

July 5, 2009

“Let Freedom Ring!”

Galatians 5:13-14 (NLT)

¹³ For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. ¹⁴ For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Yesterday we all celebrated America's birthday. America, you've got to love it:

Only in America can a pizza get to your house faster than an ambulance.

Only in America do drugstores make the sick walk all the way to the back of the store to get their prescriptions, while healthy people can buy cigarettes at the front.

Only in America do people order double cheeseburgers, large fries and a DIET coke.

Only in America do banks leave their front and back doors open, but chain their pens to the counter.

Only in America do we buy hot dogs in packages of ten and buns in packages of eight.

Only in America do we leave cars worth thousands of dollars in the driveway and put our junk in the garage.

Only in America do we use answering machines to screen calls and have call-waiting so we won't miss a call from someone we didn't want to talk to in the first place.

The United States of America was 233 years old yesterday. That's a long time for a nation to remain free. But nations like Egypt, China, Japan, Rome, Greece make America's history seem so short.

We are so young. And yet we stand tall among these nations because of the principles on which we were established: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain *inalienable* Rights (absolute, indisputable, undeniable, not able to be forfeited rights), that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

Thus begins the Declaration of Independence, which we celebrate today. Some Americans think we celebrate on July 4 our Independence Day. We don't. We should call it our DECLARATION of Independence Day. On that day in 1776 we merely signed (literally, put our John Hancock) on a declaration. But that did not establish our independence. King George did not read the Declaration and then say to Thomas Jefferson, "Pretty nice piece of writing Tommy boy, ok enjoy your USA, old chap, and send me a postcard from Colonial Williamsburg." No, it took seven years of struggle before the Constitution could be written.

Now, and don't let anyone tell you any different, freedom ought and needs be celebrated. I love our country and celebrate today with you the freedoms which God has blessed this

great nations of ours. Now I'm not sure whether God has blessed us with liberty and therefore we are free or if we have wisely built our liberty based on biblical principles. In any case our freedom is from God. And we should be thankful to God for it and celebrate it. Freedom is from God.

So let me give this caution: With freedom comes great responsibility. We are not free to live excessive lives. We are not free to pursue selfish ends. Our independence does not mean freedom to do whatever we want. As Paul so powerfully puts it: "...you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature."

You have been called to live in freedom: Paul had shared the Good News of Christ with the Galatians, but Paul makes it clear that he did not make them free, Christ made them free. Paul is only the messenger; they have been called and made free by God, with a freedom that only Jesus can give.

Paul goes on to give this warning: "But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature." We are not free to do as we please, we are free so that we can do what pleases God.

Freedom requires righteous behavior. Freedom requires kindness, respect, graciousness, viz. love. On this July 4th weekend we celebrate Freedom and goodness or the freedom to be good, to act right. Celebrating freedom ought to mean thanking God and loving others.

Christian freedom cannot be defined as permission to do anything we want (it is not a freedom to satisfy our sinful nature). Rather, it is the opportunity to do what Christ wants. We are not free in the sense of totally governing ourselves. Our independence was from England, but we are not totally independent from Christ. We are under the restraint of the Holy Spirit, and the higher law of God, the law of love. Freedom must be used to glorify Christ and serve others, not just to fulfill our personal desires.

I read, from America's God and Country Encyclopedia, the following quote:

The Colonists grew in their resilience and confidence in God, to the point where one Crown-appointed Governor wrote of the condition to the Board of Trade back in England: "If you ask an American who is his master? He will tell you he has none, nor any governor but Jesus Christ."

The Committees of Correspondence soon began sounding the cry across the Colonies: "No King but King Jesus!"

General Omar Bradley the U.S. Army officer who commanded the highly effective 12th Army Group, which helped ensure the Allied victory over Germany during World War II; and later served as first chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (1949-53) said,

"America today is running on the momentum of a Godly ancestry, and when that momentum runs down, God help America."

Paul was writing to the Galatians who took the idea of freedom to far. They thought that because they were free from certain Jewish rituals and laws, they were free to live any way they desired. But we can easily become slaves to our desires. Paul lets them know that they are not free to live anyway they desired, they certainly were not free to satisfy their sinful desires. Instead they were to use their freedom to serve one another in love.

Paul says do not satisfy your sinful (selfish) nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.

Love for others flows out from what God has done in each believer's heart. The Greek word for love (*agape*) refers to selfless, self-giving love. Christian freedom does not leave believers wandering through life without laws, rules, restraints, or guidelines. Instead, they freely live according to God's standards and glorify God through loving service to others. (from the Life Application Bible Commentary).

It is confusing to the world, but we are free...to serve. We are free to be slaves of God and others. This is freedom at the deepest level, freedom in Christ allows us to voluntarily serve one another with joy.

Do not use your freedom to satisfy the sinful nature, but rather to use your freedom to serve one another in love – that means: Freedom is not the starting point or the spring board to fulfill your own desires, rather freedom is the starting point of being able to serve one another in love.

America is losing sight of this, Christians or Jesus followers must not.

America thinks the answer is to add more and more laws to the books. We only need one law as Paul said, "For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" By the way, loving neighbor as yourself is the result of loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

What the people of our country need are not more laws, what people need is a new heart; They need to be set free from being a slave to their sinful nature, a slave to sin. They need to be free to love their neighbor as themselves.

As believers, or Jesus Followers we are called to be free to serve others in love. When we do people see Jesus. Jesus is the only hope for our country. Our founding fathers knew that, we must not lose sight of that.

This week celebrate your freedom but remember it comes with the responsibility to live righteously. Serve others in love, that they may see your good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven. Only Jesus, the Son of God makes us truly free, by forgiving sin, cleansing the sinful nature, and empowering us by the Holy Spirit to serve others in love.

As it says in John 8:34,36 (THE MESSAGE): Jesus said, "I tell you most solemnly that anyone who chooses a life of sin is trapped in a dead-end life and is, in fact, a slave.... So if the Son sets you free, you are free through and through." (or, "you are truly free").