

Biblical Change – 2 Motive for Our Choices

There's an organisation called Technology, Entertainment, Design, or TED for short, that hosts conferences and gets speakers to speak on a wide variety of topics. Most of the talks are on the Internet. The most popular talk of them, with over 7 million views, is a talk by motivational speaker Tony Robbins, called "Why We Do What We Do." His views are his own, but the Bible is pretty clear on telling you why you do what you do, and it is even more clear on why you should do what you should do.

Once we understand the importance and power of choice in the process of change, we need to understand how motives are shaped. Maybe you heard last week's message and you agreed, "Yes, I know that my choices are my responsibility, and that the kind of choices I make add up to the kind of change I have, but how do I change the kind of choices I make? I very often know the sort of choices I should make, and I know the sort of choices I shouldn't make, but I still find myself making more of the wrong kind. How do I change *that*?" We know what Paul meant when he said

For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. (Rom 7:19)

We all want to make choices in the direction of change into Christlikeness, but what we find is, to put it bluntly, we don't want to. We don't want to make the right choices, and it feels like a huge struggle to make the right choices.

If we are to change, we need to know what should motivate us to choose rightly. At the moment of decision, why should I make the right choice? Why should I choose to pray instead of not praying, to be truthful instead of fudging, to turn my eyes away from what is wicked instead of watching, to lovingly encourage instead of indifferently neglect, to open my mouth to share the Gospel instead of being ashamed? Why should I obey God, and sow to the Spirit, instead of pleasing myself and sowing to the flesh?

There have been a lot of answers to this question in Christian history. Some have said it is a matter of the will. Just try harder, and be more vigorous. Others have said try less, let go and let God – the less of you, the more of Him, the better your choices will be. Others have said you need to be severe with your body, take away its pleasures, and then your choices will be purer and more focused. Others have said, you need to get a second blessing of the Holy Spirit – then your choices will be right and pleasing.

But the fact that the debate goes on shows that the answer is not in one magic bullet approach. It is in something quite familiar to us, too familiar actually. Just like we'd like it if we could blame our choices on others, or if we could get a harvest better than what we've actually sown, we'd like it if the path to motivation and desire came easily, effortlessly, even passively.

In this passage in Exodus 21 we have a rather obscure law which might not even turn our heads except for the fact that it beautifully illustrates the two halves of motivation. It answers the question, how do I make right choices? What should be my motive and my purpose in making one good choice over another?

The account of the Hebrew slave and his Master will show us two reasons to obey at any time in your Christian life. Here we have two motives to make the God-pleasing choice, and at any time, regardless of how you feel, regardless of time or place.

These two approaches are very different, as you'll see. But they are not opposites. They are not hostile to each other. They complement. In fact, they only go bad, when you have one to the exclusion of the other. If you neglect one altogether, the other becomes overgrown, unbalanced, even monstrous. Like two eyes, you need both to really have the whole picture.

I. We Need To Obey As Our Duty to God

"Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: 2 "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. 3 "If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. (Exo 21:1-3)

You could call this the Law of Indentured Servanthood. This is not the slavery that was practiced by Europeans in the 15th to 19th centuries which kidnaps a man, and forces him to work for another against his will. A Hebrew became a slave mostly out of financial desperation. When someone had either accrued a massive debt to another, or if he was what we would call bankrupt, he could enter into a contract with another Hebrew to work for him for six years. He would essentially sell himself to that man to rescue himself from his poverty (Lev 25:47) His work for the man would pay off his debt. According to Deuteronomy 15:18, this kind of servant cost half of what you would pay a hired servant. So the man who bought you was getting double his money over six years, while the one being bought got out of debt.

And during these six years, he served like a slave would serve. He lived in the household, he depended on his master for food and drink and clothing, and was counted as part of his master's property for those six years. Now God still protected him from abuse, but for all practical intents and purposes, he was no longer his own. He had given up his freedom to belong to another. He could no longer go where he wanted, eat what he wanted, dress how he wanted, relax how he wanted. His choices were now restricted by the will of his master.

And if you had asked that man in year one of his service, why do you do what you do?", his answer would have been something like, "Because I have to. It's my duty. I'm obligated. It's the law." Here the words are all obligation, responsibility, duty, have to.

And this illustrates the first, and foundational motive and reason for obeying: because we must. Because it is our duty to obey God. Because it is our obligation to obey God. Because it is right to obey God.

