

LIBERTY IN CHRIST

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Liberty is a great and wonderful concept. Thomas Jefferson, in the Declaration of Independence, declared that each person has an unalienable right to life, *liberty*, and the pursuit of happiness. Patrick Henry proclaimed, "Give me liberty or give me death!" Each year our country celebrates its national independence on July 4th.

Nearly two thousand years ago, in a Jewish synagogue in the town of Nazareth, a man named Jesus also spoke of liberty. He quoted from the prophet Isaiah (61:1-2) about one who would be anointed "to preach the gospel," which would include the task of setting "at liberty those who are oppressed." Then this Jesus proclaimed that He was the intended Prophet-Messiah of God to bring this blessing to man (Lk. 4:16-21)! Though the Jewish people were familiar with bondage and freedom, this promise of liberty would be greater than anything they had experienced before. This liberty would be superior because it would extend to all mankind to set him free from the worst slavery of all – the slavery of the soul by sin (Rom. 2:23; 6:16, 23).

THE NATURE OF LIBERTY

Liberty is not the unrestricted license to do whatever we please and to disregard any and all law. Instead, true liberty is freedom from brutal oppression and acts within the bounds of lawful conduct. After Israel received its freedom from Egyptian bondage it received the law of Moses at Mt. Sinai. In Christ, our liberty is the freedom from the bondage of sin *and* the responsibility to act within the lawful bounds of righteousness (Rom. 6:7, 17-18; Jas. 1:25). Being free in Christ does not mean, as some argue, being free from the law of God. If we love Jesus, we will keep His commandments (Jn. 14:15). Having been made free from sin, we must become servants of righteousness and follow the divine pattern of the word of truth (Jas. 1:18).

THE FOUNDATION OF LIBERTY

The foundation of spiritual liberty is the *truth* revealed by Jesus the Christ (Jn. 8:31-36; 1:17; 14:6). Our liberty was purchased with great power and at great cost (Heb. 2:9-11a, 14-15). Jesus sets us free from sin and death in a new and better covenant (Rom. 7:23-8:2; Gal. 4:31). Just as our national liberty is based on the principles written in our constitution and laws, our spiritual freedom is based on the word of God. If we expect to be free, we must stand uncompromisingly and faithfully in the truth of God's word.

THE EXERCISE OF LIBERTY

We exercise our liberty by living according to proper laws of conduct. In Christ it is obedience to the perfect law of liberty (Jas. 1:25). There we learn how to be "holy in all our conduct" (1 Pet. 1:15). Our freedom is exercised by being "servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:13-19). Only then are we freed from the foolishness of human wisdom, fear of death, and slavery to our own lusts. We should never exercise our liberty to commit sin (1 Pet. 2:16; Gal. 5:13). Within the bounds of what is righteousness, there may be room for matters of expediency (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23) and matters of conscience concerning things of indifference to God (Rom. 14). Under no circumstance does this justify any deviation from the revealed doctrine of Christ on any point (2 Jn. 9-11). We must uphold and defend the divine inspiration and authority of Scripture. False teachers will try to deceive us with false promises of "liberty" not based on the pattern of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:18-20).

THE GOAL OF LIBERTY

The immediate goal is freedom from our past sins, happiness, contentment, and peace. The ultimate goal is eternal life with God (Rom. 6:22-23). If we remain faithful to God, we will be granted the right (liberty) to the tree of life, which was forbidden to man after he first sinned (Gen. 2:16; 3:24; Rev. 22:14). Because Christ died for us, we have the liberty now to partake of the water of life freely if we come to the Lord in faith and obedience (Rev. 22:17). Do you enjoy the liberty that Jesus brought to man? Or are you still a slave to sin and death? You can know the truth, and the truth can make you free!
