**Lesson: National Freedom Day**

Freedom Day commemorates this date in 1865 when President Lincoln signed into law antislavery legislation which soon would become the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution. The push to memorialize the event arose from a former slave named Richard Wright who was freed after the Civil War, and was a veteran of the Spanish-American War. The US army major arranged a conference in Philadelphia to garner support for his idea. In 1948, the year after Wright died, President Truman signed a bill making National Freedom Day in the USA official.

Schools often acknowledge this historic event; additional events include luncheons, festivals, speeches, and local observances to remind us that freedom is nothing to take for granted. Traditionally, a ceremonial wreath is draped over the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. Today is a day to praise God for living here in the land of the free; it is also a good time to pray for people around the world who are not free. Take time to enumerate your freedoms as a family; bring plenty of paper because these blessings outnumber the setbacks.

You might first consider your freedom from sin and death. Thanks to Jesus Christ, we need not fear death because He overcame it. And we need not worry about being condemned for our sin because He paid the penalty in full. We are free to do whatever we want, but we are limited by our own conscience which knows in advance what is allowed and what is not allowed. There is no excuse for disobedience (ROM 2:15), though we all fall short (ROM 3:23). Freedom makes everybody equal, so does sin. Which one is worth fighting and dying for?

* PSA 51:10–12 ~ Create in me a clean heart, Lord, and renew an upright spirit within me. Do not remove me from your presence and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with your free Spirit.
* PSA 119:44–47 ~ I will obey God’s laws continuously and forevermore; I will walk in freedom, for I have sought His rules. I will boldly testify before kings, and I will delight in God’s commandments that I have loved.
* JER 8:11–12 ~ To heal your pain they came saying “peace, peace” but there was no peace. Were they ashamed of their atrocities? Not in the least; they did not even blush. But they will join the fallen. When the Lord comes, they will be cast down.
* MAT 10:8 ~ Jesus said, “Freely you have received and freely you should give.”
* JOH 8:31–32, 36 ~ Jesus said, “If you believe in my words then you are indeed my disciples; and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. If the Son of God sets you free, you will definitely be free.”
* ROM 3:23–24 ~ All people have sinned and come short of God’s glory. All are justified for free by God’s grace through the redemption found in Jesus Christ.
* ROM 6:14, 17–18 ~ Now sin has no hold over you, for you are not under the Law you are under Grace. Thank God that we, who were servants of sin, have obeyed in our hearts that doctrine which delivers us, being made free from sin, and now serving righteousness instead.
* 1 CO 2:12–13 ~ We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God, so that we may know the things that God has given to us for free. We speak of these things, not in the words that the world teaches, but in words that the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.
* GAL 5:13 ~ You have been given the freedom to love and serve one another.
* 2 TH 3:1 ~ Pray for Christian teachers and ministers, and pray for the freedom to openly speak God’s Word.
* 1 PE 1:18–19 ~ You were redeemed, not with corruptible things such as gold and silver, but with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without any imperfections.

Many freedoms that we enjoy are guaranteed by our Constitution, and most of those are given by God Himself. These are called unalienable rights in the Declaration of Independence because they are not to be taken away (alienated) from anyone since they were not given by government or humans. Of course, if you violate the law you can expect to lose your freedom, because, in a free society, citizens are obligated to respect the freedom of others. If you do not respect freedom, you do not deserve freedom. If you do not have freedom, you’ll seek it; and once you obtain it, you will do whatever it takes to keep it. Guard it carefully; do not lose it, for it will be very difficult getting it back if you do.