This picture of one man owning another is not far off from our situation with God. In fact, God owns us twice. He owns us in the first place as Creator – Psalm 24:1 says "The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein." He made you, and just like a painting you paint is yours, a sculpture you sculpt is yours, so you belong to Him. In the second place, if you are a genuine, born again Christian, He owns you as Redeemer. A Redeemer is one who would buy someone out of their poverty, or their slavery, or looming financial ruin. God is called Redeemer 18 times in Scripture, and we are told that one way of thinking about salvation is that God redeemed us from slavery to sin, from bondage to our old evil ways. So once He has redeemed us, we belong to Him.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1Co 6:19-20)

In the New Testament, Christians are called God's bond-slaves 11 times, we are called slaves of God

22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. (Rom 6:22)

Why must we obey God? Why must we make choices that please Him? Because we have to. He owns us. It is the nature of our situation. Just like that Hebrew servant was bound by law and obligation to serve and obey and was the legal property of his master, so we obey and serve and make the right choices because we must.

And of course, when you speak like this, there is a big negative reaction. You'll quickly hear people saying things like "Legalism!" We must not speak of serving God like it is an obligation." To that, I can only say, what does the Lordship of Jesus mean if it does not mean an obligation to obey Him?

What does Paul mean, when he writes

7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. 8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. (Rom 14:7-9)

or

14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. (2Co 5:14-15)

It is not legalism, or dead religion, or coldness to serve God because you must. It's important to understand that the idea of serving God because He owns you, because it is your obligation, because you have to doesn't mean it is okay to obey with a bad attitude, with pouting reluctance, with the weariness and heaviness that characterised the priests in Malachi. Dutiful obedience is simply a correct response to God. Rom 12:1: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.*' Presenting your bodies as a living sacrifice – is seen as one's *reasonable* – logical service.

10 "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" (Luk 17:10)

Why must I choose to use godly words over ungodly? Because God owns you and you have to. Why must I choose purity in thought and deed and in body? Because Christ is my Lord, and I have to obey Him. Why must I choose to serve God in the church? Because God is great, I must obey Him! Why must I choose to evangelise? Because God bought me, I must obey Him. Why must I make biblical choices as to how I conduct my family life? Because God owns me, I must obey Him. Why must I flee from temptation? God has the power to destroy me, I must obey Him. Why must I choose blameless ethics in how I conduct business? Because God is holy, I must obey Him. God is God, and must be glorified, I must obey Him. God is not mocked, I must obey. We owe Him obedience, it is our duty. If we disobey, there will be penalties. If we obey, there will be rewards.

Now, are any of those responses legalism? No, they are perfectly appropriate and necessary.

Now there is a lot of nonsense coming out of the mouths of people, particularly people of my generation and younger, who say that it is always inferior and wrong to obey because you must. They say, you should always obey out of happy, voluntary, spontaneous choice, otherwise you have

soiled your act with insincerity and hypocrisy. Well, let's try that theory out in a real-life relationship. A man is on his way home from work. He is bone-tired. His wife calls him and says, "There is nothing to eat, and I have not had a chance to run out and get something. Would you please pick something up for us on the way home?" Now, the last thing he wanted to do was stop somewhere and buy food. He does not feel like it at all. It is troublesome, irksome, and not what he wanted to do. So let's imagine he believes these guys. He arrives home, empty handed. Several hungry faces look at his empty hands with puzzlement. He explains, "See, I really didn't want to stop and buy food. And I knew that when you do something that you don't want to do, you aren't doing it for the right reasons, you aren't being sincere. So because I treasure being real with you guys, I didn't buy anything. And honey, I didn't want to be a legalist and do something only because I had to. We're under grace in this house, so we do things because we want to."

It is silly to think that there is something wrong with doing what you do out of duty. A lot of life is built on that. The hardest things in life have to be done this way. The difficult jobs, the dirty jobs, the dangerous jobs. In fact, in relationships, a lot of the strength and the faithfulness is built on doing what you ought to do, even when you don't feel like it.

As I said at the beginning, the only problem with either of these two motives is if one of them is all you have. A Christian life made up of nothing but duty is not a whole Christian life. If you only do things out of sheer obligation, or sense of His Lordship, then you are missing a huge part of the Christian life. If it never leads to anything else, then it becomes ignoble.

Now it is true in Heaven, we won't have this, because we'll be perfect. And a perfect man doesn't have to be told to do something; he already wants to. But until you reach Heaven, for the rest of your Christian life, you will always have to fall back on this, and return to this, and use this when you are weak, and do this when you have become cold, and use this motive and this purpose when you are fearful, or reluctant.

