

Moving, sin and other stuff

By [James Sledge](#)

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The moving van arrived at the church manse on Saturday morning. (The storm that left us without power until today complicated this only slightly.) We are moving from a home with a garage, a basement, and a large shed into a church manse with a small shed, no basement, and no garage. Let's just say there are lots and lots of boxes, along with a washer, dryer, and a good deal of furniture and lamps stashed away in the attic.

There nothing quite like a move to reveal the degree to which you are afflicted with the American idolatry of stuff. (George Carlin used to do a hilarious comedy routine about us and our stuff. You can find it on YouTube.) My wife got rid of a lot of stuff before we moved to Falls Church, but still we will soon be looking for a home of our own in the area, one with a basement and garage so we can store all that stuff that won't quite fit where we are now.

And yesterday, after several days offline, I looked at the daily readings and saw Paul talking about how we are no longer slaves to sin. In Christ we are freed from sin and become "slaves to righteousness." And Jesus is all worked up about how the Temple has stuff being sold there, how it has gone from a "house of prayer" to a "den of robbers."

I'm not entirely sure exactly where these verses intersect with me and my stuff. But it does seem that in some ways I am still a slave to the ways of this world, thinking that I won't be happy without more and more stuff. And my life is often animated more by the stuff I have and the stuff I want than by a desire to do God's will. But of course some stuff is necessary for life, and knowing just where one crosses the boundary between necessary/reasonable and idolatry of stuff can be difficult to figure precisely.

I think that Christians like me, who grew up in what purported to be a Christian culture, sometimes have difficulty reflecting on how our day to day lives do or don't

square with our faith. Because we were products of this "Christian culture," there is a certain presumption that typical, middle-class, American-dream values are in fact Christian. All of our stuff is "God's blessings."

I've been talking with the Stewardship Committee here about a fall campaign that moves away from fundraising and focuses instead on growing in faith through spiritual disciplines of giving and generosity. I want us all to reflect on the ways in which we struggle to be the generous disciples we are called to be because so much of our energy, efforts, and cash are devoted to stuff.

Paul promises that we can be set free. We can become new creations, no longer bound by what marketers or ego or envy tells us we cannot live without. And surely we want to be freed and made new.

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