* JER 2:31–32; JER 14:10 ~ God says, “Why do my people say that they are free to roam? Does a maiden forget her jewelry? Does a bride forget her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me for days without number.” The Lord says this to the people: “They love to wander; they cannot keep their feet from straying. Therefore, the Lord does not accept them; He will now remember their iniquity, and punish them for their sins.”
* ISA 61:1–3 ~ The Spirit of God is upon me, because He has directed me to preach His good news to the humble, to heal the broken hearted, to free the slaves, and to release those who are bound in chains and in prison; to proclaim the Lord’s favor and His vengeance, to comfort all who mourn, and to tell those who mourn to exchange their ashes for beauty; to replace mourning with joy, and to don the garment of praise in exchange for the spirit of sorrow, so that they may be trees of righteousness, planted by the Lord for His glorification [Jesus quoted this passage early in His ministry in His hometown (LUK 4:14–20).
* HOS 10:2, 10 ~ Their heart is divided; they have been found guilty. God will break down their altars and destroy their graven images. When it pleases God, He will punish them; nations will gather against them and enslave them because they betrayed the Lord.
* GAL 5:13–18 ~ Brothers, you have been called to be free men, but do not use that freedom as an excuse to engage in lusts of the flesh, but in love serve one another. For all the Law is fulfilled by loving your neighbor as yourself. So, walk in the Spirit not in the flesh. For the Spirit and the flesh oppose one another. If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.
* 1 PE 2:13–17 ~ Submit to the laws of the land, for it is God’s will that you are lawful and upright, thereby silencing those ignorant people who would talk behind your back. Be free, but do not use your freedom to conceal evil. Instead, you must serve the Lord, respect all people, love your fellow Christians, fear God, and honor those in authority.

What is the opposite of freedom? Slavery, of course. If you are not free from something, chances are you are apt to becoming a slave to it: case in point, sin. We are not free to do whatever we want, and that makes sin all the more attractive to our sullied flesh. Such sins can become habitual, after which it is very difficult to stop. Even things that are allowed are not to be abused; overindulgence in anything leads to addiction and is harmful to one’s health. Any worldly addiction means the person does not have God first in their lives since the world and the flesh are in control. Let the spirit inside you govern your thoughts, and you will be free. That kind of freedom lasts forever; hold fast to it, else someone snatch it from your hand, like Satan.

* ECC 1:8 ~ The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.
* MAT 24:8–11 ~ Jesus warned everyone that those who follow Him will often be hated by others and that being a Christian will be offensive to many. Some Christians will be assaulted, imprisoned, and even killed for following Christ, but those who endure until the end will receive a crown of life.
* JOH 8:34 ~ Jesus said, “Whoever commits sin becomes a slave to sin.”
* ROM 7:19–25 ~ The good I want to do I do not do, and the evil I do not want to do I do. If I do that which I wish not to do, it is not I that do it but sin that dwells in me. And even when I do good, evil is still present within me. Although I delight in God’s law in my mind, I see another law working in my body, warring against the law of my mind and making me a slave to the sin which is inherent in my body. What a wretched man am I; who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord, for with my mind I serve the Law of God, but with the flesh I serve the law of sin.
* 1 CO 6:12; 1 CO 10:23 ~ Something that is permissible is not necessarily beneficial or constructive. It is all right to enjoy something but I will not let it control me.
* PHP 3:8–9 ~ Without a doubt, I count everything loss except the excellent knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all worldly things, which to me are as garbage because of what I have gained in Christ; finding righteousness from Jesus, though not having any of my own in accordance with the law, but possessing the righteousness of God by faith in His Son.
* PHP 4:5 ~ Let your moderation be an example to others.
* GAL 3:28 ~ There is no such thing as Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for we all are equal in Jesus Christ.
* HEB 13:3 ~ Continue to love each other as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison as if you were there with them, and remember those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.
* REV 2:10 ~ Jesus said, “You will suffer and be imprisoned because of me. But, be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life.”
* REV 3:11–13 ~ Jesus said, “Behold, I am coming soon. Hold onto your crown of faith; do not let anyone take it away from you. For those who overcome I will make them a permanent pillar in God’s temple; they will have the name of my God and His city, which is the new Jerusalem, written on them. The city will descend from heaven and from God, and I will write my new name on them. Listen to what the Spirit says to the churches on earth.”

Heavenly Father, we are thankful for the freedoms we enjoy and we pray for those who are not free. Let your Holy Spirit touch those who are enslaved, either by others or by their own misdeeds. Help them to see that your saving grace is free, and it sets us free from those things that would otherwise try to control our minds. Help us to continuously relinquish control of our thoughts to you, bringing them into alignment with your will. If we think of you before we think of what to do next, we can control ourselves and refrain from sin; but we are weak and feeble-minded, forgetting that you are in control. We need to be mindful of you, but we need your help remembering. Give us signs in our daily life to remind us where we are heading during every moment, all the way to the end, which is home in your kingdom to live as your adopted sons and daughters, along with Jesus our brother. We ask this prayer in His name, Amen.

By Andrew V. Barber (posted 02/01/2024)