

## Declaration of Freedom 07.03.11

**Bible Reading: Galatians 5:1, 4-6 MSG (read by Jessica)**

**Video: "Finding Freedom" by Centerline New Media [1:53]**

**Intro:** This is the 4th of July weekend - Independence Day... the day we celebrate our country's birthday. We are 235 years old tomorrow. From date of signing of our Declaration of Independence. This document is what declared our independence and our freedom.

*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.*

Perhaps the best-known, most poignant sentence in the history of the English language. Christianity also has its own declaration of freedom sentence... we find it in Galatians chapter 5, first verse:

**"Christ has set us free to live a free life. So take your stand!  
Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you."  
Galatians 5:1 MSG**

**Reflections on Our Freedom in Christ.** This morning I'd like to reflect upon our Christian freedom, appropriate on this holiday when we celebrate our political freedoms. This declaration of Christian freedom found in Galatians was one of the first penned in the NT. Scholars tell us that Galatians was written before any other book in the NT! Isn't it significant that the first NT book written was about our Christian freedom?

Christ died so that we **MIGHT BE FREE**!

This is profound when you stop and think about it. Here and in Romans 6-8 we learn that we Christians identify with Christ's death and resurrection... and we live differently as a result. This is the sign of baptism. Death no longer contains us. Sin no longer holds us. We are free to live a significant, meaningful, full, and abundant life - the life God the Father created us to live, the life God the Son died that we might enjoy, and the life that God the Spirit empowers us to live! That's a real declaration of freedom!

**Taking Our Stand Involves 2 Challenges: What is "taking stand?"**

**Challenge #1** - Does Christian freedom mean we may live anyway we want? We can easily misunderstand what our Christian freedom means. Especially in America where we understand our political freedom to mean that we are free to do anything we want, we are free to become anything we want, we are free to live anywhere we want. Is Christian liberty the same thing. Clearly not. In fact viewing Christian freedom as an excuse to do whatever we want to do actually destroys our freedom!

**"It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don't use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom." Galatians 5:13a MSG**

No! Doing anything I want - **SELFISHNESS** - destroys freedom!

We have a word for living any way we want without regard to God's wishes or plans or will. It's called selfishness. Selfishness is inconsistent with God and with his plan for us. The objective of the Christian life is to become more like God in our attitudes and actions. We are free. We CAN live any way we want... we are FREE to do so. But our love for God and our love for one another causes us to want to use our freedom to serve God and to serve one another. The more we know God... the more we become in tune with God's Spirit living and directing us... the more we are freed from our selfishness. The more we are free to live the life God created us to live.

“For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness.” Galatians 5:17a MSG

This might seem like double talk to some, but we must recognize that without God's Spirit we may think we are free but in actuality we are controlled - literally we are in bondage - to our own selfish ambitions and vain conceits. Paul writes to the Romans (and to us) and explains the conflict between selfish sin and living God's way in freedom: (Romans 6:15-18 MSG)

So, since we're out from under the old tyranny, does that mean we can live any old way we want? Since we're free in the freedom of God, can we do anything that comes to mind? Hardly. You know well enough from your own experience that there are some acts of so-called freedom that destroy freedom. Offer yourselves to sin, for instance, and it's your last free act. But offer yourselves to the ways of God and the freedom never quits. All your lives you've let sin tell you what to do. But thank God you've started listening to a new master, one whose commands set you free to live openly in his freedom!

So one mistake we can make with Christian freedom is to call ourselves Christians but see no lifestyle changes... to continue to wallow in a sin-controlled life. That's one extreme. There's another:

**Challenge #2** - We forget that Christianity is

not a **RELIGION** but a **RELATIONSHIP**.

This is an easy mistake to make. Well meaning Christians may try to lay out the boundaries for you to live within. The idea is that if you stay on this side of the boundary, you'll not wander into sin. But this is to trust and rely upon our own religious plans rather than Christ!

