter word "by." We forget God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes.

Again, this is what we see in the Israelitish nations. Income, material goods, and comfort are increasing, and Jesus is named and claimed by cultural Christianity, but in practical fact He is forgotten because His commandments, judgments, and statutes are ignored. It is evident that the people do not fear Him and do not feel the tremendous gravity and awe of the great Creator. In everyday practice, He is forgotten. Remember, our God is not what we say we worship, but what we serve. Our God is that to which we give our life.

For the true God to be our God puts us under obligation to live His way. If we deviate from that way, then, as He defines it here, we have forgotten Him. And the awful irony is that people have said they feel "free" when they reject God's law. They no longer feel constrained to live His way. But what that means is that He really isn't their God. If His instructions feel like a burden, it indicates the heart is inclined to a different god.

We can connect this principle with that second phrase we took note of in Exodus 13 about having God's law in our mouth through eating unleavened bread and avoiding leavening. God intends for our physical practice for this feast to bring His instructions to our minds and to our conversations. This feast reminds us of what we have been delivered from, but also of the way of life that guards against being enslaved again.

We know that "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." Our words reveal what fills our minds and what is important to us. Think of this in terms of whom or what we quote. If we think highly of a certain movie, songwriter, author, podcaster, or some public figure, their words and ideas tend to become lodged in our minds. As circumstances or conversations arise that relate, we then quote what we have taken in. This is simply how our minds work. And thus, the content of our speech reveals what has been stored in our hearts or minds.

Now, if we fully believe that God’s instructions are words to live by, then they will be in our mouths more than the wisdom of men. Think about how Christ responded when He was tempted by Satan. With each test, His response began with, “It is written...,” followed by a quote from Deuteronomy—from the law. His law was in His mouth as an immediate answer to what was set before Him.

This is not to suggest that we cannot quote anything but Scripture. In Athens, Paul quoted Greek poet/philosophers because his unconverted audience could relate to what those authors had said. Even so, the wisdom of mankind is, by definition, a mixture of good and evil at best. But the very best guide for life is the Book in front of you. It contains the words of life. They proclaim the Truth that sets us free and keeps us free. Thus, storing God’s words in our hearts, and abiding in them, leads to greater freedom.

Please turn to Deuteronomy 13, where there are more mentions of the “house of bondage”:

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 “If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.

In verses 5 and 10, God adds emphasis by referring to “the house of bondage” to remind His people of their former lack of freedom. Reading

between the lines, these passages imply that failing to heed this warning will result in a return to slavery, because serving any god but the true God is slavery.

Verses 1-5 warn against allowing a prophet to influence us to serve a different god. But this goes a step further, because notice that in verse 5 it says, “to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk.” That includes serving the true God in a way other than how He instructs. God gives a specific way, and that way is defined by His commands, His judgments, and His statutes. So, just saying the Creator is our God, or that Jesus is Lord, or Christ is King, is meaningless if we do not also walk in the way He says to walk, without adding to it or subtracting from it. That’s the proof that He is our God and that we love Him—that we not only honor Him with our lips but that we conform our lives to every word that proceeds from His mouth.

It may be difficult to see how this passage applies to us today, because pretty much anyone who claims the title of prophet is regarded with suspicion. Likewise, if someone takes his dreams too seriously, we tend to slowly back away. But when we understand the essence of the warning here, it turns out this scenario is not so far-fetched.

First, a prophet does not have to wear a robe and sport a long beard. In the broadest sense, a prophet is a spokesman or a representative of some kind. The word means, “one who speaks for another.”

Second, while the term “wonder” indicates something miraculous, the word “sign” does not have to depict anything supernatural at all. It can mean a mark, or more broadly, an indicator. It can mean some sort of proof, or something that can be observed, regardless of whether it involves the supernatural.

Third, remember that God’s concern is not only Who is worshiped, but also how the worship takes place, meaning whether it is in alignment with the way in God commands us to walk.

Putting this together, this passage not only warns against something as obvious as someone calling fire down from heaven, like the False Prophet of

Revelation, but in principle, it covers scenarios that are much more subtle and commonplace.

