

PHILIPPIANS Part 5: Personal Declaration of Independence 07.04.10

Play: "Finding Freedom" Video Clip [1:53]

Intro – Today is Independence Day. As Americans AND as Christ-followers, we celebrate our freedom on this 4th of July Independence Day. We can celebrate today because our forefathers sacrificed so much in 1776. The men who signed the Declaration of Independence had far more to lose than to gain! Most were very wealthy already.

- 24 were lawyers
- 9 were landowners or rich farmers
- 11 were merchants
- the others were physicians, ministers, and politicians.
- All but 2 who signed had families.
- educated men of standing in their communities...

They knew security and prosperity, but felt there was something more important than security: freedom! They knew that the penalty for treason was death by hanging, yet they signed!

- John Hancock—[signed twice as large as all others] "Now his Majesty can read my name without his spectacles!"
- Stephen Hopkins—[old when he signed] His hand shook as he signed...looked up and said, "Gentlemen, my hand trembles, but my heart does not!"

What many people today forget is that the war with Great Britain had been going on for a year when the declaration was signed. And while the conclusion of the First Continental Congress towards Independence from Britain now is assumed, it wasn't that way 2 years earlier 1774. Many, initially, were loyal to Britain and to the crown. Some remained "Loyalists." Ultimately, after a year of war, those first Americans had to decide what they were all about - the core of their being - who they were:

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.

As Christ-followers we come to an equally important crossroads after fighting a war against ourselves and our selfishness. We need to declare Independence from Our Selfish Selves. Not everyone remains. So "move back to their old selves." But those who remain Christ-followers affirm their own "Declaration from self." We see this declaration Phil 1:27.

Live as **CITIZENS** **OF** **HEAVEN** (NLT)

v.27 "Conduct yourself in a manner" (NIV), "Let your conversation be as" (KJV)

πολιτεύομαι (*politeuomai*): from polis - word for city, as is *Metropolis*. To be a citizen of; where we get our word for "politics"; particularly relevant for Philippians as Philippi was a Roman outpost. People conducted themselves as Romans, speaking & writing Latin.

We, as Christ-followers, live in a Christian outpost within this world. It is central to Jesus' message and those who followed him:

Jesus: "You are the light of the world - like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden." Matthew 5:14 (NLT)

Paul: "So you are no longer strangers and outsiders. You are citizens together with God's people. You are members of God's family."
Ephesians 2:19 (NIRV)

Peter: "Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul."
1 Peter 2:11 (The Message)

What keeps me from living as a FREE citizen of heaven?

MY SLAVERY TO SELF

It is a Christian truth that to be FREE in Christ means we no longer will be SLAVES to self. Like those early Americans, when we become a Christian we find ourselves in an unexpected war. Before we didn't struggle with our own wills, our own wishes... everything was about us and about what we wanted to do. However, we found that such self-focus ultimately was leading to our own self-destruction. We responded to Christ's call upon our lives and declared our independence from self and our reliance upon Christ. And the battle began! We found that we struggle with our sin and with righteousness. We want to do the right thing, but disappoint ourselves with our own failings. Paul describes this in great detail in Romans 6. Read it! **We also read of... in Philippians**

Four Declarations of F.R.E.E.dom from Self

F **FORTIFY** a like-minded attitude with other Christ-followers.
"... I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel." Philippians 1:27b (ESV)

Central to our declaration of FREEdom from self is that we join together in like-mindedness with other Christ-followers. Gathering together is important to who we are. That's why CHURCH is so important!
"Now may the God of all patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."
Romans 15:5-6 (NKJV)

This is so vital that we're going to spend an entire evening talking about it next week as we move on to Philippians 2:1-5. But I want tonight to emphasize one concept: FORTIFY. Look at the words that Paul chooses here: "standing firm" and "striving side by side." There's really a sense of togetherness, camaraderie, an esprit de corps that comes to people who join together in a mutual cause. It's not - "I'll be together with you if nothing better comes up..." BUT a "I will stand beside you TOGETHER... NO MATTER WHAT!" Without such fortification, we're prone to isolation and make for easy pickings by the enemy of our soul.

