

June 28, 2015

¹⁸And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading to more* lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for *holiness*. ²⁰For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹What fruit did you have then in *the things* of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²²But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 6).

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

Freedom. What exactly is this?

It would seem that the answer to this question is simple.

In Dahl's dictionary this word is defined as "of one's own will, space, the opportunity to act in one's own way; the absence of constraint, servility, slavery, or submission to another's will".

For the majority of us the key words in this definition will be the words "one's own". That is, one's own will, the opportunity to act in one's own way, inasmuch as I want.

Slavery in this traditional understanding is the opposite of freedom, because a man in servitude is obligated to do not his own will but the will of his master.

We denounce all manifestations of slavery in our times. Freedom of human action is held as an absolute today. A man is free to do everything that he wants if he, of course, does not do harm to another man. Various laws and courts determine the extent of this harm.

It would seem that we all know this. Yes, we came into this free country in order to be free from all of the restrictions and circumstances we had in our homeland... And we voluntarily limited ourselves in order to firmly establish our freedom. This is the freedom that we desire: freedom to live where we want to live, freedom to go where we want to go, freedom to give our children a better education, freedom to have better medical care, freedom to pursue our favorite hobbies, etc. And we completely forget that in seeking such freedom we give ourselves over to servitude. Because, every listed blessing for which we strove so much depends on the size of the purse. For example, it turns out that if you have money- you are free. Without money – a life of freedom is not apparent, not unless you earn a million or two or steal it. As another example, it seems that there is every opportunity to have something, to go somewhere or to do something, but there are not enough means. So we set our whole lives on obtaining those means, with which we then pay for our old age and illness.

This is such an unhealthy scenario for us Orthodox Christians!

Our freedom does not lie in what we can acquire, what to eat, what to drink, to go where we want to go and to do what we want to do. But in that we are free from addictions to what we eat and drink, to go or not to go somewhere, to do or not to do something. We are free in spirit, although outwardly we can be working hard. But this work does not enslave us. We do not have a cult of money. We do not give it power over ourselves. Equally, we also do not give pride, self-love, envy, pleasure of the flesh or amusements power.

A man who loves money cannot live without it. He certainly has funds for a rainy day, but he will not give it away to anyone else for anything. A proud man cannot live where his opinions are not considered. He must absolutely feed his pride. A lustful person cannot live without pleasing his flesh. An envious man cannot stand that someone is doing better than he, and so forth. People stress out because they do not have something and if they have it, then they suffer from thoughts that someone will take it away.

The man is free of all of this does not pay any attention to this. These trials do not trouble him and as a result there is peace and quiet in his soul. He is satisfied with what there is whether this is a lot or a little.

Today we read in the Epistle:

²⁰For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹What fruit did you have then in *the things* of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²²But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

For this we have received baptism, in order to be freed from slavery to sin, which is every earthly addiction. By this it is necessary to understand that which stands between us and God, that, the lack of which brings us suffering.

We must strive for the eradication of all of these tribulations because in the end there death. The development of sins in man leads to spiritual death. We strive for life. And God gives us a life, in servitude to Whom we voluntarily give ourselves. A slave strives to please his master in everything. And so a believing man strives to please God always and in everything. For example, it happens that a believer is a slave of righteousness because he does not do what he himself desires to do, but what God desires. And such servitude or obedience to God leads to the acquisition of the fruits of the Holy Spirit – a pure, righteous life that is the prelude to eternal life. Sin leads to death, righteousness to life.

Let us strive for righteousness, not as Pharisees who have only the appearance of righteousness, but inwardly strive to cleanse our hearts and thoughts of all traces of sin by continuous repentance and by sanctifying every moment of our lives with the memory of God.

We do not belong to ourselves but to God. And our freedom is only to choose with whom we will be: with God or with our own will, which inevitably leads us to sin.

I would like to conclude with a parable: A certain restive horse bit through his bit, threw off his rider and, dashing off, wandered aimlessly, not taking time to choose his way. The horse thought that finally he had broken out to freedom, but he did not notice that in front of him was an abyss and tumbled from a cliff down into the abyss.

Thus it happens to the human soul. Let a man throw the fear of God out of his heart and he begins to tell lies, to steal, to become jealous, to bear ill will and to think highly of himself. And he does not notice that in front of him unavoidably awaits an abyss.

And all of this begins with pride, when a man permits himself to buck.

Amen