

Dependence Not Independence
Galatians 6:7-10
July 4, 2021

Today is Independence Day, or more accurately “The Declaration of Independence Day.” As we celebrate this day, I am sure you would all agree that freedom is a precious gift. We have this gift because our forefathers paid a tremendous price for it.

Of the fifty-six people who signed the Declaration of Independence, five were captured by the British, tortured and executed; twelve had their homes burned; nine lost their lives in the war; and two lost their sons in the war. And countless amounts of people lost lives, homes, and families. Freedom is not free; it is very expensive.

President Reagan was right when he said:

“Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn’t pass it on to our children in the bloodstream. The only way they can inherit the freedom we have known is if we fight for it, protect it, defend it, and then hand it to them with the well fought lessons of how they in their lifetime must do the same. And if you and I don’t do this, then you and I may well spend our sunset years telling our children and our children’s children what it once was like in America when men were free.”¹

Freedom is not free. It is not cheap. In fact, it often costs hundreds of thousands of lives, perhaps more. So, what is freedom? How do you define it?

Does freedom mean that I can do whatever I want to do? Some people think freedom means, “I can do whatever I want to do, whenever I want to do it, wherever I want to do it, and however I want to do it.” Is that what freedom means? Is that why our forefathers and foremothers gave their lives? Was it just to allow people to indulge themselves in their own desires? If all the citizens of any nation do whatever they want to do, will it be a free nation? Will it not be an anarchistic country?

Freedom carries responsibility with it. That responsibility is for the common good for all citizens. It is for the justice for all. Only when everyone lives for the

¹ From Ronald Reagan’s 1961 Speech on Socialism.
<https://fee.org/articles/ronald-reagan-at-110-twenty-of-his-best-quotes-on-freedom-government-and-america/>

common good and common justice can a nation be truly just and free. But can this be achieved by human effort?

Saint Paul described human nature in a very confessional manner in Romans 7. He said, “The law is spiritual; but I am NOT spiritual. I do not understand my own actions. For what I want to do, I don’t do; but what I hate and despise, I do... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it... What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death?”² This was Paul’s confession of his own human nature but is this just for Paul? Isn’t this our own human nature, too? We need some help if we want to do good, if we want to be what God wants us to be.

When a few people do bad things, it affects the whole society in a negative way. Everyone gets hurt. If a few Christian leaders do immoral things, all Christians hurt, and the Lord is dishonored. When politicians violate their own law, everyone feels betrayed. It requires everyone to live for the common good and common justice in order to secure our nation to be free and just.

But like Paul, we often find ourselves violating our own principles and our own values. We see ourselves doing what we don’t want to do, and NOT doing what we want to do. Instead of declaring “Independence”, perhaps we need to learn to Declare Dependence – dependence on God who empowers us to be the kind of people he calls us to be.

There is a hymn in our Hymnal #402 called “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian.” According to Miles Mark Fisher, who wrote *Negro Slave Songs in the United States*, this song could have been written in Virginia based on a story of a black slave. “A black slave asked Presbyterian pastor William Davis, ‘I come to you, sir, that you may tell me some good things concerning Jesus Christ and my duty to God, for I am resolved not to live any more as I have done... Lord (Sir), I want to be a Christian.’”³

What a powerful statement – “I am resolved not to live any more as I have done.” When we know God’s grace and his willingness to forgive us, we often dismiss our sinful attitudes and behaviors. We justify our actions done out of pride rather than humility and our complacency in the injustice, all because we bear the name Christian.

² Selected passages from Romans 7.

³ https://hymnary.org/text/lord_i_want_to_be_a_christian_in_my_heart

We must dedicate ourselves to being Christian – not just claiming the name, but to resolve “not to live any more as we have done.” And this cannot be achieved only by own will and effort. We need God’s intervention and help. We need to depend on the Lord each and every day.

Another thing we need to consider is that there is a consequence in freedom. All actions and behaviors bring a result.

Paul reminds us of this in his letter to Galatians: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”⁴

Freedom means we are free to sow whatever we want but there is a consequence. We reap whatever we sow. This is the law of life. If we sow a good life, we reap a good life. If we sow a careless, irresponsible and indulgent life, we reap accordingly. It is our choice. That is why Paul counsels us: “Let us not be weary in doing good: for in due time, we shall reap a harvest if we do not faint.”⁵

Misuse of freedom can lead us to a new form of slavery. There are many people who live a life of slavery and don’t even know it. People who cannot break their dangerous and destructive habits, people who live dehumanizing and degrading lives, people who hold on to self-defeating attitudes and life-denying practices. They are all living a life of slavery and they need freedom through dependence – the dependence on the power of God that frees us from all forms of slavery.

Some people think that they can defy the laws of sowing and reaping; but it is an illusion. If we want a healthy body, then we must sow the right seeds for a healthy body. We must eat right, exercise regularly, and take care of ourselves. If we want a happy marriage, then we must sow the seeds of a happy marriage, mutual respect and mutual service.

We are free but freedom has consequences. In order to properly exercise our freedom, we must be dependent on God. We must surrender ourselves to the Lord.

George Matheson, a 19th century Scottish minister, understood this very well. He wrote a Hymn called, “Make Me a Captive, Lord.” In it he wrote:

⁴ Galatians 6:7-8.

⁵ Galatians 6:9.

“Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free.
Force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be.
I sink in life’s alarms when by myself I stand;
Imprison me within thine arms, and strong shall be my hand.”⁶

George Matheson understood that only in true surrender to God, he could be what God wanted him to be. True freedom is being who we are meant to be.

On this Independence Day, let us not only celebrate the fact that we have freedom in this country, but also celebrate our dependence on God who gives us true freedom to be what he wants us to be.

⁶ UM Hymnal #421 verse 1.