Consider, for example, a public personality as the spokesman here. He could be a podcaster, a mega-church pastor, or a commentator of some kind, maybe of the “cultural Christian” variety. He does not have to perform miracles, but instead offers proof in other ways that he should be listened to. Thinking of a mega-church pastor, maybe it is his material success that allows him to say, “Trust me. God has favored me. Listen to what I am telling you.” Maybe the sign is how joyful and full of life he appears on camera—surely that is evidence of God’s gifting and work through him.

But regardless of how the spokesman establishes his credibility, and no matter how attractive his message is, if he encourages people to walk contrary to God’s way, he qualifies as a false prophet. In Isaiah 8:20, God says, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

The critical part is that we must be so knowledgeable of God’s way—the way He instructs us to walk—that we will recognize a counterfeit and not be turned aside, no matter who is promoting it. Knowing God’s way comes from personal study and practice. Thus, we must know God’s way intimately to be able to discern if someone is speaking in alignment with it.

Notice that God commands the death penalty here. Now, I am not advocating stoning your local mega-church pastor—let me be clear on that. God has not given the church the same civil authority that He gave to the physical nation, and He certainly has not given that authority to church members. But the death penalty here shows that God is deadly serious, not just about which God is promoted, but also whether the message lines up with the way in which God commands us to walk.

Proverbs 14:7 tells us what we can do in such a case—it says, “Go from the presence of a foolish man, when you do not perceive in him the lips of knowledge.”

Biblically, a fool is not someone of low human intelligence, but someone who makes ungodly choices. A man could be wicked smart, as they say, but

if he walks contrary to God's way, God classifies him as a fool. So, Proverbs 14 says to leave the presence of a fool when we perceive he does not have true knowledge. When we add in God's prescription that a false prophet be put to death, even though we don't carry that out, we can reckon that prophet as dead to us. There is no point in paying him any heed.

Colossians 2:8 gives us a New Testament parallel. It says, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world [a reference to demons], and not according to Christ." What is interesting is that the Greek word translated "cheat" more literally means, "take you away captive." The danger is spiritual captivity—being taken back to the house of bondage. That warning identifies philosophy, deception, and the traditions of men as how those once delivered can be re-enslaved. It is a serious warning.

Just to reemphasize our focus here, this is all in the context of having been delivered by God, and striving to remain free of spiritual slavery. The upshot of Deuteronomy 13 is to very carefully evaluate the voices and the teachers and the teaching that we allow into our lives that could undermine the way of God and lead us back into the house of bondage.

Remember, a major part of this feast is what we feed ourselves with and what we avoid. However, the spiritual application of that is far more important than the physical one. The weightier matter here is what we feed our minds with, as well as what we protect our minds from, while also not leaving the physical practice undone. In other words, even if we eat unleavened bread each day (as commanded) and avoid all leavening, if we are not dedicated to ingesting truth each day, but feed our minds with things that are corrupt, this feast will leave us unchanged. Scanning labels for leavening is easy. Evaluating what items in our watchlists or feeds contain corruption takes a bit more effort. But what is harder still is identifying and removing the corruption in our own hearts. God's solution is to prioritize the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. When we fill our hearts with that, there is not much room for other things.

We're going to change directions slightly as we continue to think about freedom and what we can do to maintain it after we have been delivered by God. Please turn to Matthew 13:

Matthew 13:33 Another parable He spoke to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.”

This parable can be challenging to understand because Jesus says “the kingdom of heaven is like leaven.” In Scripture, leaven is consistently used to represent corruption of some kind. God is adamant that nothing with leaven is allowed on His altar, symbolizing His table (Leviticus 2:11).

On the other hand, Paul tells the members at Corinth, who were carnal and spiritually immature, that they “truly are unleavened” (I Corinthians 5:7). That’s interesting, because here was all manner of corruption in the members, and yet because they were in Christ, they had a state of being unleavened imputed to them. Paul was basically telling them, “God considers you to be unleavened—now, start acting like it.” Thus, because the church consists of those who are in Christ, and Christ is unleavened, the church can never be “all leavened,” even though there certainly can be corruption within it because of carnality.

As you can see, this parable sets up an apparent contradiction, because leaven is a symbol of corruption, and the church is deemed unleavened because of Christ, and yet here Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like leaven.