Your choices in the direction of change need to always have the sense that they are required, and expected and our obligation to the God who owns us twice.

II. We Need To Obey As Our Delight in God

4 "If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. "But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' "then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever. (Exo 21:4-6)

God knew that a situation may occur frequently enough for there to be some special allowance made. A man might work those six years, pay off his debt, and be freed from legal obligation. But along the way, something may have happened. He may have come to enjoy serving his master. He may have come to regard his master's home no longer as work, but as home. So much so, that he could have voluntarily allowed his master to act in the place of a father for him, and arrange a marriage for him, knowing full well that this was bolting him down. If his master got him a wife in year five, then she would be a servant to the master for another six years. He'd only agree to that arrangement if he was willing to stay longer.

So here you have a man who, long before year six is in sight, considers his master's household to be his home. He has come to love his master like a father, he has come to feel that working for his master is not just an obligation, but a privilege. Working for his master is no longer a duty, it is a

delight. He no longer feels simply that he has to, but that he gets to. His experience of obeying his master, of making choices that please his master has gone from legal obligation, to loving dedication.

He could walk out and live for himself, but he has come to believe it is better, it is more pleasurable to live under the authority of this man, than to go out free. He will freely give up his freedom, voluntarily give up his autonomy, and willingly submit to a new master. And now through a public ceremony, he lets the world know that he is not serving just six years out of legal obligation – he is a lifelong, willing, happy servant of this man.

What's happened here? If in the first six years the words are obligation, responsibility, duty, have to, now the words are privilege, pleasure, delight, want to. We've gone from *have to* to *want to*.

And this illustrates the second, and higher motive and reason for obeying: because we love to. Because it is our delight to obey God. Because it is our joy to obey God. Because it is a happy privilege to obey God

This picture of one man lovingly dedicating himself to another is not far off from our situation with God. Truth be told, it's at the very heart of our Christian life. After all, what is the first and greatest commandment? It is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Jesus told us “*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. (Joh 14:21)*

It is not enough to merely do our duty. It will not produce lasting change if you sluggishly, drearily, reluctantly go through the motions. Scripture is full of the idea that alongside the truth of God's greatness that teaches us we must obey, is the truth of God's goodness, that teaches us we will want to obey.

Psalm 100:2 says *2 Serve the LORD with gladness; (Psa 100:2)* We're commanded to “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!” (Phil 4:4). Ps 37:4 tells us to delight ourselves in the Lord. It is not good enough to merely give to the Lord, 2 Cor 9:6 tells us God loves a cheerful giver. A Messianic Psalm, Psalm 40:8: “*8 I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart. (Psa 40:8)*” “In Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever” (Psalm 16:11).

Duty, obligation, responsibility is good, but if it never blossoms into joy and pleasure, and delight, it becomes bad. God speaks of His disgust with Israel's continued ritual with no accompanying desire in Isaiah 1. In 29:13 He says, “Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.” Joel 2:13: “And rend your heart, and not your garments,”

Jesus says to the dutiful church of Ephesus in Rev 2:2-4 “*2 I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. (Rev 2:2-4)*”

7 "Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things; 48 therefore you shall serve your enemies (Deu 28:47-48)

God is not glorified as much by people doing their duty, as He is by his people enjoying Him, delighting in Him, expressing pleasure in him. Think about this situation: which would show the watching world that this master was good and worthy and a man to be admired – when a servant worked out his required six years, or when a servant made this public announcement - “I love my

master, I will not go out free!” When that public ear-piercing ceremony took place, for it was a public ceremony, what were people concluding about that master? He must be good, if a man gives up his own freedom to stay with him. He must be just and wise and generous, if a free man becomes a slave on purpose. He must be loving and trustworthy, if a man gives up his independence to work for him forever.

And what would people conclude if that servant was not the first? What if there was a crowd of ear-pierced servants, who had all at some point, given up their freedom to be this man's servants? What would it say? It would bring that man glory.

This is why God commands joy and pleasure and delight in Him, because it is the true sign of a heart relationship with him. To know His Fatherhood, His shepherding care, His comfort, His goodness leads to joy. So we make choices that please Him because we long to please Him. Pleasing Him pleases us. To displease Him becomes its own punishment. To please Him is our pleasure.

We long to obey Him, it is our delight. If we disobey, we displease Him. If we obey Him, it is the pleasure of pleasing Him.

