

Celebrating ‘True Freedom’

The 4th of July is a very special time when we celebrate the birth of our country and our freedom as a nation. Many, many people have sacrificed so much, even their lives, their loved ones, and all they possessed to secure the freedoms we enjoy today. We are the freest nation on earth, yet in the midst of “freedom”, so many of us live enslaved lives.

"Give me liberty or give me death!" Patrick Henry placed a high value on freedom. It is for "freedom" that soldiers fight on the battlefield, sometimes to protect it, sometimes to take it away from others, and sometimes to restore it to those who have lost it. In the United States, we generally think of such freedoms as the freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, etc.

But there is more to true freedom than these noble ideas. There are some freedoms that civil law cannot give and that governments and armies cannot secure, but come only from God. These are our most important freedoms and are the freedoms that no one can ever take away if we choose to accept them: freedom from sin, freedom from sin's eternal consequences, freedom from hopelessness and despair, freedom from fear, and ultimately, freedom from death.

Jesus said to his followers: 'If you abide in my word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,'" (John 8:31-32). Jesus also said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me." (John 14:6). If we abide in His Word, we will find Jesus! Jesus is Truth! Jesus gives us ‘true freedom’ that cannot be taken away by imprisonment, circumstances, oppressors or even death. When we know Jesus for ourselves He sets us free. When Jesus sets us free—we are free indeed!

When Christ came, the whole world was lying in the power of the Evil One. In the context of Jesus' promise to "know the truth and the truth shall make you free" is an objection of some who heard Him. They countered that they had never been enslaved to anyone. Besides being historically inaccurate (they had indeed been enslaved by Egypt and others), they were missing the point. Jesus explained He was talking about their being enslaved to sin (John 8:33-36).

There was pride and pretentiousness; hypocrisy and greed; hatred and selfishness. They held to outward religious form and pomp; self glory and human tradition, often setting aside God's commandment in favor of their traditions. They were self-righteous and often hard-hearted. Jesus came to free them and to free us from such sin.

While the Jews dealt with these things, the Gentiles were no better off. They were enslaved to false gods (Galatians 4:8). Their degradation seemingly knew no limits (Romans 1:28-32). Jesus came to set us all free. He was the only One who could do so. We could not free ourselves, neither could any other force in heaven or on earth. It had to be Jesus. In Him we are set free as we are made new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

"... and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1b). The specific danger Paul addresses in the above passage is a return to or dependence upon religion or law for salvation. Paul has many fine things to say about the Law of Moses. It is good; it is righteous; it exposes our sin, it points us to Christ; it is profitable for study and learning and so forth. But it cannot justify, and returning to it for justification would only result in enslavement. True freedom is found only in Christ. Religions, tradition, ritual and laws are no substitutes for what only Christ can do. "For sin shall not be the master over you, for you are not under Law, but under grace." (Romans 6:14).

There is also another clear and present danger to our freedom that Jesus warned us about—using our freedom from the Law to return to a sinful lifestyle. “For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.” (1Pet2:15-16). This idea is repeated in Gal 2:13: “You my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather serve one another in love.” The blood of Jesus not only cleanses us of our sin but also delivers us from a lifestyle of sin.

We must stand guard over our freedom in Christ, else we may well find our liberty eroded and ourselves enslaved again. Peter warns in 2Peter 2:18-22 that the final state of enslavement can be even worse than the first. He reminds us of the importance of staying true to God’s Word and to staying fresh in our relationship with Jesus.

Even as Jesus referred to the Pharisees of His day as being enslaved, there are those today who think like the Pharisees thought. They are prideful and hypocritical. They look for a physical kingdom of silver and gold instead of a spiritual kingdom of truth and righteousness. They are steeped in human religious tradition and creeds, while setting aside the doctrine of Christ. Do not let the modern version of the Pharisee rob you of your freedom!

Neither should we deceive ourselves and use God’s grace that comes through Christ as a license to sin and live un-Godly lives. The world is constantly bombarding us with temptations and philosophies to entice us away from our salvation. Our answer: “Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1).

Freedom through Christ is a gift of love. Living free and holy lives in His service is our gift of love back to Him.

(Some excerpts are from Expository Files 8.1 by Jon W. Quinn)