

The Responsibility of Freedom

We are taking a break from our sermon series on this fourth of July weekend to acknowledge our blessings as free citizens and to acknowledge and express our thanks to all who have sacrificed to secure those freedoms we enjoy today. Once again, thank you to all who have served in our armed forces. I hope all of you have a safe Independence Day tomorrow and that you take a moment at some point to thank the Lord for the freedoms you enjoy as Americans.

I called this message The Responsibility of Freedom. Most of us were born here in America, born as free citizens. That was not the case two hundred and fifty years ago as a war was fought to secure freedom from the rule and control of England. It was not the case for many a hundred and sixty years ago as a war was fought to emancipate slaves in this country. Freedoms were declared, but freedoms had to be won and had to be maintained. People still had to fight to enjoy the blessings of those freedoms. The American civil rights movement was about fighting so that freedoms secured by law could be enjoyed and experienced by everyone in this nation. Freedom may be won for us, but we have a responsibility to maintain it so we can enjoy the blessings of freedom. It involves sacrifice, effort and discipline. John Adams, our second president who helped draft the Declaration of Independence wrote, **“I am well aware of the toil and blood and treasure that it will cost us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States...Yet through all the gloom I can see the rays of ravishing light and glory. I can see that the end is more than worth all the means.”...John Adams**

Adams and the founding fathers of this nation understood that liberty and freedom could be declared by law, but maintaining freedom, living in the blessings of liberty would require discipline and effort and sacrifice. As citizens we would do well to remember the responsibility of freedom. We have a responsibility to vote, to speak out, to protest, to exercise our rights. We also have a responsibility to share with others the blessings and fruits of freedom and democracy. Freedom requires something of us as citizens of this country. We have a responsibility to freedom. But remember we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. Freedom was won for us at Calvary, but something is required of us.

Pastor McQueen used to say, with great blessing comes great responsibility. Jesus said to whom much is given, much is required. Freedom has been given to us, but we have a responsibility to maintain that freedom, to not surrender it and return to slavery. The Apostle Paul writes, **“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do**

not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1 Paul isn't saying we are saved by our efforts in addition to grace. There is nothing we can do to earn salvation. Remember **“He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to his mercy.” Titus 3:5.** But Jesus has set us free from the shackles and burdens of sin, and calls us to live in that freedom and never let anyone enslave us again; not yourself by your poor choices, not the devil, not anyone. We have a responsibility to stand in the freedom Jesus won for us. Eugene Petersen's Message paraphrase reads, **“Christ has set us free to live a free life. So take your stand! Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you.” Galatians 5:1**

He saved you so you could be free. He saved you so you could find a new life and a new purpose in him, so you could live the victorious life he created you to live. **“Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”** Live a free life!

This is what I've come to tell you on this Fourth of July weekend. Jesus set you free from sin, set you free from a lifestyle of sin, he broke addictions from your life, he has given you freedom so you can make right choices, redeemed choices, good choices. Stand firm in his freedom and don't go back into bondage!

Paul said, **“I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” Philippians 3:12.** Jesus took hold of you for a reason. He acquired you, bought you, redeemed you. Think of yourself as an athlete who had some problems and you couldn't play but then the owner of your dream team acquires you, pays \$20 million dollars for you, and says, “I acquired you and now you are free to play.” That owner expects you to stay free, to not waste his \$20 million investment on cocaine or whatever foolishness got you in trouble. He expects you to play ball and live out your purpose, the reason he acquired you! Jesus saved you, acquired you by his grace, his sacrifice, and he wants you to live out your purpose. He sacrificed his life and saved you so you could live free and be all he called you to be. He expects you to stand firm, to refuse to go back to slavery, refuse to go back to living an old way of life. Don't go back to sinful thinking and sinful choices. That's slave thinking! Stand firm and stand free!

Listen to what I'm telling you. Jesus gave his life to set you free. He liberated you from so much. He set you free for a higher purpose, for a greater life, a greater calling. He intends for you to be more than you were, more than you are now. He has set you free from sin and its condemnation and he has made you his own. He has made you his own son, his own daughter. He wants you to live like you are a child of God. He intends for you to live free, not free to live

any old way you want, but free to live as that new person in Christ. You are free, not to indulge your flesh but free to live and choose to do what is right, to please God, to live without being haunted and hounded by condemnation and guilt and shame and fear, free to live with a clean conscience, free to live knowing your sins are forgiven and you are going to heaven. It was for this kind of freedom Christ set us free. Don't let Satan lure you away from Jesus and from his freedom and back into bondage and slavery. You've come too far to turn back now!

