

The fourth of July is the day in which we as a country emphasize freedom. Over 200 years ago our country had its beginning born of this idea. But what exactly is freedom? What is so powerful that men would prefer death to not having it?

Freedom is generally defined as the ability to do anything that you want just as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else. We have many freedoms that we enjoy in this country, such as freedom of religion and freedom of speech. We also have many freedoms that we enjoy as Christians. Paul says in Galatians 5:1, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

Everyone wants to escape the responsibilities of life and take it easy. This attitude is illustrated by the prodigal son in Luke 15:11,12. This boy obviously wanted to escape his father's control and be free to do whatever pleased him. He traveled far away so he could be his own boss, but he found out that absolute freedom is an illusion; he was free from his father, but he still wasn't free. He was soon willing to eat the feed for the unclean hogs of which he was in charge. His bondage now was much worse than it had been!

We can also refuse to allow God to be our Father. He allows us to free ourselves from the restrictions placed on us by His will. We soon find, however, that we become slaves to sin instead. Each of us has weaknesses which become evident when laws and restrictions are removed. For instance, when a person reaches his eighteenth birthday he has the freedom, legally, to drink alcoholic beverages. But so many who exercise this "freedom" will find it an illusion. A man will simply exchange the bondage of the law (which said he couldn't drink) for the bondage of his own weakness (which says he can't keep from it). Our own particular weakness may be in bondage to pride, or ambition, or sensual pleasure, or self-righteousness.

It was only when the prodigal son 'came to himself' that he realized that the 'slaves' in his father's house had more freedom than he had as a so-called 'free man'! He then went home and asked for forgiveness, and was received royally. We are all serving either God or Satan. God tells us that our maximum freedom is in serving Him. Only Jesus has the power to break the chains that bind us and give us freedom from sin.

Christ gives us freedom to become what God intends us to become. In Mark 5 we read where Jesus climbed out of a boat one day and came face-to-face with a demon-possessed man who lived in a graveyard. Night and day he wandered among the tombs and on the mountains shrieking as he cut and bruised himself on the stones. People had tried to bind him, but he snapped the chains like they were made of thread. It's a painfully vivid picture of life without Christ. In a sense this man had freedom, for no chains could hold him; but he was controlled and tortured inside by Satan. Jesus is a much, much better master. See what he did for the demon-possessed man. His name had been "Legion", because he had so many interests inside him tearing him apart, but Jesus brought unity, order, and purpose into his life after he had eliminated the demons that had been in him. Now look at him: clothed, in his right mind, wanting to follow Jesus. He is the perfect representation of what Christ can do in our lives.

But what is the cost of freedom? We must pay for our freedom in Christ by letting our own personal, selfish form of freedom die. This sounds strange, that we must give up freedom to become free, but it is like Jesus' saying, "he who finds his life shall lose it, and he that shall lose his life for my sake shall find it."

Freedom. A tremendous word, for in it lies our future. And Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:17,18, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." We have the freedom to choose which master we will follow. We have the freedom to find salvation. We have the freedom at any time to come to him. Let us celebrate this freedom every day.