

Freedom in Christ

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As Americans, we greatly value freedom. We place a premium on independence. Many have given their lives for the cause of freedom. There is something about our nature that is intently focused on freedom. We reject tyranny and oppression. We want to be able to make choices for ourselves.

Generally, we relate to the concept of freedom through the lens of American patriotism. Yet, the Bible describes a different kind of freedom than what our culture promotes. To the churches of Galatia, Paul wrote, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

In this passage, Paul considers two aspects of freedom. First, Christ is our liberator. By His death, He has made freedom available to the world. Second, this passage indicates that we must guard our freedom. If we are not cautious, we can return to slavery. More specifically, note how the Bible explains the important concept of freedom.

The Nature of Freedom

1. Sin enslaves. In much of Paul's writings, he explains the true meaning of freedom by drawing on the history of Israel. They had been enslaved by the Egyptians. God liberated them and took them to Canaan. They formed a society designed to shine the glory of God into the world. This foreshadowed what God was ultimately going to do for the world through Jesus.

Of course, our oppressor is not any particular nation. Our oppressor is sin; the yoke of bondage. By our choosing, we become enslaved to sin. Jesus warned said, "...Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). When we live according to pride and lust, sin rules our lives and dictates our behaviors. Paul wrote, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions" (Rom. 6:12).

Being enslaved to sin is hopeless. Sin over-promises and under-delivers. Sin destroys marriages and ruins families. Sin turns us into people who are untrustworthy and self-serving. Sin is dehumanizing. Sin corrupts our character. When sin is finished with us, we stand condemned. James wrote, "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (Jas 1:14-15).

2. Freedom is gained by obedience. This is a surprising aspect of freedom. We can be liberated from the enslavement of our sin if we choose to obey Jesus. Jesus said, "...If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (Joh 8:31-32). The truth is that Jesus is the Messiah. Therefore, only Jesus can save us from eternal death: "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death" (John 8:51).

Our obedience to Jesus remains the key to our freedom. Jesus claims our life; however, His expectations are light and easy. They are intended to bless our lives. To all those overburdened by the taskmaster of sin, Jesus invites to His freedom: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

3. The freedom to serve. Once we are freed from sin, what's next? What does our newfound freedom mean? Some are confused about what the freedom of Christ means. Some think freedom means they are entitled to live without restraint. As already described, this is not freedom. This is enslavement.

Like the independence of the nation of Israel, their freedom meant a new life. Rather than living under the oppressive rule of the Egyptians, they were now living under the loving rule of God. They were to cultivate His love in their lives and become a beacon of hope to the world. Likewise, in Christ, we are given new life and a new, loving Master. Living under the rule of Christ is a good life with a hopeful future.

The new freedom we have in Christ enables us to serve Him by serving others. Paul explained, "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Gal. 5:13-14). A life of self-giving service is a fulfilling life. This is how we experience the love of God in the hope of Heaven.

Additionally, Peter wrote, "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor" (1 Pet. 2:16-17). Free people do not self-righteously berate sinners. Instead, they seek their salvation. Free people honor everyone because everyone has been made in the image of God. Free people love the family of God. Free people reverence God. Free people live peacefully for the sake of expanding the reign of Christ.

Conclusion

As we observe Independence Day, let us be grateful to God for our country. More than American patriotism, however, let us be grateful for the freedom we have in Christ. Our freedom required the death of our Savior. His blood paid the price for our redemption. The sacrifice of Jesus must shape how we understand the purpose of our lives. We must live to the glory of God.

Also, we must guard our freedom. This is done by protecting ourselves from sin. We must not become entangled in the yoke of bondage. Sin will always appear enticing; however, we know better. We have come out of sin. Remembering the consequence of sin must serve as a warning not to return to such a hopeless life. Instead, we must use our freedom in Christ to serve.