There is a way to understand this parable that allows the symbols to all work together. That is, in a couple of places, the phrase “kingdom of God” or “of heaven” is used to refer to the physical nation. The nation was a kingdom that had its origin in heaven and was still under heaven’s dominion. This is seen most clearly in Matthew 21:43, where Jesus tells the chief priests and the elders that the kingdom of God was going to be taken from them and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. Since the kingdom could be taken from them, as Jesus said, then the kingdom was under their care. They represented the kingdom. But, because of their rejection of Him, the kingdom would be given to a better, spiritual nation.

When we plug that meaning of the kingdom into the parable of the leaven, the parable takes on a different shape altogether. That parable was spoken to

the multitudes, not to the disciples. In fact, the first four parables in the chapter were spoken to the nation. You can see that in verses 1-2, as well as verse 34. He was speaking to the physical nation as the kingdom, and He warned about corruption overtaking it.

The three measures of meal refer to the meeting between God, Abraham, and Sarah in Genesis 18:6, when Abraham told Sarah to “make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes” as part of the meal with the pre-incarnate Christ. That was when God promised Abraham and Sarah a son, a true heir. So, that meal, centered around the three measures of grain, is symbolic of the fellowship between God and the family of Abraham.

But in time, something happened to the fellowship between God and the expanding house of Abraham: That kingdom became "all leavened." The covenantal relationship between God and Abraham's family completely degenerated, in large part because Israel “took” of corrupted belief systems from the nations around her and introduced that leaven into her relationship with God.

Thus, the religious atmosphere that opposed the Son of God was a poisonous blend of what God had revealed through Moses, plus beliefs and practices picked up during the Babylonian captivity, as well as a Hellenistic influence. This unholy mixture had hardened into traditions, handed down from previous generations, and called Judaism. The major problem within the kingdom at Christ's time was not the graven images like before the captivity, but the idolatry of false beliefs. Jesus did not contend with pagan temples, but with hearts hardened in doctrines and practices that kept them blind to the Truth.

When we understand the principles, we can see that leavening can be a symbol of slavery, just as, on the flipside, unleavened bread is a symbol of deliverance from the house of bondage. At the time of Christ, the nation had become “all leavened.” It was filled with corrupted teachings, traditions, and practices. And what is significant is that even as the people of Judea were in bondage in numerous ways, they could not even see it. They had become enslaved, but they believed they were free.

They may not have been worshiping Baal or Ashtoreth or Zeus, but neither were they worshiping the God of their fathers in the way which He had commanded them to walk. The result was that when the God of their fathers walked among them, they could not recognize Him. He did not fit with their concept of the divine because their concept was corrupted. Physically, they were in the Land of Promise, but spiritually, they were in the house of bondage. We need to consider if this could apply to us as well—believing we are free while being spiritually enslaved.

Please turn with me to John 8:

John 8:31-36 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free?’” Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

Verse 31 reiterates what we have already seen: Living by God’s word is the key to remaining God’s people. If we are His people, we will walk in His way, which He alone defines. That should be obvious, but nominal Christianity has a false concept of freedom. It believes it has been delivered from God’s commands. Instead, it says it walks in love, not understanding that God’s instructions define what love is. Progressives say that if two people of the same sex love each other, they can marry. They say a woman should love herself and abort if a pregnancy is unwanted. God’s Word defines love very differently.

Yet notice that Jesus links abiding in His word—every word of God—with knowing the truth and becoming free. God’s way leads to freedom, but it is freedom as God defines it, not as humanity defines it. While the carnal mind strives to be free of God’s law (Romans 8:7), true freedom lies in worshiping

the true God in the way He instructs. That is how we remain free from bondage to this world, to its ruler, and to sin itself. Being free of those things and being one with God is true freedom.

Verse 32 mentions knowing the truth as a result of abiding in God's word, and that leads to the truth making us free. The Greek word under truth is *alethia* (*Strong's #225*). It signifies the essence or the reality of a thing, which goes beyond just having facts. One may have the facts about an event, but that isn't going to make one free. The spiritual reality that Christ is talking about is understood through living His way, as He says, but ultimately, it is talking about knowing Him. He says in John 14:6 that He is the way, the truth, and the life.

So, it is not some sort of abstract, Zen enlightenment we should seek in order to be free, but rather the divine embodiment of what is real, which is Christ. This is why, in verse 36, He says that if the Son makes us free, we will have true freedom. The truth that leads to freedom, and which keeps us from returning to the house of bondage, comes from and through the Son. Seeking truth and seeking spiritual freedom means seeking Him.

