

INDEPENDENCE DAY 2017

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Escape to Freedom

Galatians 5:1 *Christ set us free, so that we should remain free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be fastened again to the yoke of slavery.*

The story of the Hebrew people (the central culture of the Bible) is a story of escape from tyranny and slavery—first, from the Egyptians; then, from themselves.

The story of the United States of America, too, is a story of escape from tyranny. Regrettably, however, many of our forefathers, who fought with their lives for their own freedom, kept other people as their slaves. Some even used the Scriptures to justify their inhumane sin. This is the deepest blight of our culture, and still challenges us today.

Do you think we may be forfeiting some of God's intended blessings because we treat some people as objects to be possessed and controlled?

As Jesus began His ministry, He chose these words from the Book of Isaiah (61:1-2) as His mission statement:

¹⁸ The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹ to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord. (NJB)

On this Independence Day 2017, let's take a moment right now to set your captives free. Set them free from emotional bonds of anger, judgment, and scorn. Set them free by forgiving them—refusing to be their judge, or hold them hostage to vengeance, and putting them in the hands of the universe's only Just Judge, who always balances the books.

Pray for those who have offended you (intentionally or accidentally), for those who have tried to control you, for those who have hurt you, for those who have grieved you.

Why is this important? Because God has said, "If you do not forgive your brother his sins, neither will I forgive you your sins." If you don't forgive others, He won't forgive you. Even though Jesus died for your sins, this condition remains.

When you embrace slavery of any others, you become a slave yourself.

Biblical Slavery

You may be interested to know that there are two kinds of slavery that the Bible actually approves.

The first is indentured slavery—this is economic slavery, that has two forms. The first is called CREDIT: A person might become an indentured slave to earn credit for a future provision. Jacob indentured himself to his Uncle Laban for seven years, in order to marry his cousin, Laban's daughter. Jacob's seven years of unpaid labor was a substitute for a dowry (the price of a bride).

Our modern form of credit is hardly any different. The Bible says, "The borrower is servant to the lender." When you accept credit from a bank or credit union, you work, in part, for the bank, until your debt is paid. That final payment is your emancipation! The chief difference is that the bank won't give you room and board, as Jacob's uncle did, while you work off what you owe.

The second form of indentured slavery is brother to the first, DEBT: A person may take a provision now for which he cannot yet pay—he may arrange consensually for this transaction, or break or injure something owned by another, or steal something belonging to another (the result is the same: he owes someone else). In the Bible you may read of some who sold themselves and/or their family in order to pay off such a debt.

A huge part of the modern human trafficking crisis owes its beginning to just such poverty—where parents sell their children to meet their financial needs.

Indentured slavery was approved and regulated in the Bible. And the greatest of the regulations was SABBATH—every seventh year, all Hebrew slaves were released. They could not be kept longer than that, because they were brothers.

The second kind of slavery approved in the Bible was known as bond-slavery. It came about like this: when a slave was set free, if he loved his master and preferred to continue to serve him, he could choose to stay on as a bond slave, establishing a special lasting relationship, rooted in love.

Paul referred to himself as a bond slave of Jesus Christ. Jesus had set him free, but he chose to indenture himself for life, for love of the Savior. This became the icon or image of the servants of Christ.

The psalmist sang (116:16):

O Lord, I am Your servant; yes, I am Your servant, born into Your household; You have freed me from my chains.

We sang it this morning: Freed from our chains! Yet bound to Him by love.

Peter expressed it this way:

1 Peter 2:16 For you are free, yet you are God's slaves, so don't use your freedom as an excuse to do evil.

It was that same Paul, the apostle, who so carefully explained this freedom to which Jesus Christ has set us free.

Galatians 4:5 God sent [Jesus] to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that He could adopt us as His very own children.

Romans 3:23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. ²⁴ Yet God, in His grace, freely makes us right in His sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when He freed us from the penalty for our sins.

Freed from the PENALTY of your sins. That's good news!

But there's more:

Romans 8:1 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ² And because you belong to Him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.

Freed from the POWER of your sin. That's great news!

Enslaved to Freedom

Live in this freedom! Remain in this freedom! But as you do, learn to USE it, not just for your own pleasure, but for the glory of God.

Galatians 5:13 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.