

## Dependence Day!

John 8:31-36

Happy Dependence Day!

A few years ago in what could be considered, at best, extremely poor timing (8 days before our nation celebrated its 226th birthday) the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of appeals ruled saying the Pledge of Allegiance in public school is unconstitutional because the phrase "one nation under God" is an "endorsement of religion." In Canada, where President Bush was taking part in an economic summit, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said: "The president's reaction was that this ruling is ridiculous. The Supreme Court itself begins each of its sessions with the phrase 'God save the United States and this honorable court,'"

Fleischer said. "The Declaration of Independence refers to God or to the Creator four different times. Congress begins each session of the Congress each day with a prayer, and of course our currency says, 'In God We Trust.'

The ruling was also attacked on Capitol Hill, with Senate Majority Leader Thomas Daschle, D-S.D., calling it "just nuts."

I don't know if America has ever been so united against a judicial ruling as this one. Whenever the Senate and the House vote UNANIMOUSLY on ANYTHING it's time to sit up and take notice. And when have you ever heard of Jerry Falwell, Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson all being united on any issue?

The case was brought by Michael A. Newdow, a Sacramento atheist who objected because his second-grade daughter was required to recite the pledge at the Elk Grove school district. A federal judge had dismissed his lawsuit.

Newdow, a doctor who holds a law degree and represented himself, called the pledge a "religious idea that certain people don't agree with."

Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo., was one of many lawmakers who immediately reacted in anger and shock to the ruling. "Our Founding Fathers must be spinning in their graves. This is the worst kind of political correctness run amok," Bond said. "What's next? Will the courts now strip 'so help me God' from the pledge taken from new presidents?"

We are losing more and more freedoms because of "political correctness" and people who are "offended" by one of the foundations of this country. July 4th is when we celebrate America's freedom from England. But we need to remember that this holiday is about so much more than cookouts, parades, and fireworks.

The 4th of July is about a nation founded, rooted and established on Christian principles. We have already heard what one of our former presidents had to say about this.

To this I'll had a statement that George Washington made in his Farewell Address to the Nation: *"Do not let anyone claim tribute of American patriotism if they even attempt to remove religion from politics."*

President Thomas Jefferson in an address to Danbury Baptists said this: *"The 1st amendment has created a wall of separation between church and state, but that wall is a one directional wall, it keeps the government from running the church, but it makes sure that Christian principles will always stay in government."* There are so many things that we no longer hear today. For example, we are now told that our Founding Fathers were atheists, agnostics, and deists; but consider this statement by

Patrick Henry: *"It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ!"*

We note also that 52 of the 55 Founding Fathers who worked on the constitution were members of orthodox churches. At the first Constitutional Convention, the delegates were frustrated because they were so tired and it was so late. They were so divided on the issue that they were just about to throw out the whole concept of a constitution completely.

Just then an old white-haired man by the name of Benjamin Franklin 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 prayer, the slogan, epluribus unum was born: ONE OUT OF MANY.

Listen to this concept from the DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE: *"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"* The Declaration of Independence was signed in Congress on July 4th 1776. That's the day we declared America's freedom and independence from the oppressive rule of England by declaring our dependence on God. *That's why I entitled my message this morning "Dependence Day."*

You see, this is a day that we should not only be celebrating our independence as a sovereign nation, but we should be celebrating our dependence on God to lead this nation.

"Freedom" has been the battle cry of this country for over 200 years. At that moment in time, in 1776, a nation was born that guaranteed, under its Constitution and Bill of Rights, that all men would be FREE from oppression of other men. True, we have seen those freedoms erode, slowly but surely. The right to bear arms has been severely limited and continues to be limited more. The right to Life has been nearly destroyed with the passage of Roe vs. Wade when the right to choose death for another human being was passed. Other rights have seemed to spiral out of control to the point of almost destroying our land and its freedoms.

The right to pursue happiness has led many to believe that their own personal happiness is their right at any cost, including the right to infringe upon someone else's happiness to get it. The right to freedom of religion has led many to believe that it also means freedom from religion and has caused those like Madeline Murray O'Hare and others to have prayer removed from our schools, public displays of scriptures and anything to do with Jesus to be removed from public buildings and even now are trying to rid the air waves of the preaching of the gospel.

We have freedom of religion, of speech, of the press. We have the freedom to hope & dream & pursue our dreams. We are free in so many ways!

We have these rights because of what our forefathers have done. You & I didn't earn the privileges that we enjoy as citizens of this land. The poet expressed it well. *"We eat from orchards we did not plant. We drink from wells we did not dig. We reap from fields we did not sow. We are warmed by fires we did not kindle. We are sheltered by roofs we did not build. We are blessed by moneys we did not give."*

Dr. Martin Luther King had a dream of freedom for all men regardless of their race. He preached and taught equality and freedom from oppression. I believe that he would roll over in his grave if he were to see the vast injustices done in the name of equality and what people think they have a right to.

But things that have been happening, such as prayer being taken out of the schools, the Klan being allowed to spread their hatred in towns that don't want to hear it, and now the issue of the phrase "Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. So we stand back & look at this "land of the free" and we begin to wonder, \* "Is there any real freedom anywhere?"

