

"You are Not Your Own"
Exodus 13
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One of the major problems with many who call themselves Christians is that they say they believe in God, but then they act as if **they** are God.

The problem is as old as Satan himself of whom it is said:

Isaiah 14:13 "You said in your heart,

"I will ascend to heaven;

I will raise my throne

above the stars of God...

I will make myself like the Most High."

It's as old as humanity, when Satan said to Eve in Genesis 3:5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God..."

It is the historical and universal problem of mankind:

Romans 1:25 "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator.

Again, we say we believe in God but we act as if we were that God.

It is manifested in nearly every aspect of life.

- Commitments are feared.
- Independence is prized.
- We treat our time, our money, and our energies as if they exist for our pleasure.
- Education, jobs, even relationships and hobbies are sought mainly for the advantage they will bring us.
- We respond to setbacks and difficulties as if there is no God in control.

The "good life" is to somehow be physically, psychologically and financially independent – self-reliant.

The problem is summed up in the old saying, "The self-made man who worships his creator."

Or to parody another saying, “The self-made man has a fool for a god.”

“Independence” – the word makes such a nice sound in our ears.
 “Independence” – not under the control of anyone else and not reliant on anyone else – the “captain of my own fate.”

How many older teens have muttered under their breath,
 “I can hardly wait until I’m on my own.”

But the truth is, independence is an impossibility.

Now I realize that in a superficial way we can be what we popularly refer to as independent in some things.

The young adult is living independently, when he is no longer dependent on his parents for livelihood.

But truly being under no one’s control and reliant on no one are impossibilities.

The Bible says it this way, “You are not your own...”

I hear in that both a warning and a promise.

The warning is that “you are not your own” and the promise is that “you are not your own”.

The truth is that as much as we might like to be, we are **not** our own.
 So the question is, to whom **do** we belong?

We also like the word, “emancipation”.

It too has the sound of freedom and independence.

But the Latin from which the word is derived means. “to **transfer** ownership”.

Even if you are emancipated from one owner, who takes up the new management?

Who or what controls, influences, or owns us?

1 John 5:19 “We know that... the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”

I said the phrase, “You are not your own” is both a warning and a promise.

The warning is don’t be a fool – self-reliance is a euphemism for being under the control of the evil one.

But “you are not your own” is also a promise:

For “We know that we are children of God...” (1 Jn 5:19)

Romans 8:9 “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.”

I’m suggesting today that the answers to the following questions touch on everything about us:

To whom do we (you and I) belong, by what means and price and for what purpose?

In our on-going study of the OT book of Exodus, we last left the storyline at Passover.

Every Israelite family had been commanded to slay a lamb and put the blood of it over and on the sides of the doorway to their home.

That night the plague of death passed over the Israelites and struck down all the firstborn of the Egyptians so that the Pharaoh would finally allow the Israelites to leave Egypt.

We left the story at Exodus 12:50-51 “All the Israelites did just what the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron. ⁵¹ And on that very day the LORD brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.

The first part of chapter 13, which is our text for today, is an excursus, an important digression, in which Moses gives some instruction for later in Israel’s life.

Immediately after this excursus, we find the storyline continuing in:

Exodus 13:17-18 “When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, “If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.” ¹⁸ So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.

But in between, here in Exodus 13:1-16, God through Moses gives them and us a visual reminder of “You are not your own.”

Please stand for the reading of God's Holy Word.

Exodus 13:1-16

"The LORD said to Moses, ² "Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal."

EX 13:3 Then Moses said to the people, "Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand. Eat nothing containing yeast. ⁴ Today, in the month of Abib, you are leaving. ⁵ When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites--the land he swore to your forefathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey--you are to observe this ceremony in this month: ⁶ For seven days eat bread made without yeast and on the seventh day hold a festival to the LORD. ⁷ Eat unleavened bread during those seven days; nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, nor shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders. ⁸ On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' ⁹ This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the LORD is to be on your lips. For the LORD brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand. ¹⁰ You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year.

EX 13:11 "After the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he promised on oath to you and your forefathers, ¹² you are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the LORD. ¹³ Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons.

EX 13:14 "In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵ When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. **This is why** I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.' ¹⁶ And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand."

May God bless the reading of his Word! / Prayer

It is immediately apparent that God is establishing two rituals.

One, in verses 3-10, is the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread – bread made without yeast.

I am going to give only this brief mention of the first ritual here – the feast of unleavened bread – for two reasons: one it is connected so closely to Passover that I think it's major significance is addressed in that context.

The second reason is that I find no significant counterpart to the feast of unleavened bread in the New Covenant.

So it is the second ritual, in verses 1-2, and 11-16, the consecration, the returning to God, of the firstborn animals and sons that we will focus on today.

It is also readily apparent that the rituals were to remind the people and also to give occasion for the instruction of their children that “you are not your own.”

- We see it in the first ritual in verses 8-10 “On that day tell your son...”
- And we see it in the second ritual in verse 14 “In days to come, when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him...”

So what does this second ritual teach?

