

Freedom

Galatians 5:1 (New International Version)

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

INTRODUCTION: Freedom Lady.

Atop the hill in Washington, D.C. stands the Capitol Building of the United States of America. The cornerstone was laid in 1793, but the crowning touch, is the statue on top of the rotunda known as the “Freedom Lady” that was placed there in 1863.

The Freedom Lady, stands nearly 20 feet tall (that’s some lady), and stands proudly atop the dome. A crest of stars frames her face. A shield of Stars and Stripes is in her left hand.

Sculpted in Rome, “the Lady” was brought to America aboard a sailing ship. During the trip across the Atlantic Ocean, a fierce storm developed.

The Captain ordered cargo thrown overboard to lighten the load. The sailors wanted to throw the heavy statue overboard, but the captain refused, shouting over the wind, “No! Never! We’ll flounder before we throw ‘Freedom’ away.”

And so, “Freedom” was saved, and the statue stands above the dome today, because one man stood for “Freedom.”

For me, one word sums up America, freedom. America prides itself on her freedom. Yet freedom in the history of our nation has gone through a transitional period of since our inception that I call

3 Phases of Freedom.

PHASE 1. *Freedom OF* ... This leads to the Bill of Rights.

In 1787, our constitution was written, and sent for ratification to the states.

As the ratification process went along, people wanted the guarantee of specific freedoms, and within a few years, the Bill of Rights were added as the first 10 amendments to our constitution.

Freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of people to peaceably assemble, and many of the other freedoms we enjoy.

Paul reminds us in Romans 13:4, "*The government is God's servant working for your good.*" -- (GOD'S WORD) This first phase of freedom flows out of the Revolutionary War and Declaration of Independence that we celebrate this day.

PHASE 2. *Freedom FROM* ... American Culture Today.

Over the years, and especially over the last 40-50 years, we have seen a change in freedom out of phase one's freedom of to phase two's freedom from.

For many Americans today freedom means to be free from any type of restraints.

Freedom that is similar to what one finds in the Old Testament in the book of Judges in Judges 21:25, "*At that time there was no king in Israel. People did whatever they felt like doing.*" – (The Message)

Somewhere along the road of freedom, we as American have fallen into the trap of being more focused on our freedom from, than our freedom of.

Bill Maher observed, "We have the Bill of Rights. What we need is a Bill of Responsibilities."

A recent survey indicates only 13 percent of Americans still believe in all 10 Commandments. 9 out of 10 citizens admit they lie regularly. For 10 million dollars, 7% of our people say they would kill a stranger.

Many Americans are living in this second phase, wishing for a better day, but also seeking freedom that goes along with whatever they feel like doing.

That's why I hope for a third phase.

PHASE 3. *Freedom FOR ... Opportunities of Outreach.*

While phase 1 takes us back to America's birth, phase 2 describes today, phase 3 describes God's eternal purpose whether one be free or a slave, to recognize that freedom is for an opportunity of outreach to connect people to Jesus the ultimate source of eternal freedom.

As Jesus himself declares in John 8:36, "*So if the Son sets you free, you will be absolutely free.*" -- (GOD'S WORD)

In the movie, *The Patriot*, the story is told of a fictitious character, Benjamin Martin and his family's involvement in the American Revolution and the price that was paid.

The movie begins with the opening credits rolling, and Benjamin Martins speaks this line, "I have long feared that my sins would return to visit me."

Martin fought in an earlier war with the French and Native Americans, and though he was a war hero he was haunted by his own actions. Later in the movie when tragedy hits, Martin repeats the line, "I have long feared that my sins would return to visit me."

How about you, do you have that same fear?

Throughout Galatians Paul affirms how Christ's death takes away that fear, and how God provides lasting forgiveness and restoration in

knowing that Jesus Christ has set me free not just for a day, but for eternity.

FREEDOM PRINCIPLE 1: *REST in what God has done for you.*

A prisoner in Sydney, Australia tried to escape from jail by climbing underneath the hood of a van delivering bread to the institution. When the van made its next stop, the prisoner sneaked out from under the hood—hot and dirty. He found himself in the yard of another prison just 4 miles from the first.

Like that prisoner, our own attempts at lasting freedom often leave us in another prison 4 miles down the road of life.

Often our attempts at freedom from our sins and with God leave us dejected, dirty, and in another prison.

This shouldn't surprise us.

We cannot save ourselves.

I know it almost sounds anti-American to not encourage you to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps.

But when it comes to our relationship with God, salvation and freedom comes from what Jesus has done for you, not what you or I might do for Him.

We don't earn God's love, we are invited to enjoy it, experience it, and to embrace it.