“When you attempt to live by your own religious plans and projects, you are cut off from Christ, you fall out of grace. Meanwhile we expectantly wait for a satisfying relationship with the Spirit. For in Christ, neither our most conscientious religion nor disregard of religion amounts to anything. What matters is something far more interior: faith expressed in love.”  
Galatians 5:4-6 MSG

I grew up in a church like this. We had two books. We had the Bible. And we had the manual. The manual described those activities we would not engage in - drinking, card playing, dress codes. All dealt with the outward appearance rather than the inward heart. Christ always deals with the heart first and foremost. Paul put it this way:

“What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn’t work. So I quit being a “law man” so that I could be God’s man.” Galatians 2:19 MSG

To be a Christ-follower is not to be a “law man” or a “law woman.” In one sense this is too easy - because if I just live within the rules - there is a boundary, a line, it’s definite. In another sense it’s the most frustrating thing in the world because it doesn’t enrich the soul, it doesn’t require any communication with the Lord... and provides for no exceptions. In short, it’s religion not a relationship, and it doesn’t work. It’s not what Christ had in mind when he died to set you free.

**So how do we do this? How do we live free lives without OOH living a debauched life of sin apart from God and OTOH living a rule-keeping religious life also devoid of God’s presence?**

#### **4th of July Insight:**

Our Christian freedom is NOT a declaration of independence! We so connect the concept of Christian freedom with political freedom that we think in terms of INDEPENDENCE and FREEDOM as one in the same. They are not. As a Christian I cannot be independent and free. Rather...

a. Rather it is a declaration of **DEPENDENCE** on the Spirit...

Apart from God’s Spirit and therefore God’s power we cannot live a life that isn’t compelled by our own selfishness and sin. In other words we can never be independent from God. Rather we strive for more and more *dependence* upon His Spirit. **Paul puts it this way:**

“My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God’s Spirit. Then you won’t feed the compulsions of selfishness.” Galatians 5:16 MSG

This is always a choice for Christians - and a daily choice at that. We’d like to rely upon our one-time decision to follow Christ. That is the choice that first puts us into relationship with Him. It only needs to be made once. However, every day... every hour really... we make the ongoing decision to depend upon Him, to rely upon Him, to seek His guidance and wisdom, to yield our wills and our kingdoms to His will and His kingdom. This is why Jesus included it in the Lord’s prayer - “**Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done...**” The biggest challenge to God’s kingdom coming in our lives is our own kingdom!

b. ... and a declaration of **INTERDEPENDENCE** on one another.

We were never meant to live free from one another. Our Christian faith is built upon the freedom to depend on each other. I depend upon you. You depend upon me. Our freedom in Christ should lead to an interdependence of serving one another in love!

“Use your freedom to serve one another in love; that’s how freedom grows. For everything we know about God’s Word is summed up in a single sentence: Love others as you love yourself. That’s an act of true freedom.” Galatians 5:13b-14 MSG

One of the things we are striving for at Church Requel is the desire to live in community, to live in this mutual interdependence with each other. Our very mission is to be a community loving God and loving people. We don't want these to be merely fancy words written down on dead trees. Rather we want this mission to be written in the living hearts and souls of every person at CR, coming to life in the actions of unselfish love and service to one another.

**Conclusion.** So how is your Christian freedom on this 4th of July weekend? Is there anyone here so consumed with freedom of self that you've lost the freedom to live out your Christian life? Tomorrow could be a day that you focus on becoming more free through limiting your own wishes and finding a way to serve someone else. You could spend part of your day tomorrow discovering an "act of true freedom."

Or perhaps there are those here who are bound up in the life of rule-keeping, religious plans and projects, an outside faith that puts on a good show for everyone else. But inside you are withering - close to spiritual death. Tomorrow could be a day when your act of freedom is just to get away with God... to confess your condition... to admit your reliance upon self rather than upon God's Spirit. He longs to be with you and will answer your prayer, if only you will admit your need of Him. Let's pray.

**Prayer and Benediction.**