As I said it earlier, **“To whom do we (you and I) belong, by what means and price do we belong and for what purpose do we belong?”**

I can rather easily imagine the scene:

It is spring - the birthing season.

The family knows every animal and which ones are about to deliver.

The father takes note of some of the female goats and sheep and when they give birth for the **first time**; then he takes the new male lambs and kids and brings them nearer the tent where they live.

At the right time he takes a knife and slays the lamb and offers it as a sacrifice to the Lord.

If you have ever watched an animal die, you know that it can be a dramatic and even traumatic experience.

“Daddy, why did you do that?”

“My son, first of all I did it because the Lord told us to.

Exodus 13:12 “You are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the LORD.

“But Daddy, why would God ask us to take the firstborn lamb and sacrifice it to him?”

“Son, the firstborn male animal has always been symbolic of the whole next generation – males and females.

So when we give the firstborn to God as a sacrifice, we are saying that we recognize that it all belongs to God.

The animals don’t belong to us son; they belong to God.

The children would watch time after time as the firstborn male animal was sacrificed.

What a powerful and perpetual reminder – it all belongs to God.

Can you imagine as the children get older and they begin to think about the apparent waste of this?

Or how they wonder why their father doesn’t sacrifice the lame or sickly animals and let the good ones live? (Numbers 18:21)

The father explains that they give the **first** as an indication of trust that God will provide more and they give the **best** because God is worthy.

It was not only the first of the livestock that they brought in sacrifice to the Lord but also the first of **all** they produced or as we would say it “**all** they earned or received.”

Nehemiah 10:35 ““We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the LORD each year the firstfruits of our crops and of every fruit tree.”

The same concept is taught in the New Testament:

1 Corinthians 16:2 “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income...”

Here we have in mind ALL we earn and we first set aside a portion of the whole to give to the Lord.

We give not only to meet a need but more importantly to remind ourselves that it is all from God and belongs to God and our trust is in him not in the money.

I think there is precedent in both the Old and New Testaments for regular giving and in this Corinthian passage even for weekly giving – mainly as a regular and frequent reminder that it all belongs to God.

Who gets the **first** part of our income?

Is it God or some lender, entertainer, or retail store?

The firstborn and firstfruits belong to the Lord – to use them otherwise is to steal from God.

To use what has been entrusted to us, other than for the owner’s purposes, is to violate the owner.

Malachi 3:8-12 ““Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.

"But you ask, `How do we rob you?'

"In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are under a curse--the whole nation of you--because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse...”

But the sacrifice of the firstborn male lambs wasn’t the end of object lesson.

Exodus 13:13 “Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons.

The firstborn males of some kinds of animals couldn’t be sacrificed to the Lord.

For example when a firstborn male donkey was born the owner could just kill it or could again get a lamb.

Then he would slay the lamb instead of the donkey.

Likewise when a woman had her first son, the son couldn't be literally sacrificed to the Lord but an animal would be sacrificed instead of the child.

Later, money could be given instead of a lamb but at first it appears, when we think even of the earlier experience of Abraham and Isaac, that it took a blood sacrifice to redeem the child.

Again, imagine the scene:

A woman in the community gives birth to her first baby boy and the husband goes to his flock and gets a lamb, which he slays in sacrifice to the Lord.

“Daddy, why is he doing that?”

“Son, that lamb is taking the place of the child. The same thing happened when you were born.

As the oldest son, you represent the whole next generation.

And God has given us this very physical and powerful reminder that you and every one of us belong to God. Son, you are not your own.”

And what of us?

1 Corinthians 6:19 “You are not your own; you were bought at a price.

The first question I asked earlier was, “To whom do you belong?”

The answer is, “You belong to the Lord!”

The second question is “By what means and price do we belong to God?”

“Daddy, I understand that we are not our own and that we belong to God. But why does a lamb have to die for that?”

Exodus 13:14 "In days to come, when your son asks you, `What does this mean?' say to him, `With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

“Son, God, in his justice, has decreed “the soul that sins will die” and “the wages of sin is death” – eternal separation from God.

Because we are sinners too, when the plague of death went through Egypt, you and I both, as firstborns representing both generations, would have justly died in that judgment.

But God provided another life to die instead of us – he provided the lamb.

“And son, every time we sacrifice a lamb in place of a firstborn son, just as we did for you when you were born, we remember how God brought us out of Egypt by his mighty hand and by his grace – how he freed us from bondage to the Egyptians and our own sin.”

The Bible calls it “redemption.”

Exodus 13:13 “Redeem every firstborn among your sons.”

Redemption means to secure the release of someone by the paying a price.

Iraqi terrorists are abducting people and demanding a ransom.

The price of Israel’s release was the death of the firstborn Egyptians and the death of the lambs in each household at Passover.

We too are held captive.

From conception we are held in slavery by a sinful nature and by a sinful world.

As free as we might appear, we are controlled by the influences of our forebears and the world in which we live.

1 Peter 1:18 “You were redeemed from **the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers...**”

Colossians 1:13-14 “For (God) has rescued us from **the dominion of darkness**” by redemption.

The Bible says, as I mentioned earlier, that we are not our own.