Let's take our man driving home again. Let's change the scenario. This time, he phones ahead, and says, “Don't make anything for supper. Tell the kids, I have a surprise.” He gets home, and his eager family looks for what he has, and in he brings their favourite food bought from their favourite restaurant, plus desserts. And the family is rejoicing, and they say to him, “Why did you do this?” And think how honoured they will feel if he then says, “Because it was my duty. I felt obligated. I made vows at the wedding altar, and those still bind me.”

No, what will honour them and show their value is if he expresses joy and pleasure. If he sees something similar to the servant, “I wouldn't have it any other way. Because I love you, and nothing makes me happier than to spend an evening with you like this.” I am pleased by pleasing you. Would any of them object to his joy being the reason he served them?

Why must I go to church? Because I desire to see God. Why should I be faithful to my spouse? Because I long to please God. Why should I read my Bible? Because I am hungry for Him. Why should I pray? Because it is sweet, when I get past the initial irksomeness, to commune with Him. Why should I have integrity in all my dealings? Because His pleasure with me is more pleasurable than pleasing myself.

It's true, you won't always have this, so you fall back on the other, Duty and desire. Some Christians wait around for desire to come, without doing their duty. It never comes, and they neglect their duty, and so they are stuck there. Other Christians do their duty, but do not long for it to be more than that, and become stoically content to do what they do out of heartless habit, rather than heartfelt love. They say, “feelings don't matter. As long as we do what's required.” But obviously, they do matter. Duty and desire.

Now let's ask the really crucial question: How do we go from the one to the other? How do you go from being a Christian who does his duty to one who also desires God? How do you get to where the higher and better and more glorifying motive is behind more of your choices?

Let's think about the Hebrew servant. How would a man, who is paying of a six-year debt, have come to love a man so much that he would stay there permanently?

Well, let's note how it would never have happened.

No slave would have reached this place by living in disobedience. If he had always been on the wrong side of his master, disobedient, negligent, slothful, unreliable, the only side of his Master he would ever have known would be wrath. He would have made his own life a misery. He would have been chafing at the yoke that he placed around his own neck. If he had resented his duties, instead of embracing them, and lived in a kind of rebellious denial of his position, all he would wish for was the last day of the sixth year.

In the same way, if you refuse to do your duty, refuse to obey what you do know, resent the obligations that you have, and live in denial of them, you will not get to a place of delight. Your Christian life will be lived under a sense of conviction and chastening, knowing that you are like a perpetual runaway.

If you want to get to the place where more of your choices are done out of delight, then start embracing all your duties, whether you feel like them or not. Submit to the reality you are in. Willingly, trustingly, cheerfully embrace your responsibilities and duties and obey. Make the right choices in season, when it's easy, and out of season, when it's not.

If that Hebrew servant had been a cooperative, submissive servant, who pleased his master, do you know what would have happened next? He would have had the chance to observe the master. He would have watched him. He would not have been on the receiving end of punishment, but he would have been in a favoured place of trust and confidence. From there, he would have watched and seen the wisdom, the gentleness, the fairness, the kindness, the generosity of his master. And you can imagine over time, the relationship would be increasingly becoming more like a friendship. The servant's trustworthiness would have been producing more confidence from the master, and the more confidence he had in him, the more he would let him in on his confidences. And not only so, but the master would have opened more and more of himself to the servant, being generous, even finding him a wife. There is no way the master would have tried to find a wife for a servant who was cantankerous and a pain to be around.

If you live willingly under God's authority, you get to increasingly observe and commune with God. And when you do that, you see His goodness. *8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him! (Psa 34:8)*

You experience his generosity, you experience His goodness. Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 shows us that those who live submitted to the Spirit, come to know *the width and length and depth and height-- 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; (Eph 3:18-19)*

First comes submission, then comes observation. And then I think the ceremony tells us of the third way to having both desire and duty - identification. The servant was willing to go public with his joy in his master. He was willing to have a ceremony with some brief pain, which would tell the world of his willingness to publicly live under his good authority. I think we all need to do that. The joy isn't complete until you share it. You do that partly when you are baptised. You do it partly when you take the Lord's Supper. You do it by identifying yourself with God's people – His local church. You do it when you have to make a choice in front of others that shows you are seeking to please God.

Here's a test for where you are. If God were to come to you and say, "I have paid your sin debt. You don't have to serve me any longer. You will not go to hell, but you are free to live independently of Me if you want to.", would you take the offer? If I can get out of hell, and live as I want, that's first prize! The you haven't really spent time with the Master. Because if you have come to know Him in personal experience, you will say, Even if I could, I would not. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Life under your authority, lived in you, is the best life we could ask for."