If we want to be free from spiritual slavery, we must go to Him. He is the one who sets free, just as He did with ancient Israel. Remember, He is the focus of this feast. But if there is trouble in that relationship, we cannot expect to be free. We are in danger of becoming enslaved, if we are not already.

What the Jews say in verse 33, on the surface, appears to be one of the most absurd statements recorded in the Bible. They had been enslaved by the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and were, at that time, under the thumb of the Romans. It seems bizarre that they could say this with a straight face.

Now, it is possible they were simply lying for the sake of not losing this debate. We see that happen today—someone will straight up lie during an argument, or even just a conversation, because of how he wants to be perceived. Appearance means more to him than truth—than reality.

Maybe that was the case here. However, it is also possible that the Jews meant something different than the way it comes through in this translation. The word translated “bondage” means slavery or service. What is important, though, is that the slavery or service described by this word can either be voluntary or involuntary. So, even though the Jews had been conquered numerous times, and they knew it, they may have been asserting that they had never voluntarily served anyone—it was always under duress. When ancient Judah was conquered by Babylon, the Jews proudly rebelled and refused to submit to Nebuchadnezzar’s yoke, even when God’s prophets told them to. In other words, they may have been asserting that they had retained their honor. They had never willingly submitted to servitude but had always opposed it, because servitude was seen as dishonorable.

But Jesus answered with a foundational truth with far-reaching implications: “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.” Sin is what restricts our freedom. Sin causes us to serve it rather than live an abundant life with the Creator and serve Him.

We all know people—maybe ourselves—who have created their own prisons as the consequences of transgressing God’s instructions come to bear and shackle their lives. They were free to make poor choices, but not free to choose the results. Now they have to live under the tyranny of circumstances they chose without fully grasping what they were choosing. This is why God’s instructions about how to live are such a blessing: They teach us how to walk so we don’t injure ourselves or others. They guide us in which path to take when we can’t see the end of each one. Switching metaphors, they tell us ahead of time that if we plant a certain seed, we can expect a certain harvest. We have knowledge in advance. We know which seeds are good and which ones to stay away from.

This ties in with what we have seen. There are two opposing forces in our lives. On one hand, there is the worship of God in the way He prescribes. His instructions define sin—they define what takes us away from God and His freedom, and especially the First, Second, and Fourth Commandments. Idolatry and Sabbath-breaking are directly linked to slavery. When we abide in His Word, we are His disciples, and we become and remain free because we come to know the embodiment of Truth through keeping His Word.

But on the other hand is the transgression of His instructions, which is sin (I John 3:4), which enslaves us, bringing us back into the house of bondage.

Getting back to how critical the First and Second Commandments are to remaining free, we need to add another factor:

Colossians 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Paul identifies the sin of covetousness as idolatry. There comes a point when desire, wishing for, or longing for, comes between us and God. When that happens, whatever we are greatly desiring becomes our god. It has a hold over us, meaning it has become our master. We are then a slave to that desire and no longer free to serve the true God because we have given our heart to something else.

Remember that end-time Babylon is described as trading in souls, which includes the heart. Babylon has an enslaving effect. This is clearly seen in the advertising industry, which actively encourages coveting, and thus, idolatry. Advertising works on the mind, tugging at the heart, motivating people to buy or otherwise act, playing on the human inclination toward the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Companies invest about \$1 trillion dollars annually in advertising because they know it works. They know they can pull the strings on human puppets, and that there are plenty of people who will not rest until they have the latest gadget, or album, or clothing, or car, or whatever makes us salivate. Advertisers know the heart is easily enslaved, and this is why God tells us to guard our heart—to be aware of the different ways that our hearts, which are supposed to belong to Him, can be brought into the house of bondage.

So, during this feast, as we commemorate the deliverance God has given us, it is worth reflecting on those areas where we are not yet free, or where our liberty is threatened—those areas where someone or something is pulling the strings in our life.