Many in our country today have a much different idea as to what this freedom is, than did our founding fathers... Many in our society are clueless. Many think that freedom means, that they are free to do what ever they want - whenever they want. Millions of unborn are murdered each year and its called \* the freedom of choice. Pornography fills the magazine racks and movie screens and they call it \* freedom of speech. Cults are formed, magic practiced, the physic network grows, black is worn and Satan in worshiped and they call it freedom of religion.

And many believe that freedom means that they are free: - to do drugs and have sex with whoever or whatever they want -- . they think it means that kids are free to do whatever they want to do in school - go or not go --- study or not study. - and others think that freedom means - you can do whatever you want behind closed doors or whatever it takes to get a ahead. And tragically or ironically the things that are supposed to be evidence of their freedom, have in reality enslaved them.

Many who get involved \*in drugs and drinking find themselves enslaved to: addiction, prison, lost homes, lost families...etc And \* sex; anytime, anyplace, anyone has led to: aids/death/std's, unwanted pregnancies, destroyed families, broken hearts from being used... and the inability to enter the marriage bond pure and undefiled.

If you were to ask anyone on the streets whether they are free they would say YES! But are they really free? Like it or not, in this world there is no such thing as absolute freedom.

We may live in a free society, given the right of freedom by our constitution and protected from outside intervention by other nations but the fact is WE ARE NEVER REALLY FREE - WITHOUT CHRIST.

We come back to what George Washington knew and proclaimed: *"It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."*

Thomas Jefferson also said, *"God, who gave us life, gave us liberty."*

### **SO WHAT?**

You see, God, and God alone can give real freedom. Take your Bibles if you would and turn to John 8:31-36. (Read)

Just as the Jews misunderstood what Jesus meant by "the truth shall make you free," people today still take it the wrong way. In fact, this familiar phrase has been used out of context to promote a lot of different freedoms.

Universities use it on their seals to promote the value of academic knowledge. But around the world people who know academic truths are still in bondage. So Jesus must have had some other kind of truth and freedom in mind.

For many, "knowing the truth" means personal autonomy, creativity, and freedom from oppression and

ignorance, which they define as mental slavery.

But Jesus didn't die to guarantee personal freedom of expression.

The error comes when we think of truth as a concept rather than God himself, which was the way Jesus used the term. Jesus clarified this meaning when he said in vers 36, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

By interchanging *truth* with *Son*, Jesus implied that granting freedom is God's work. So Jesus promised freedom from slavery to sin. That freedom begins when we acknowledge our bondage to sin.

Only God can free us through his forgiveness, which he made possible by Christ's death in our place on the cross. Jesus' sacrifice did not free us to do our own thing; rather he freed us *from* doing our own thing so that we could serve him!

Sin has a way of enslaving us, controlling us, dominating us, and dictating our actions. It manifests itself in self-centeredness, rebelliousness, possessiveness, dysfunctional love, and addictive behaviors. Jesus can free us from this slavery that keeps us from becoming the person God created us to be.

Even if sin is restraining, mastering, or enslaving us, Jesus can break its power over our life. Jesus himself is the truth that sets us free. He is the source of truth, the perfect standard of what is right. He frees us from the consequences of sin, from self-deception, and from deception by Satan. He shows us clearly the way to eternal life with God. You see, Jesus doesn't give us freedom to do what we want, but freedom to follow God. As we seek to serve God, Jesus' perfect truth frees us to be all that God meant us to be. Because of God's grace, we have a greater freedom than any constitution can grant us. We have the freedom that is offered in Jesus.

There's a word for freedom in the N.T. It is the word, "redemption." "Redemption" means "to buy back." It means that we have been bought with a price, that we have been freed from our bondage to sin and to Satan, and now we are really free.

We've heard the phrase, "Redeemed by the blood the Lamb." It means that we were set free from the bondage of Satan by the blood of Jesus that was shed for us that was so graphically illustrated in the film, "The Passion of Christ."

The Gospel is a message of freedom. And it's a message that's still needed today...because far too many are still not free.

Jesus said, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Are you free?

What symbolizes freedom to you? For people in Berlin, the wall not being there is a symbol of freedom.

The Alamo has stood as a symbol of freedom for Texans for years.

Some people think of freedom when they hear the Star Spangled Banner, or Ray Charles sing America the Beautiful, or Lee Greenwood's God Bless the U.S.A.

To millions of immigrants over the years, the Statue of Liberty has symbolized freedom.

With all the symbols for freedom there are in the world one stands far above all the rest. Where all the other symbols for freedom are connected to a country or a group of people, there is one that is a symbol of freedom

for all who live, and that's the Cross.

We have been given freedom by God. Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins and give us freedom. The Cross is the symbol of life-changing, everlasting freedom. More than the Bald Eagle, more than Old Glory, more than the Statue of Liberty, the Cross is the symbol of freedom!

And, no matter what those judges in California, or anyone else say, this nation is "Under God". Always has been. And I trust always will be if we stand firm in our faith and pass the message of freedom to those around us.