

A Free People By Steven Harper

In this country, it seems the most popular topic of discussion [especially now in political discussion] is freedom or, as some see it, freedoms [in the plural sense of the word]. This country has had a long history of concern for freedom, especially in regard to what we often call personal freedom, begun with the statement within the famous Declaration of Independence:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

According to the beliefs of the Founding Fathers, as noted in this now-famous statement, they argued that it was “self-evident” [that is, obvious and needing no proof or demonstration] that God has given life, freedom, and the right to be happy to each and every man on earth. Although common sense, thousands of years of history, and even Scriptures do not agree, this is what they believed, and what many more have come to accept as truth. We, as a people, believe we have a God-given right to be free, and to disagree would cause many to get angry and start hurling accusations of being “anti-American” or something worse.

The writers of the Declaration of Independence did go on to say that they also believed: *“That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men”* and that those governments’ powers were derived from the people. I’m not sure if I have ever heard anyone note the inconsistency in that statement, but the basic principle here is that government is instituted to ensure these freedoms that have been given to us by God. Many “Constitutionalists” today argue for those freedoms and bemoan the perceived loss of those freedoms [denied by the very government they say must protect those freedoms], and will go on to complain that if we claim freedoms come from government, rather than from God, then we must admit those same governments can take away those freedoms.

Again, I would argue that history shows that very fact is true; governments can and have taken away freedoms from men, and they have done so since almost the beginning of recorded history [and probably before the records existed]. Freedom is certainly desired by most all men, but it is certainly not guaranteed. More men — by a wide margin — have lived in slavery, under tyranny, under despotism, and under ruthless dictatorships than those who have lived truly free. We should not be surprised at this fact, but rather thankful that we have been able to enjoy for so long a government that has not been oppressive.

By now, you are probably wondering what the spiritual message is in all this. Some of you probably dropped out when I disagreed with the Founding Fathers! Stick with me for a minute, though; I believe we can learn some important lessons from this discussion.

While we may be interested in the freedoms we enjoy as citizens of this country, and motivated to argue for the retention of the freedoms we have for so long enjoyed, we should be more interested in a different kind of freedom, and more interested in telling others about this freedom more than those outlined in our Declaration of Independence. That freedom is found in Christ Jesus, not in our founding documents.

We may remember that it was Jesus who told those who had gathered at the temple in Jerusalem, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). They argued that they had never been in bondage (v. 33), but Jesus reminded them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (vv. 34-36). Here, Jesus reveals that men may be free by the truth and by the Son, but free from what? The context shows He was speaking of freedom from sin, and other Bible passages teach this, also. The apostle Paul reminded the Roman believers “that you have been set free from sin” (Rom. 6:22).

This freedom is one to be desired of all men, though some simply do not understand the value of it, and many others [like those Jews said to Jesus] believe they are already free, and have no need to be delivered from anything. It is evident that the vast majority of mankind does not recognize the fact that they are firmly trapped in “the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (2nd Tim. 2:26), and so they live as if they had not a care in the world for their spiritual state. Far too many will only recognize their true condition when it is too late.

But we should note now some facts about this freedom — what it means and what it does not mean.

What This Freedom Means. Freedom from sin means we are no longer bound by its condemnation, no longer bound by its inevitable consequence, and no longer bound by the fear it brings to those who are guilty. Paul reminded the Roman brethren, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1); that is something one outside of Christ could never hope to achieve! As Paul also wrote, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), and every man outside of Christ faces that condemnation. Inside of Christ, we are free from that condemnation!

The freedom we have in Christ also brings relief from the fear of death — the consequence of sin. Though the end result of sin is death (Jas. 1:15), and all men — before Christ came — “through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Heb. 2:15), now, in Christ, we have no reason to fear death! Jesus brought forgiveness from sins, so we are free from its consequences!

What This Freedom Does Not Mean. Freedom from sin does not mean we cannot ever sin again, however. John reminded the disciples of the first century, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1st John 1:8), and, “If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (v. 10). Clearly, we cannot honestly say we do not sin — or cannot sin — as Christians. Just a few examples from the New Testament show this idea to be false (Acts 8:18-24; Gal. 2:11ff).

This freedom in Christ also does not mean that we are free to do whatever we want. By definition, a Christian is one who follows the teachings of Christ; that means we are bound to obey Him and His words if we want to be called His people. Peter reminded the Christians of the first century to not use their freedom in Christ “as a cover-up for evil” (1st Pet. 2:16), but to live honorably as good citizens and as faithful servants of Christ who pursue righteousness, rather than the pleasures of the flesh. Unfortunately, some have come to believe that, once in Christ, they can never fall away and they then live however they wish, falsely thinking they will not be condemned! Paul reminds us that we may profess God but then deny Him by our lives (Titus 1:15, 16); let that never be said of us, and let us never take for granted the freedom that we have in Christ!

Freedom in Christ is a wonderful thing, and it is something no man can take from us. That being true, let us not mistakenly believe it can never be surrendered! While it cannot be taken from us, we can give it up by choosing self over Christ!