It's your responsibility to stand in that freedom. Paul writes, **“For you were called to freedom; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh...” Galatians 5:13** What does he mean by “an opportunity for the flesh?” “Flesh” is referring to our sinful desires – that part of us that wants to live outside of God's will, to live apart from God's design and his plans. Jesus set us free and calls us to freedom, to live by obeying him and his word.

Paul mentions some of those desires of the flesh that are at war against God's will. **“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing and things like these, of which I forewarn you...those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21**

Notice the first three have to do with sexuality – immorality, impurity, sensuality. They refer to both actions and thoughts. Immorality is any kind of sexual sin, any sexual activity outside of the God-ordained marriage covenant between a husband and wife. Impurity is referring to impure thoughts; sensuality refers to what the Living Translation calls “eagerness for lustful pleasure.” It's easy to be drawn back to sexual immorality, to these desires of the flesh. But Jesus has set us free so we can live free from immorality, even in our thought life.

Paul mentions idolatry and sorcery, spiritism, witchcraft. We've been set free from sin and idolatry so we can worship the Living God. We are to have nothing to do with demonic sources or spirits, consulting fortune tellers, psychics, etc.

Paul then mentions areas of the sinful nature that effect relationships. The Living Bible reads, **“...hatred and fighting, jealousy and anger, constant effort to get the best for yourself, complaints and criticism, the feeling that everyone else is wrong except those in your own little group...”** You were called to freedom, to stand free, to live free, and to never go back to a life or a lifestyle that gives opportunity for these kinds of things to run rampant in your life! It was for freedom Christ set you free, not for factions and fighting. Are you free?

The last things Paul mentions (**next slide with previous verse**) are drunkenness, carousing, a “party spirit”, a lifestyle out of control. He says these things separate you from God and you won’t inherit the kingdom of God. You aren’t going to heaven if you give yourself to this kind of life instead of giving yourself to God. Jesus gave himself for you so you could be free from this kind of life.

Look at verse 13 again. **“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.’” Galatians 5:13-14**

Don’t turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh. Paul uses a word that in other places suggests a base of operations. Don’t allow your freedom to serve as a base of operations from which the devil can gain a stronghold in your life. Don’t give into the desires of the flesh or you’ll find yourself enslaved again. You become a slave of whatever you serve. Don’t go back to sin. Don’t go back to selfishness, living only for yourself, instead, “through love serve one another.” Here is the whole law – Love God and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus not only sets you free, he imparts grace to you and the strength and power of the Holy Spirit to you can stay free, so you can walk and live in freedom. Paul writes, **“But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” Galatians 5:16.** Walk by the Spirit. Paul seems to be referring to the fact that when we repented of our sins and placed our faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit took up residence in our life. We have been made new creations through the work of the Holy Spirit. He is producing the life and character of Christ in us. Walk by the Spirit and you won’t surrender to or re-engage in those “desires of the flesh” we mentioned before. But notice, this isn’t automatic. We have a responsibility to freedom. You’re going to choose whether you’ll walk by the Spirit or will you choose to give in to the desires of your flesh and fall back into bondage. Paul tells us the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. There is a battle going on, but Jesus has set you free from sin’s power to dominate and control your life. He has provided victory for you and has called you to live a life of freedom, but you have to choose to stand firm and not go back into slavery to sin. Stand firm in that freedom by his grace. His grace is sufficient for us if we will look to him. Stand firm by the indwelling presence and help of the Holy Spirit. Choose to cooperate with the Holy Spirit, choose to reject the easy ways of sin and

choose Jesus and his way. Stand firm by exercising the spiritual disciplines of prayer, studying God's word and living in obedience. All of this is part of our responsibility to live in freedom.

Are you living in freedom? Are there areas of your life where you aren't free? Are there areas where you have started surrendering to old patterns, an old lifestyle, sinful choices? What about your thought life? Are you free or are you in bondage to impure thoughts, bound to pornography, bound again to addictive behavior, to alcohol, drugs, gambling? Are you in bondage in the area of relationships? Are you living in a sinful relationship? In sexual sin and immorality? Are relationships being destroyed because of envy, jealousy, anger, rage? Are you refusing to forgive someone for something in the past? Trying to get even. You are driven to behavior you know is not pleasing to God. That's bondage. **“It was for freedom that Christ has set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”**

If there is an area of your life where you feel like you are in bondage, that you aren't truly living in the freedom that you believe Jesus wants for you, I want you to come and meet me here and we are going to pray and ask God for his grace so we can stand firm in the freedom he has secured for us. This is part of the responsibility of freedom, for us to ask for his help, to get free and to stand firm in that freedom.