R **REVEAL** my Christian faith even when afraid to do so.
"... and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God."
Philippians 1:28 (ESV)

One of the ways that we can be completely dependent upon Christ and free ourselves from ourselves is when we confess Christ as Savior to

those around us - especially those for whom such confession could lead (in our minds) to ridicule. **Jesus himself was pretty clear about this...**

Jesus: "If people are ashamed of me and of my teaching, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." Luke 9:26 (GNT)

This is one of those things about our Christian lives that at first seem most difficult, but then once we begin, we find that it is most powerful!

Paul: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." Romans 1:16 (NIV)

Two of the freedoms we have in this country is the freedom of religion and the freedom of speech. Unlike many in Christian history, as an American you cannot be jailed, tortured or killed for expressing your faith!

Two pieces of advice when sharing your faith:

1. You are a witness. Not an expert. Just tell in your own words what your relationship to Jesus means to you. You don't have to know all the theology behind it. You don't need to quote chapter and verse!
2. You are not responsible for how people respond to you. No pressure for "conversions." The Holy Spirit works in this way. Not us.

E **EXPECT** suffering to accompany my belief.

"For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake." Philippians 1:29 (ESV)

It's not popular today in Christian circles to talk about "suffering." Often it seems as if we're trying to package Christianity into most appealing way: "Become a Christ-follower and your life will improve!" **The problem is that this is not what Jesus himself said!**

Jesus: "Do you remember what I told you? 'A slave is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you." John 15:20a (NLT)

I'm not talking about general problems in life. As in, Look what the Devil did to me! Sure there are spiritual battles. But I'm saying we should expect that there are times when we suffer *for the very definable reason that we are Christ-followers*. When we don't get the promotion. When we are not accepted into social circles. When it becomes politically correct NOT to talk about our faith. It's better if we're up front and EXPECT suffering to accompany belief.

In this we have much in common with our American forefathers! Do you have any idea the personal price these men paid for freedom?

- ➔ 5 were captured and tortured by the British before they died.
- ➔ 12 had their homes ransacked and burned to the ground.
- ➔ 2 lost their sons in the war.
- ➔ One had 2 sons captured.
- ➔ 9 fought and died from wounds or the hardships of the war.
- ➔ Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British navy. He sold his home to pay his debts and died in rags.
- ➔ Thomas McKean was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in Congress without pay and he died a very poor man.

- ➔ Thomas Nelson's home was seized by the British at the Battle of Yorktown and used as a command post. He urged General George Washington to open fire on it. The home was destroyed and Nelson died bankrupt.

These men all sacrificed everything so that they might have that one elusive benefit of freedom! And that you might have freedom. In the same way Christians throughout history have suffered for their faith. Just like our American forefathers who knew that freedom isn't free, these Christian forefathers knew that suffering accompanies belief. We stand on their shoulders today, both as Americans and as Christ-followers.

And this is why we should...

E **ENGAGE** in service with other Christ-followers.

“... engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.” Philippians 1:30 (ESV)

We don't just “show up” for church, but we ENGAGE with other Christians in SERVICE. We know that we each are a member of the body and that we each have a vital role in supporting one another. Somehow the suffering isn't as impossible when we're engaged together.

“Indeed the body does not consist of one member, but many. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” 1 Corinthians 12:14,26 (NRSV)

I love what I see happening here at Church Requel. We are still small, but each week I see more and more people finding their place and coming together. How about you? Have you found your place here yet? You may say, what needs doing? Everything! Music. Teaching. Children. Printing. Website. Leading. Setting Up. Tearing Down. Inviting new people. New church... no shortage of opportunities to be ENGAGED!

Conclusion: Illustration - At that first Constitutional Convention, the delegates were frustrated. They were unsure and unclear of their direction and failure seemed the most likely outcome. They were burdened and harassed by tremendous crisis...They were so fragmented that they were just about to throw out the whole concept of a constitution completely. Just then Benjamin Franklin, not particularly known for his Christian convictions, rose to his feet and said:

“Gentlemen, if it is true that not one single petal from any flower falls to the ground without escaping God's attention, will the distress of this nation go unheeded? Let us therefore determine to seek His face.”

They promptly got down on their knees and when they arose from that prayer, the slogan, e pluribus unum was born: ONE OUT OF MANY.

On this Independence Day, this is the dream that I also have for you and Church Requel. That we would see ourselves as citizens of Heaven in this outpost on Earth. That we would FORTIFY a like-minded attitude, that we would REVEAL our faith to our world, EXPECT difficulties and not shrink away from our task and ultimately that we would ENGAGE together. e pluribus unum. One out of many! **Let's pray!**