We are either owned by the evil one and live in the dominion of darkness or we are owned by God.

In the “dominion of darkness” we live in the “empty way of life handed down to (us) from (our) forefathers...”

If you are a first generation Christian, then you **know** something of the empty way of life handed down to you.

If you are second or third generation Christian then you probably don't have to go very far back to see what it could have been like to live in the dominion of darkness.

I don't know much about him but my paternal great-grandfather died drunk being hit by a train as he stumbled home on the tracks one night.

It doesn't take much to imagine the kind of life he and the whole family lived because of his futile way of life.

By God's grace, his son, my grandfather was redeemed from that futility and it began a whole new lineage handed down to my father and to me.

I'm not saying we are Christians by being in the right family; I'm saying we are given the great advantage of having godly models before us.

We are held captive to the old way of life, the kingdom of darkness, until God redeems us.

And the Old Testament law only shows us how helpless and hopeless we until God intervenes.

We are redeemed from the curse of the law's penalties.

We stand ready to die for our sins until Christ died in our place.

Galatians 3:13 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”

We are redeemed from having to keep all the ceremonial law of sacrifices and regulations.

Galatians 4:4 “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

Christ has fulfilled the ceremonial law and we are no longer under its tutelage but we are now adopted with all the privileges of God's children.

We are redeemed from the law of works; that is trying to be good enough for God.

Christ has perfectly obeyed the law and we belong to him.

Romans 5:19 "Through the obedience of the one man (Jesus) the many will be made righteous.

We are redeemed from the guilt of sin.

Colossians 1:14 "In (Christ) we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

By what means do we belong to God instead of the old way of life?

By redemption. God redeems us; he buys us out of that slavery.

At what price?

1 Peter 1:18-19 "For you know that it was **not with perishable things such as silver or gold** that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, **but with the precious blood of Christ**, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Jesus came to be the price, the ransom:

Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus' **life** was the price of that ransom:

Galatians 1:4 "The Lord Jesus Christ... gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age." (Cf. Eph 1:7; Rev 5:9)

And that ransom was paid, was substituted, for us:

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous **for the unrighteous**, to bring you to God. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3; John 1:29; Hebrew 9:28)

Every time we see the table of the Lord's Supper, every time we eat and drink from it, we are reminded of the ransom paid for our release.

Back to our three questions:

To whom do you belong?

By what means and price?

And for what purpose?

Exodus 13:1-2 "The LORD said to Moses, ² "Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal."

Again I remind you that the firstborn son represented the whole.

Exodus 4:22 "This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son and I told you, "Let my son go, **so he may worship me.**"

To "consecrate" something is to dedicate it to a sacred purpose.

Every time a family sacrificed a firstborn lamb and every time they sacrificed lambs for their firstborn sons they were reminded that they and everyone else were **consecrated** to God.

Their **purpose in life** was to bring glory to God.

We are consecrated to the same sacred purpose:

1 Peter 2:9 "But you are a **chosen** people, a **royal priesthood**, a **holy** nation, a people **belonging** to God, **that YOU may declare the praises** of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Titus 2:14 "Jesus Christ... gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness **and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.**

Colossians 1:10 "that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may **please him in every way:** bearing fruit in every good work

We are back nearly where we started:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" – consecrate yourself to the Lord.

We don't offer lambs any longer because Christ has offered himself as the perfect, infinite Lamb.

But we still respond:

Romans 12:1 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your **bodies** as living sacrifices, holy

and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.
(Cf. Eph 1:11-12; Eph 2:8-10)

The Heidelberg Catechism asks: “What is your only (hope) in life and death?”

“That I belong – body and soul in life and in death – not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

I close with the purpose of these rituals of Exodus 13.

God wanted the parents to observe these rituals regularly so that their experience of deliverance from Egypt would become their children’s experience as well.

The purpose was instructional.

Very specific rituals were established and controlled to the end that the children would ask and then experience in sensory ways the answers.

They were to see it, taste it, to realize the cost of their freedom.

And they were to do this over and over again.

The Bible places great emphasis on the repetition of ritual.

Commentator Peter Enns writes, “Ritual breeds familiarity. It seeps into one’s subconscious and, however subtly, begins to exert a formative influence... Repetition and familiarity work. What is repeated becomes familiar, and this becomes part of us. Our own culture understands this, but alas, not always the church. Far too many equate ritual with spiritual dryness. True, ritual and liturgy can be dead – even using the terms can raise hackles – but only when the significance and power of those rituals are forgotten. Spiritual death is not the property of ritual itself. To the contrary, ritual has

always been and will always be a means of securing for future generations the power and reality of the gospel” (Peter Enns, Exodus, 261)

Do our children see us participating in the rituals of worship?

Do they hear us singing praise to our God, giving our offerings, praying, listening to God’s word preached, and most importantly, participating in the Lord’s Supper?

Do we create the contexts wherein they will ask and we tell them what these things mean?

There is much we must be doing on our own, but starting June 12 we are inviting, even encouraging parents to include their children in at least the first part of our time of worship.

I want our children to ask, “What does this mean?”

Then I can answer, “The Lord has redeemed us!”