

Happy Fourth of July. This weekend, as we once again celebrate our nation's birth, it is good to reflect on the qualities that have made the United States the unique country that it is. We are a free people and freedom is perhaps the central, founding principle of this nation. Freedom is at the heart of what it means to be an American. Freedom is to an American like water is to a fish. Just as a fish will never know what it is like to live on land, most of us Americans will never know what it is like to live under the yoke of tyranny. We live in the "land of the free." If you doubt that, just ask our refugee neighbors.

But not everyone is free. Some are held captive by a distorted view of freedom. Just last week in Arkansas a man drove his car into a Ten Commandments monument shouting "Freedom" as he destroyed the monument. To him, freedom means I can do anything I please and no one can tell me how to live, including God. That's not exactly the freedom our founding fathers envisioned. Others are held captive by destructive habits and invisible forces that suck the life out of them.

How can we live as free people? How can we set others free, those who are under the yoke of slavery in all its forms? Jesus answered that question but much of what he said on the subject has been redacted or left out. What is left falls under the category of "Hearsay or Heresy." You have heard it said that "The truth will make you free." Those six words of Jesus have become embedded in our culture. You can find them on the floor of CIA Headquarters - it's their motto. You can find them on countless high schools and courthouses and university libraries. In fact, the motto of SMU, Veritas Liberabit Vos, is the Latin translation of these words. These are strong words but unfortunately, they are wrong words. Look at these words in their context and you realize that it is not the truth that makes us free. It is our knowledge of and obedience to the word of God that leads to freedom. The truth does not make anyone free. It is knowing that truth that makes us free. When you know the truth, accept the truth and obey the truth then and only then will you truly be free. **To embrace the truth is to live free. To reject the truth is to live in captivity.**

Let's look at these six words in their context. "As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. So, Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you continue (abide, remain) in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'" John 8:30-32. Free from what?

The truth will set you free from the curse of the Law. John identifies Jesus' primary audience in these verses – Jews. These disciples of Moses were very proud of the fact that they lived by the Law, the first five books of the Old Testament. But the Law doesn't make anyone free. In fact, those who live under the Law are cursed. "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse." Gal. 3:10. Is the Law a curse? No, the Law is good. But those who are trusting in the Law to save them are cursed. The Law was not intended to save us. It shows us God's standards. It shows us that we fall short of keeping God's standard but it cannot save us. "A man is not justified by the Law but through faith in Christ." Gal. 1:16. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"—¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Gal. 3:13-14. And, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." Ro. 8:2. Don't live in bondage to externally imposed rules and regulations but walk in the Spirit.

Don't be a Polar Bear Christian. A lot of Christians resemble the Polar Bear I read about a few years ago. A large zoo was given a Polar Bear but they had no habitat for it...raised money...built a world-class enclosure...the bear stayed in a large cage...four steps to the left and four steps to the right. The big day arrived and everyone turned out to watch...Care to guess what happened? He walked out into the open, sniffed the air, took four steps to the left and four steps to the right. Even though he was free he was still imprisoned by his own mind. "It was for freedom that Christ set us free." We are free from the worship of self. We are free from our fatal attraction to Law. Paul says, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free." Gal. 5:1.

The truth can set you free from the tyranny of the flesh. Notice the response of the Jews to Jesus' words. "They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?' Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.'" John 8:33-34. The Pharisees failed to recognize that sin is a rejection of God's rule and reign and they had become a law unto themselves. They were their own authority. We want to be our own gods.

Freedom is often confused with autonomy. Auto = self, nomos = law. And I want to be free from all authority but my own. I want what I want when I want it. The very first recorded lie was that Adam and Eve could be their own gods and call their own shots – accountable to no one. We are still living with the disastrous consequences of believing that lie and it is still with us. It begins at birth. You know that. I have suggested before that we should post this sign in our child care area:

Property Laws Of A Toddler

1. If I like it, it's mine.
2. If it's in my hand, it's mine.
3. If I can take it from you, it's mine.
4. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.
5. If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way.
6. If I'm doing or building something, all the pieces are mine.
7. If it looks just like mine, it's mine.
8. If I saw it first it's mine.
9. If you are playing with something and you put it down, it automatically becomes mine.
10. If it's broken, it's yours!

Freedom is not being a law unto myself. Freedom is the opportunity to be all that God created me to be without fear and without interference. The freedom Jesus offers does not mean autonomy. It is the freedom to be who our loving Creator created us to be. The good news of the gospel is that we are free from what we once were to pursue who God created us to be.

Freedom always comes at a price. I may think I am free to indulge my appetite but I am not free of the consequences. I am free to eat all I want but I am not free to be thin. All freedom comes with a corresponding bondage. I am free to play any keys on the piano but I am not free to play great music. Only those who become slaves to the notes and the corresponding keys can play great music. Autonomous freedom is not an option. We can be free from following God's truth but we can't be free of the consequences of rejecting it. And the consequences are severe. C. S. Lewis once observed, "The lost enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded."

Christ not only sets us free FROM but He sets us free TO. He has set us free TO serve one another as we “live out our God-given purpose in Christ every day.” We are free to use our gifts to serve others.

Peter says, “Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.” 1 Pe. 2:16

Paul says, “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Gal. 5:13-14

One of the great debates that surfaces this time of year is whether America is a “Christian nation.” You could argue either way but there is no denying that the influence of Christianity was a dominant factor in the founding of this nation. The founding fathers of this country were seeking a place where they could worship God freely and serve Him openly. Those early American Christians were influenced by a Reformation led by Martin Luther that was spreading all over Europe. Luther once said,

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.
A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant, subject to all.

These are seemingly contradictory statements. Jesus Christ has set us free. Because of that, we are completely free people, not under any sort of law that we must follow to earn or keep our salvation. But we are not free to serve ourselves. We are not free from doing good works. Good works are inseparable from our calling. “We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which He has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:10. So, as a Christian, I am subject to none and subject to all.

So let me remind you as we go off to our cookouts and our fireworks displays - the truth CAN set you free from all these things but it WILL set you free only under one condition – “IF you abide in my word.” Then you will know the truth and it is the knowledge of and obedience to the truth that WILL set you free. Living in America will not make you free any more than walking into ATT Stadium will make you an NFL star. Walking into this church will not make you free any more than walking into a stable will make you a horse.

Do you want to be free? Don’t seek freedom. Seek Jesus. Jesus is THE truth who conquered death and overcame the grave. It is Jesus who sets us free from the prison of self and offers a place in Heaven as a joint-heir with the King of Kings. Seek Jesus who promised to set us free from a slavish obedience to the Law of Moses and offers help and encouragement and companionship and guidance of His Holy Spirit.

“If the Son sets you free you shall be free indeed.”

Is freedom such a hard concept for these Islamic countries that support terrorism?

People are often held captive by a false narrative. What kind of disinformation campaign have you encountered in places like Iraq and Afghanistan?

What are some of the rules these people live by?

Fear and intimidation are favorite tools of the oppressor. How have you seen these used?

Tell us about a time when people moved from fear of US forces to appreciation, even trust.

Many of your troops are teenagers. Do they understand what they are fighting for?

Give us an example of the price freedom requires.