You can rest in what God has done for you, because of what Jesus has done to make us free.

John writes in Revelation 1:5b, "*Jesus was the first to conquer death, and he is the ruler of all earthly kings. Christ loves us, and by his blood he set us free from our sins.*" -- (Contemporary English Version)

God is in control over all worldly leaders, and Jesus by his blood has set us free.

Why worry? God offers rests. One reason why we confess our sins as we gather for worship is to experience this rest that God offers. Freedom is for resting in what God has done for you.

FREEDOM PRINCIPLE 2: *RESPOND with a life empowered by the Holy Spirit.*

Understanding freedom is a bit like understanding kite flying. If the wind is strong, the kite goes higher, and grows smaller and smaller as it tugs against the string.

The harder the wind blows, the higher the kite rises. Then let's say the string breaks! The kite is free, but no longer soars higher. It is tumbling, and crashes to the ground or becomes tangled in the trees.

What kept the kite airborne was the restraint of the string. When that was lost, the kite was unable to fly.

We are never freed until we are restrained by something that pulls us higher and higher. It is not the absence of restraints that makes us free.

There is no freedom in life until one belongs to God. Every other form of it is an illusion.

We find the freedom to achieve the greatest desires of our lives only when we live in that relationship.

The loving life of freedom is lived out wisely as we follow the Holy Spirit in how we live.

Paul offers us a life empowered by the Holy Spirit when he writes in Galatians 5:22-23a, "22But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." -- (New Living Translation)

We have been freed for resting in what God has done for us and responding with a life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

FREEDOM PRINCIPLE 3: *REACH OUT by becoming a contagious Christian.*

A chime that changed the world on July 8, 1776, with the Liberty Bell ringing out from the tower of Independence Hall summoning citizens to hear the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence by Colonel John Nixon.

The Pennsylvania Assembly ordered the Bell in 1751 to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of William Penn's 1701 Charter of Privileges.

Penn's charter, Pennsylvania's original Constitution, speaks of the rights and freedoms valued by people the world over.

Particularly forward thinking were Penn's ideas on religious freedom, his liberal stance on Native American rights, and his inclusion of citizens in enacting laws.

As it was to commemorate the Charter's golden anniversary, the quotation was taken from Leviticus 25:10b, "*Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.*" -- (King James Version)

The verse was particularly appropriate because the line in the Bible immediately preceding "proclaim liberty" is, "And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year." What better way to pay homage to Penn and hallow the 50th year than with a bell proclaiming liberty?

The bell was hung in March 1753, and cracked the first time it was rung.

2 Philadelphia foundry workers, melted the crack bell down, recast it by adding copper to the bell, but when hung again people were displeased with the sound. So the 2 workers gave it one more shot, and on June 11, 1753, the Liberty Bell was raised to the Statehouse steeple.

We know of its importance in American history for it was used to call together the First Continental Congress in 1774.

It rang for the Battle of Lexington and Concord in 1775, but its most resonant ringing was on July 8, 1776 as it called people to hear the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence.

There is widespread disagreement about when the first crack appeared on the Bell that we know of today.

However, it is agreed that the final expansion of the crack which rendered the Bell unringable was on Washington's Birthday in 1846.

Every July 4th at 2pm Eastern time, children who are descendants of signers of the Declaration of Independence symbolically tap the Liberty Bell 13 times while bells across the nation also ring 13 times in honor of the patriots from the original 13 states.

The purpose of the bell flows out of Leviticus 25:10, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land."

God has the same purpose for our lives today to proclaim liberty throughout the world that is ours through Jesus Christ.

No matter where we live in this world. No matter whether slave or free. No matter whether young or old, or male or female, Paul reminds us we have a common need for the free gift God gives in Jesus Christ.

Paul tells us in Romans 3:22-24, "22 This righteousness is given through faith in[a] Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the

glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." -- (NIV)

God has placed us this day in our free country to have freedom for becoming a contagious Christian. We have freedom for reaching out and transforming lives with Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION: *No other options.*

At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, the American statesman Patrick Henry uttered the famous phrase, "Give me liberty, or give me death." It became a slogan for the revolution.

Liberty or death. There were no other options. The state motto of New Hampshire, which is on its license plates reads, "Live free or die." They take their freedom seriously in New Hampshire.

As Christians we take our freedom seriously but also joyously, so we celebrate not only as a nation founded on freedom but as people who have discovered and want to share the ultimate freedom in Jesus Christ. There are no other viable options for lasting freedom. This freedom in Christ calls us to celebrate it, to share and to live it out each day. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free! Amen.

Communion