Freedom in Christ

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Last Monday, was Memorial Day. The nation pays tribute to the men and women who have served in the military past and present. One of the annual features of this observance is the Washington D.C. Memorial Day Concert. For over thirty years, a national celebration has commenced on the National Mall.

The celebration includes actors who read letters from Veterans. This is always an emotional part of the event. This year one actor read a letter from a World War II veteran. This man stormed the beaches at Normandy. After surviving this horrific day, he was redeployed to fight in the Battle of the Bulge. Somehow, he lived. Afterward, he received orders to redeploy in Japan. Thankfully, the war ended before his deployment.

This was an incredible story. This veteran was present in the audience. After two other letters from Veterans were read, a woman came on stage to sing a song. I did not recognize the performer, so I Googled her. In the results that came up, I quickly learned this woman was a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community as a bi-sexual. Immediately, I thought, "This is who our veterans fought and died for?!?!"

Then, my self-righteousness got the better of me. I thought about Jesus and Him laying down His life for me and the rest of the world. I thought about what He must think when He sees us living in sin in the name of freedom.

When soldiers in World War II were fighting in Europe and the Pacific, they were fighting for freedom. But, did they think this freedom would mean that one day the people they fought for could promote homosexuality? Most likely not.

More importantly, when Jesus died on the cross to liberate us from sin, what kind of freedom did He secure for us? Freedom to sin? Of course not! Yet, we are often mistaken and wrong about the nature of freedom. Freedom does not mean having the right to do whatever we choose. Consider more accurately the nature of the freedom Jesus secured.

The Nature of Freedom

1). The enslavement of sin. We cannot understand freedom without first appreciating oppression. Sin enslaves. Sin holds us hostage. Sin dominates. Sin slowly destroys. As long as sin has us in its grip, we will never know true freedom.

The apostle Paul often wrote about the enslavement of sin by drawing on Israel's history of slavery. The nation of Egypt oppressively enslaved the descendants of Jacob for over four hundred years. In His time, God delivered Israel by the hands of Moses.

This Exodus from Egypt was a sign of a greater exodus in the future. By the blood of the Messiah, God would redeem humanity from their enslavement to sin. Through faith in Jesus, we can be released from the crushing grip of sin. Notice how Paul described this in Romans:

"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:20-23).

2). Leaving sin. From the passage in Romans chapter six, we learn that our freedom in Christ requires we leave sin. Just like Israel leaving Egypt for a new life in Canaan, we cannot return to a life of sin. This is critical to understand the nature of freedom.

Freedom in Christ does not mean we have the right to sin. We cannot celebrate our freedom while proudly flaunting sin. Such thinking is a perversion of freedom. This delusion will only reattach us to the leg irons of sin. Paul wrote in Galatians, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

3). The use of freedom. Freedom requires responsibility. Freedom enables us to express true humanity. The freedom of Christ enlivens us as God's imagers, made to fill the world with His love and goodness. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, "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" (Gal. 5:13).

Freedom can only be experienced within the right boundaries. For example, if you catch a fish and set it free, what do you do? Keep the fish on dry land or put the fish back in the water? Of course, you would put the fish back in the water. A fish cannot live out of the water.

Likewise, with us, we can only experience freedom within the right boundaries. We cannot be free while living for our selfish desires. Paul continues to warn against using our freedom to gratify the flesh. Rather, we must seek freedom by following the Spirit and bearing the Spirit's fruit in our lives.

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law…If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16-18, 25).

Conclusion

As the summer begins, our nation remembers freedom and its price. We should be humbled by the sacrifice of those who secured our freedom. Even more so, we must be awed by Jesus who died that we might be freed from sin and eternal death. His self-giving love must shape our understanding of how we are to live.