

JOKE: A Pastor went to his church office on Monday morning and discovered a dead mule in the church yard. He telephoned the police. Since there did not appear to be any foul play, the police referred the Pastor to the Health Department.

They explained, "Since there was no health threat you'll need to call the Sanitation Department."

When the pastor called the Sanitation Department, the Manager of the Sanitation Department said, "I can't pick up that dead mule without authorization from the mayor."

The Pastor was not at all too eager to call the mayor, who possessed a very bad temper and was always extremely unpleasant and hard to deal with, but, eventually, the Pastor called the mayor anyway.

The mayor did not disappoint the Pastor. The mayor immediately began to rant and rave. After his continued rant at the pastor, the mayor finally said, "Why did you call me any way? Isn't your job to bury the dead?"

The pastor paused for a brief prayer, and asked the Lord to direct his response. The lord led the pastor to the words he was seeking, "Yes, Mayor, it is my job to bury the dead, but I always like to notify the next of kin first!"

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Last week we talked about the perfect love that casts out fear.

I want to continue on the love theme, but I want to look at it in a much different way.

James 4:8 (NIV): 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you.

I love this Scripture, the KJ tells us, "draw near to God, and He will draw near to us."

Here's what makes that Scripture so impactful, God gave us the free will to choose how close to Him we want to be.

You have a choice. You can have the attitude that you just want to show up put your time in, leave the same way you came or you can come with an expectation and a hunger that will become a life transforming experience. The choice is yours.

The measurement of how close God comes is totally up to us. We get to determine how much of His presence we truly want in our lives. How much of His transforming you want to allow.

I think there are a few things that keep us at a distance from God and I'm going to share a few of those. However, as I mentioned out if the gate this all has to do with love.

John 8:31–35 (NIV): 31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” 33 They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” 34 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.

John 8:36 - 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Because we have been made a new creation we have been set free from the law of sin and death. And have become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. And have been called the sons and daughters of God.

Romans 8:1–4 (NIV): Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

But here's the thing, Paul on several occasions called himself a bond servant. So was he truly free?

What is the difference between a slave, which we are not and a bond servant which we should be?

I'm glad you asked, because there is a huge difference between the two. Bondservants have worked off all their debts. They have no obligation to stay and be slaves any longer, but they choose to stay because of love for their master.

Jesus paid our debt. We are forgiven for everything. He died so that we could be free. We choose to stay a bond servant to Christ because we love the master.

We are not His slaves, but we choose to be His bondservants. What you need to understand according to the Old Testament Law, is that a bondservant was given freedom and then made a choice to give his life to his master.

1 Peter 2:16 (NIV): 16 Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.

1 John 4:19 (NIV): 19 We love because he first loved us.

So once more John chapter 8 verse 36 tells us,

John 8:36 - 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Now I need to pause here and make a very important point. Several in fact.

Point one: you are free.

Paul said it this way:

1 Corinthians 6:12 (NIV): 12 "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything.

Spend time with that

Not sure yet listen to this.

1 Corinthians 10:23 (NIV): 23 “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive.

Sound familiar? You need to know that you are free.

However, point number 2 - Freedom that comes from walking in the love of God will never lead you into sin, but it will lead you deeper into love and relationships always. Always.

Galatians 5:1 (NIV): It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

So, if the freedom that you are walking in leads you into sin, rather than away from it, you are getting your freedom from a source other than Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And the

closer you walk with Jesus, the more freedom you will walk in and at the same time the less sin you will walk in.

Romans 13:8–10 (NIV): 8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. **Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**

So basically, the law of love is this: I choose not to sin because it harms relationship.

But here is some really good news:

Romans 5:6–8 (NIV): 6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But



God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

You are of value, you are of worth. Value and worth are always determined by what someone else is willing to pay for something.

And here's more good news, God was willing to pay for us with the death of Jesus. So here's something that may get you excited. Since God was willing to pay for us by having Jesus die, we must be of equal value to Jesus in the eyes of the Father, or He made a really bad investment.

Let that sink in for a moment.

But here's the thing we continue to strive and perform, and so we find ourselves constantly frustrated because of our failure.

And because we do that, here's what happens, every time we sin, we beat ourselves up. We have that phrase that

we live up to, “we are our worst critic.” And so, we don’t treat ourselves with the same unconditional love that God has for us. We become disappointed at our failures. This shows us one extremely important fact, and that is that our love for ourselves is completely based upon our performance. And God never loves us based on performance. He just loves, because God is love.

One last point I want to make today and that is this. Because we have based our journey on our performance quite often we allow our past to hinder or even dictate our future.

The enemy loves to bring up our failures. If only I would have prayed more in that season of my life, if only I would have read the Bible more often, if, if, if.

Let me say a couple things. First, today is a new day, it’s never too late to start with those things. Secondly, if you continue to focus on your past you will never reach your destiny.

Philippians 3:13–14 (NIV): 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

See here's the thing repentance will allow us to rewrite the history of our life.

Look at this example:

Genesis 18:9–15 (NIV): 9 “Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him. “There, in the tent,” he said. 10 Then one of them said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.” Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. 11 Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?” 13 Then the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ 14 Is anything too hard for the

Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.” 15 Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, “I did not laugh.” But he said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

What a story Sarah laughed at what God had said, then lied to God about what she did. Not a really healthy thing to do right there.

And we need to understand something here, Sarah’s laugh, according to the original Hebrew root words in this passage, (tsaw-khak) was a mocking type of laugh.

She was not saying, “Oh Lord, great joke, You are so funny.” She was frustrated and angry, she was ridiculing His declaration.

Not quite the woman of faith you would think is she?

But look at what the writer of Hebrews says about her. . .

Hebrews 11:11–12 (NIV): 11 And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. 12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

What a different story. It's almost like they never read the one found in Genesis 18.

But when we understand that our repentance can rewrite the book of our life, we too can look with confidence ahead and press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus.

A couple more things and I will wrap up Joy will you come up now. Play quietly please as I finish up.

1 Corinthians 3:21–23 (NIV): 21 So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the

**present or the future**—all are yours, 23 and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

Romans 8:38–39 (NIV): 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, **neither the present nor the future**, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Did you notice what was missing from these two Scripture verses? Our Past.

Maybe all you ever heard while reading that is, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God.” I would propose to you that the past was left off that list on purpose, because it will separate us from the love of God.

Now before you throw anything at me for some kind of heresy because we all have read that He will never leave us or forsake us, let me clarify I thing or two.

God does not separate Himself from us, but when we access our past, we choose to turn away from Him. Adam and Eve did. God came looking for them and they had hid themselves because they realized their sin.

What you need to understand is that God does not exist in our repented-of past, we literally have to leave God behind when we delve into our past. We have to turn away from God to look into our past because he has chosen to forget those things that we have truly repented of.

Isaiah 43:25 (NIV): 25 "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.

God is in our future not our past. He dealt with the past at the cross, when you cried out to Him. So, to look into the past we must turn our back on the future.

God does not want us to access our past apart from Him rewriting it. When we rehearse our past, we allow ourselves the opportunity to repeat it. The repented-of

past no longer exists.

The danger of rehearsing the past is the same thing that the ancient Israelites had to avoid.

Hebrews 11:13–16 (NIV): 13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 **If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.** 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

When we keep ourselves living in our past, we can never move forward.