As we saw in John 8, Jesus said that whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. Paul's lament over his struggle with sin backs that up—Paul says sin brings him into captivity. Let's look at that in Romans 7. We won't go through the back-and-forth about doing what he doesn't really want to do, and vice versa, but we will just look at his conclusion:

Romans 7:22-25 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Paul is quite clear that it is not the law of God that brings into captivity. Protestantism generally holds that Paul teaches that the law was nailed to the stake, yet Paul himself says he delights in the law of God. Those two ideas don't work together. Back in verse 16, he says the law is good, and in verse 14, he says the law is spiritual. In the next chapter, he says it is the carnal mind that is hostile to God's law, which means it is also hostile to the God from whom this good, delightful, spiritual law originates. The carnal mind serves a different god.

Paul identifies another law, meaning another rule or another active principle, that was at work within him, and it was this active principle that brought him into captivity. And even as he asks rhetorically who is going to deliver him from that carnality that remained, he also answers that Jesus Christ will give the deliverance. Again, the Son sets free.

What this teaches is that even as salvation is a process, and sanctification is a process, and redemption is a process, so also deliverance is a process. Christ delivered us initially, yet we are still awaiting our final deliverance. And while we wait, we must identify those areas where we are still hanging out in the house of bondage, and strive to become free through fully surrendering to God. So, this week, as we remember our past deliverance, we can also look forward to our final deliverance, and Who it is that brings all of this to pass.

Now, let's think about some ways that we could be in bondage, or at risk of being so, which broadly correlates to serving the wrong god, or else to serving the true God in a way other than how He commands.

As mentioned, the idolatry of first century Judea did not involve gods like Baal or Molech. The Jews had finally learned that lesson. Likewise, it is unlikely we will be tempted to worship Allah or Buddha or Ganesh. (Ganesh is that Hindu god with a face like an elephant that is apparently popular in Yoga studios.) Again, we're probably not going to bow before him. Even so, I find it significant that at the Supernova Sukkot festival in Israel in 2023, which was the epicenter of the Hamas attack, the revelers were literally dancing under a statue of Buddha when hundreds were killed and dozens more were taken captive. So, foreign gods have a foothold within the lands of modern Israel and Judah.

Yet as the West continues to fall away from its Judeo-Christian roots, other gods have arisen that don't have personal names or recognizable images, gods that are more difficult to identify. Materialism is one. We saw one of God's warnings about that in Deuteronomy 8. He says there not to let prosperity cause us to forget Him.

Another more abstract god is humanism, which is a philosophy that emphasizes the individual, and humanity in general, above the Creator. This began in Eden with the serpent telling Eve that she could take to herself the prerogative of determining good and evil rather than listening to her Creator. Humanism takes many forms, but at their root is always the elevation of mankind's thoughts, values, and opinions above what the Creator says.

Of particular note for us is that anywhere the fear of God is lacking, humanism is present. Any ideas, perspectives, or practices that elevate the things of mankind above the things of God bring us into captivity because they put the corruptible creation above the Creator, which always bears bad fruit. Humanism denigrates God, the only source of true freedom and the abundant life.

Let's consider some other things that can enslave us, either through diminishing our faith in God, or causing us to forget Him, or else corrupting the way in which He commands us to walk.

Anxiety and the wrong kind of fear are bondage. This could include the fear of loss, the fear of the future, the fear of change, the fear of sacrifice, the fear of the unknown, and countless others. Fear and anxiety cause paralysis, keeping us from serving God fully because fear looms larger in our minds than the sovereign God.

A job or career could likewise bring us into bondage if it takes up so much of our time and attention that God gets squeezed into the background. If the demands or expectations of our employer weigh more on us than the things of God, we are in spiritual bondage. Along similar lines, we can be slaves to a certain lifestyle, or the desire for it. Again, our hearts are not truly free—they have been captured.

Debt is another form of slavery. Proverbs 22:7 says, “. . . the borrower is servant to the lender.” When we are in debt, our lenders are pulling the strings. They must be paid first, making us less free to provide for our own and to help others, let alone to be rich toward God. So often, debt is the result of a desire to have something before we can afford it, and the price is that we serve the lender until we can afford it, which takes longer because of all the interest we also pay. The credit system is a significant part of Babylon's enslavement. A major debt crisis is approaching on a national and individual level—largely because of covetousness, which is idolatry.

Speaking of Babylon, please turn to Romans 12:2:

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

John Ritenbaugh was fond of quoting J.B. Phillips' translation of this verse, which says, “Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold.” Again, we see the world—Babylon—contrasted with the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. We serve either one or the other. To the

degree that we allow the world and its voices to influence us, we are a slave to that influence and less free to follow God.

