

CELEBRATE FREEDOM

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Today, we celebrate the freedom that is ours as American citizens. Some of us were born here, others chose to come here, but we are Americans, and we are free. Thanks be to God!

However, we are, first and foremost, the people of Christ. We are followers of Jesus. We have been purchased with His lifeblood. We have been born from above. We worship His name above all others.

But we are also a people of the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who has introduced Jesus to us. It is the Holy Spirit who has convicted us of our sin and persuaded us to repent and turn to Christ. It is the Spirit of God who washes us with the Word and renews our minds. It is He who fills our hearts with the love of God and compassion for others. It is He who brings us supernatural gifts to enhance our devotion to God and build up the body of Christ.

The ministry of Jesus was founded on the words of a prophet, written a thousand years before Jesus was born. Isaiah foresaw His coming and the nature of His work, and proclaimed (61:1) the very words with which Jesus introduced His own ministry (Luke 4:18).

*“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,
Because the Lord has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”*

To preach, to heal, and to set free. These are the reasons Jesus came. He could do these things because He had been given the Spirit without measure, because the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him.

Who was this Spirit and why had He come? Paul explained: *“For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom”* (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Our Master is the Holy Spirit. Jesus has returned to Heaven, to the Father’s side, to intercede for us and to wait until His warfare for humanity is accomplished. In the meantime, He has sent the Spirit to dwell among us and to guide our steps in the Kingdom of God.

“Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is...” Where is the Spirit of the Lord?

Paul offers two answers. The first is: *“Don’t you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives among you?”* (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Paul used the plural pronoun in this verse; he was addressing the whole congregation. The Holy Spirit is here, among us, when we are together. So, in our gatherings, we may find His presence and His grace. Whenever we are together we may experience further liberation from the things that have bound us—fears, doubts, guilt, or shame.

Where is the Spirit of the Lord?

Paul gave the answer: *“Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God?”* (1 Corinthians 6:19). And, *“The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you”* (Romans 8:11).

In these verses, Paul used the singular pronoun, addressing Christian individuals. From the time you were born again, the Spirit of the Lord has lived in you. Now, wherever you go, He goes, too. You will never be alone again. And as long as you listen to Him and do what He tells you, He will always produce increasing inner freedom.

Consider that Paul wrote most of his letters from a prison cell, bound to a Roman guard. He understood limitations to personal liberty, yet he was indescribably free—not on the outside, but on the inside.

John could not have written the Book of the Revelation from his exile on Patmos, unless he, too, was a free man within.

Bondage tends to incite self-centeredness and self-absorption, focusing our attention on our personal limitations, those responsible for it (blame), and anything that might mitigate it (escape).

On the other hand, freedom is demonstrated in outward thinking—consideration of others, of principles, of purpose.

*“Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, **there** is freedom.”*

You—your life—is a living, breathing, walking testament to the liberating power of Jesus Christ!

No, you are not totally free yet, but you need not worry about your remaining hang-ups, because the Liberator lives in you. The Greater One is in you. He will not cease working for your freedom until it is complete. He will finish His work. Your freedom will surely progress.

Today, all across this great nation, we celebrate our independent nationhood. We are no longer a cluster of colonies under the will of a distant government. We no longer pay our taxes to someone else, and eat from the crumbs that fall from their table. We are a free people!

We declared our independence in 1776, with these words: *“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.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”*

Declaring it was one thing, but gaining our independence required years of struggle and warfare. Yet, we became free, and we remain free, because of another document that was drafted during the summer of 1787.

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

America is not perfect. Republican democracy is not perfect. And the farther we stray from our founding constitution, and our great liberating Redeemer, the weaker and more fragile our freedom becomes.

So also in the Christian life. The farther we wander from the Bible that declares our freedom and the Savior who ensures it, the weaker and more susceptible to bondage our souls become.

To the Galatians, Paul wrote: *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage”* (5:1). *“For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love”* (5:13).

Let us recommit ourselves today to the Savior who emancipated us, to cling to Him, no matter what.

Let us pledge to refuse any person or any system that tries to put a yoke of bondage to fear around our necks (in our minds).

Let us pledge again not to consider ourselves better than others, or to gratify our own desires at the expense of others, but to walk humbly with our God.

Let us recommit our lives to acts of gracious love and service to our fellow man—especially those of the household of God—for the honor of Jesus’ name.

Let us not simply enjoy our freedom, but let us **use** our freedom to bless other people and to set them free, as we are.

