

## Daily Devotional Guide

**Monday** – Read Galatians 6:7-8. It is an old biblical saying, “You reap what you sow.” You get out what you put in. Every action will reap some kind of result, good or bad. What kind of seeds are you sowing in your life?

**Tuesday** – Read Galatians 6:9-10. I believe all Christians can relate to feeling discouraged at seeing no results after repeated attempts of doing good. Yet Paul urges us not to give up and trust God. There will be a harvest. God’s seeds do grow. The harvest may come now or it may not come until God’s kingdom is established. But it will come. When do you find yourself discouraged at doing good? Do you ask God to give you strength and endurance during those times?

**Wednesday** – Read Galatians 6:13. In this verse Paul is speaking of some of the early “Judaizers” who demanded circumcision for Gentile Christians as a sign of holiness but neglected other Jewish laws. We see this practice in the church today. Many folks emphasize certain aspects of the faith and ignore others. For example, some Christians emphasize morality and ignore social justice. Both are important. Can you think of any other examples of unbalanced faith in the church today?

**Thursday** – Read Galatians 6:14 and Philippians 3:4-10. Paul had a lot to brag about. Yet, Paul was clear that the only thing that was worth bragging about in his life was the cross of Christ. What do you brag about in your life? Do you ever brag about Christ and his work on the cross? Why or why not?

**Friday** – Read Galatians 6:15. Paul is reminding us of the importance of inward change as Christians. If our heart and hands are not integrated and acting as one for the glory of God, we have a shallow or empty faith. We can only fake spirituality for so long. Eventually, we must allow God to do surgery on our hearts. Is there something inside you needs to change? Will you allow God to help you make the change?



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## Freedom and Responsibility

Sunday, July 3, 2011

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: Galatians 5:13-14

Happy July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend!  
Tomorrow the United States of America will be 235 years old. 235 years ago tomorrow The Declaration of Independence was adopted in Philadelphia. I believe it is appropriate to read a critical portion of that document that captures the essence of our democracy:

**"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."**

A year before these powerful words were written, Patrick Henry stood up at the Virginia Convention and said:

**"I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death."**

When the Continental Congress declared the separation of the thirteen colonies from Great Britain 235 years ago, the founders of our great nation had one thing in mind: Liberty. And although

we are proud of our freedom as Americans, we know the idea did not originate with us. Since the very beginning, human beings have yearned for what is on the inscription of the Statue of Liberty - "to breathe free" (Rev. Joanna Adams, "The Predicament of Freedom").

Three thousand years before Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence, the Hebrew people were oppressed in Egypt. They were in bondage and yearned for freedom. God called a man named Moses to deliver that freedom. He demanded of Pharaoh, "Let my people go!" When Pharaoh refused, God delivered (Adams).

A thousand years later, the people were in bondage again by the tyranny of the Roman Empire and by the powers and principalities of the world. Enter Jesus. Jesus stood at the pulpit for the first time and said that he had been anointed by the Holy Spirit "to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives...to let the oppressed go free." Jesus would later say to his disciples, "If

you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Adams).

Freedom. It is sacred. It is precious. It is beautiful. Freedom is something that began with God as he created us with free will, with the ability to choose how we live. God could have created robots or puppets that did whatever he wanted. But that is not a relationship. There is no such thing as forced love. God want us, in our freedom, to choose him. God created us to be free, to be free moral agents in this world. Freedom comes from the free spirit of Almighty God. Freedom is in the heartbeat of God and in the bloodstream of humanity. This is why it is not surprising that there are more than 50 references to freedom in the New Testament. In Romans, Paul refers to it as “the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

The freedom we enjoy as Americans is glorious. There is no freedom more glorious or precious for Americans than religious freedom. You woke up this morning and were free to choose whatever church you wanted to worship in. You could have chosen high liturgy or low liturgy. You could have chosen contemporary worship or traditional worship. You could have chosen to listen to a soft preacher or a loud preacher. You could have chosen a church where they dance in the aisles or a church where they sit in contemplative silence. You could have chosen to worship in any church you desired.

No dictator or government told you

where you had to worship, how you had to worship, or what you had to worship. When I sat down to prepare my sermon this week, I didn’t have to consult with the government or a political party to check the content of my message. This is a free pulpit, and will always be a free pulpit.

I know I don’t need to remind you that everyone in this world does not have this kind of freedom. I don’t need to tell you that people are hung, shot, and tortured for saying the name “Jesus.” I don’t need to remind you that there are Christians right now who read the Bible in the dark fearing persecution or death for doing so. I don’t need to remind you that Paul wrote most of his letters from a prison cell believing he would be executed at any moment for preaching the gospel.

I know all of you remember that in the very beginning people came to America for religious freedom. This is why one of the most sacred things we have as Americans is religious freedom. This is why I am a firm believer in the separation of church and state. Dr. Bill Self reminds us that people aren’t converted because they are forced to believe in something or because a government dictates a religion. People are converted because of the free spirit of God that moves through our free spirit which encourages us to follow Almighty God. Dr. Self wisely states, “When religion and state go to bed together, both hurt each other.” History teaches us this over and over again.

Christians who speak against the freedom of religion and the first

amendment don’t believe the gospel can stand on its own. They believe the gospel needs to be propped up by the government. Oh, the gospel can stand on its own. It does just fine by itself. The gospel will prevail when all the governmental policies and political parties fail! It is the truth! So, when you wave the flag today and set off fireworks and sing the great patriotic music, remember the precious gift of religious freedom. Remember that you are able to worship Jesus Christ without fear of persecution or death. Remember you are able to worship Almighty God in whatever way you want to, however you want to!

This leads me to our passage for today. The Apostle Paul reminds us that indeed, we are called to freedom, but freedom is not a luxury; it is a responsibility and an opportunity. Paul clearly tells us to not use our freedom for self-indulgence or corruption, but use it as an opportunity for love, for doing good toward others, for sowing seeds of the Spirit, for doing the work of the gospel.

Today, we celebrate all of our blessings as Americans, all that we have and all that we have been given. And it is important that we celebrate. But remember what the Bible says, “To whom much is given, much is required.” How will we use the blessings we enjoy? For corruption? For self-indulgence? How will we as Christians use our freedom? Will we share with those we love the gospel of Christ as freely as we share our patriotism? Will we speak out against those things our government does that are contrary to the will of God? Will

we remember that our religion is personal, but never private? Will we name the issues that need our faith, and not lose our faith in political battles? Will we speak up and speak for the oppressed and the exploited and the abused? Will we live by the inscription on the Statue of Liberty:

**“Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed,  
to me;**

**I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”  
–Emma Lazarus**

Will we use our freedom to live by the words of Paul:

**“May I never brag about  
anything except the cross of our Lord  
Jesus Christ by which the world has  
been crucified to me, and I to the  
world...a new creation is everything!”**

The resounding question for us as Christians on this Fourth of July weekend is not how big our fireworks will be, but how will we use our freedom for the glory of God? At the judgment, when all the nations have bowed before God and the kingdoms of the world become the Kingdom of God, God will hold us accountable. God will say, “You lived in a free country. You had no restrictions. No limitations – an abundance of resources and tools – plenty of opportunities. Tell me, what did you do with it?” What will we say?

Oh, let’s celebrate our freedom today. But, in the name of Christ, let’s do something with it. Amen.