From its beginning, the nation of Israel has been enamored of the nations and cultures around it, always finding them to be more enticing than the way of life provided by the Creator Himself. Even though we in the church are spiritual Israelites first, we still have to keep this tendency in check. In this regard, Isaiah makes a prescient and relevant observation about the nation in his day that is also true today:

Isaiah 2:6 For You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled with eastern ways; they are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they are pleased with the children of foreigners.

Isaiah says that God had forsaken the descendants of Jacob. Something had to be seriously wrong in the covenantal relationship for God to forsake. And Isaiah gives us the reason: Because of His people's infatuation with the ways of the peoples to the east. In Isaiah's day, that referred primarily to Babylon, though there could have been other nations as well. And in the modern nations of Israel, we see something similar. There is a fascination with the cultures of nations of the east. Hinduism and Islam are growing in this nation. Buddhist principles are taught in corporate settings. The younger generation especially takes an interest in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean culture. (I mean South Korean culture—nobody knows anything about North Korea.)

In recent weeks, I've seen several articles—including in *The Wall Street Journal*—about a trend where young people try to imitate a Chinese lifestyle, or dream about being Chinese. Now, maybe those articles were sponsored by China—it's hard to tell these days.

The final line about being “pleased with the children of foreigners” is a bit difficult to nail down. It could refer to human trafficking, which could relate to Babylon's trading in bodies. However, this seems to be the least likely of the possible meanings.

The term “children” does not have to indicate age, but can simply refer to descendants. In that regard, it could refer to the descendants of the peoples

that God originally told Israel not to intermarry with. Also, the Hebrew translated as “pleased with” has to do with striking hands, meaning, making an agreement. So, it seems to be describing Israel’s proclivity for making agreements with people from the nations that God said to stay away from. That could mean marriages, but could also include business arrangements and political alliances.

The overall message is that God had forsaken His people because they were showing Him that they really did not want to be His people. God is not capricious or impulsive, but He is reciprocal. He will respond in kind.

What this means is that if He forsook His people, it is because they forsook Him first, despite His giving to them what He had not given to any other nation. In His judgement, their looking to other cultures and peoples was forsaking Him. The other cultures looked more exciting or more advantageous to them, but the truth is that nothing from the minds of men or demons could possibly be better than what comes from the mind of the God who had delivered them from the house of bondage.

Thus, in our contemplation of what could lead us into the house of bondage, we should consider what cultural influences may have found their way into our hearts.

The Israelites were enmeshed in idolatry in Egypt, which is likely why they were in bondage in the first place. Ezekiel 23:2-4 shows the Israelites’ harlotry began in Egypt. They weren’t innocent slaves. One reason for the plagues on Egypt was to demonstrate God’s power over Egypt’s gods—not just to the Egyptians, but likely to the Israelites as well. Yet their idolatry was so ingrained that Ezekiel 20 indicates that they still had their idols during the Passover. Other scriptures show they carried their idols throughout the wilderness journey. The reason God did not destroy them was because He was faithful to His promises to their fathers.

The Golden Calf incident took place less than a year after God’s awesome deliverance. Aaron not only made an idol, but even more chilling is that he told the Israelites, “This is your *Elohim*, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!”

The central issue in the Second Commandment is safeguarding the true nature of God, because any deviation corrupts one's worship. Aaron may have used the term *Elohim*, but the physical representation he made to go along with the word *Elohim* horribly misrepresented what God was and is like.

This is why God prohibits any representation. A representation distorts a person's concept of the divine reality, which cannot be captured or contained in anything physical, with one exception, which was the human body God prepared for His Son.

God points out several times the problem of using the eyes in worship. We already read the Second Commandment in Exodus 20, and the version in Deuteronomy 5 is identical. However, God prepares Israel for entering the Land with an additional warning against representations in Deuteronomy 4, if you would turn there:

Deuteronomy 4:12 And the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice.

Deuteronomy 4:15 Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire,

God's revelation to mankind is not about His form. Trying to capture His visible image misses His character, His nature, His power, and all that He is. It limits one's concept of God to just what is seen with the eyes.

