

From the Desk of Pastor Jim - "Free Indeed!"

Like many of you as you celebrate the Fourth of July, my family and I will enjoy a cookout and good eats. Then we will make our way to some special spot where we can watch the fireworks display to make our holiday complete. Celebrating the 4th helps me remember the many freedoms we enjoy and can appreciate as citizens of the United States of America.

The Fourth of July calls to mind the heritage of freedoms that we too often take for granted. America's second President, John Adams, wrote, "Posterity, you will never know how much it cost the present generation to provide and preserve freedom. I hope you will make good use of it." I saw a political cartoon that insisted "But freedom isn't free!" True. The price in toil, blood, sweat and tears has been tremendous. Also, we today cannot fully enjoy our rights and freedoms if we are not investing ourselves in some ways to guarantee those rights and freedoms for all citizens of the USA. If we don't value freedom for others, in time we will lose them ourselves.

Jesus Christ spoke of freedom, too – freedom that far exceeds and is of far greater value than all our political freedoms. He said, "If you continue in My Word, then you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

The religious leaders who heard him objected. "We have never been in bondage to any man. How is it that you say you can make us free?" Actually, they were fooling themselves. Their nation was in fact under the domination of Rome. And they themselves were enslaved by pride and a religious system that encouraged their pride. We, too, can fool ourselves in similar ways, when we think we are free, but if we continue NOT in Jesus Word, we really are enslaved to ourselves.

Jesus responded, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!" He, of course, was talking about true freedom – freedom from spiritual slavery, from sin and guilt. When you enjoy the freedom He gives and are living in God's family as one of His children, you are free indeed regardless of outward circumstances. The sad fact of the matter is that most Christians think forgiveness of sins is all that is necessary and that continued study and growth in God's Word is unnecessary. Remember Jesus used an "if...then" statement. **If** you continue in My Word, **then** you are My disciples." All "if...then" statements are equally true when negated. In other words, "**if you don't** continue in My Word, **then you are NOT** My disciples." Said in that way is much more disconcerting.

The freedom that Christ offers cost Him His life – it is the "blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, that cleanses us from all sin" and this is what sets us free. But when we view that tremendous cost, the natural reaction is to want to know more about that self-sacrifice, thus continuing in Jesus' Word. It is only when we take this freedom in Christ for granted, that there is little or no desire to continue in His Word. Freedom in Christ comes to us as a gracious heritage – just as our political freedoms have. Even more than our political freedoms, however, our freedom in Christ requires responsible use. We must invest ourselves in the privilege and joy of continuing in His Word.

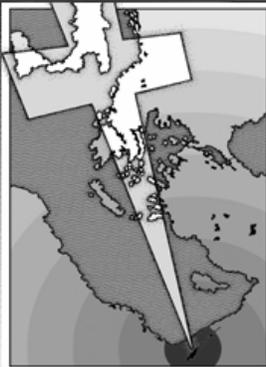
Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians, "You were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge your sinful nature. Rather, serve one another in love" (Galatians 5:13). His words surely are applicable to all of life as we celebrate another Independence Day.

Blessings,
Your Pastor Jim

Here are some ways "to continue in Jesus' Word"

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