Human nature craves being able to have something to look on to be reminded or to be instructed, and yet this is exactly what God forbids regarding Himself because it is never true. It can never accurately depict the reality. A representation lacks the infinite depth and fulness of the Almighty. And if our mental concept is incorrect, we will serve corruption. We cannot worship in spirit and in truth, which means we are serving something false.

Part of God's charge against ancient Israel was that their eyes were fixed on idols (Ezekiel 20:24). We know that they also set up idols in their hearts, and

we have considered some ways that could apply today. But God repeatedly warns against a physical representation of Him because it cannot be done in truth. His infinite nature cannot be limited, which is what mankind continually tries to do.

In Romans 1:22-25, Paul describes the unrighteous as those who change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man. Paul calls them fools. He says they exchange the truth of God for the lie. Trying to make God like a man is a lie. And foolish.

I mentioned one exception, which was Christ's incarnation. The Word became flesh. His human body contained the full measure of the divine nature. John says they beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father. His glory was not what He looked like, but how He lived—how He behaved and responded, what He said and the way He said it. Everything was motivated by the Spirit of the Father, and all of it was glorious. Every word, every expression, all His body language, every deed was perfect. His goodness, His anger, His compassion, His sorrow, His mercy, His rebukes, His joy—it all demonstrated God-life.

Now, let's explore this for a moment. Imagine that you are at the funeral of a good friend, a friend whose life was truly remarkable in every way. However, for his own reasons, your friend had not allowed a single picture of him to be taken. Instead, he had left a book that told of his life and his worldview. To really know what he was like, you had to read and meditate on his book.

Nevertheless, the organizers of the funeral for your friend have pictures of him placed at various places. Of course, they aren't truly pictures of him, because nobody knew what he looked like. Yet the organizers have sketches and paintings and AI-generated photos of what they think your friend looked like. But they are all absurd caricatures, mere cartoons compared to who and what your friend really was. What is worse, these two-dimensional impressions overwhelmingly focus on your friend's gruesome death rather than his incredible life.

What is even worse is that the organizers show video clips of your friend's life. Except your friend had not left any recordings, only his book. So, the

clips aren't actually of your friend. They are of some guy with long hair, which your friend certainly did not have. Anybody who had read his book could have figured that out. But the guy with long hair tries to fill in for your incomparable friend. He speaks your friend's words, but they sound hollow. This guy with long hair tries to mimic your friend's kindness and mercy and authority and wisdom, but none of it can hold a candle to the glory and the beauty of your friend's life. The imitation is so shallow compared to the reality that it is an abomination to you.

And to add insult to your injury, after having their eyes fixed on the imitations, people come away feeling like they had learned something about your friend. But they hadn't, not really—they just had an image of some guy with long hair stuck in their minds. If they want to learn about your friend, they should read his book.

Our concept of the Father and the Son is absolutely critical to worshiping in spirit and truth. This is why pictures of Jesus break the Second Commandment. Such a representation misrepresents and limits Who He was as a man and Who His is now. The picture is a caricature, a shallow and crude attempt to portray what cannot be portrayed because it misses His perfect character. Not only that, but the picture is also stuck in time, leaving the one who fixes his eyes on the idol with a single expression, a single look in the eyes, a single sentiment. Again, it limits the Holy One, which He takes great exception to. It skews the concept of Him in the mind of the viewer.

For my part, there is not a fundamental difference between a still picture of the Son of God and a moving picture of the Son of God. A human actor trying to portray the Christ is, by definition, changing the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man. It is impossible for the fullness of the divine nature to dwell in any actor, no matter how well-meaning. His reactions and expressions and words are simply human, not divine. All the intangibles that made up the perfect glory of the only-begotten Son cannot be replicated by a pretender. For my part, the only Man qualified or worthy to portray the Son of God is the Son of God.

Again, what is at stake here is our concept of God, because that informs our worship—whether it is in spirit and in truth, or whether it involves leavening. And where there is leavening, there is bondage in some way. We

are not fully free in our worship because something is interfering. Remember, truth sets free. Any deviation will enslave in some way.

Please turn to Romans 6 as we wrap this up:

Romans 6:16-18 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? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

This feast is about God's deliverance and the need to fill our minds with the bread of life, the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Christ and His words are the truth that sets us free—free from sin, free from the entanglements with this world, free from Satan and his influence. But we have to cooperate with Christ in yielding to His righteousness to remain free.