



"To obey God is perfect liberty."  
—Seneca

**02-Jul-04**

## **Do Americans Value Liberty?**

This weekend, Americans will celebrate—with cookouts, picnics, parades, and fireworks—the 228<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence from England on July 4, 1776, the commonly accepted beginning of the United States. At the time, the Colonies were already engaged in war with the Mother Country, blood had been spilled on both sides, costly sacrifices had been made, and heels had been dug in so that the stakes had become, as Patrick Henry had so eloquently declared, "Give me liberty or give me death!"

Though American forces won few battles during the Revolution, they won the war, exhausting the British forces through guerilla tactics and the help of their French ally. In the end, America's ragtag forces had defeated the most powerful army on earth at the time, but it had cost a great many lives and destroyed cities, estates, farms, and businesses. To them, however, this was the price of freedom, and they willingly paid it.

In 1812, the next generation was called to do the same against the same foe. Then for successive generations there were Indian wars to fight, a war against Mexico, the bloody Civil War, war with Spain, both World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, and now the Gulf Wars. Americans have taken up arms in

the cause of human liberty here at home and all over [the world](#), believing that freedom is an inalienable right of all mankind, not just of Americans. With Thomas Jefferson, they have believed, "The [God](#) who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time."

Liberty is a precious and rare blessing in the annals of humankind. Most societies, even among those considered to be free, have granted liberty only to certain classes of people based on birth, wealth, or merit rather than bestowing it universally, regardless of class. America was the first nation that attempted such a radical concept, enshrining it in its founding documents as a goal for future generations to strive to attain. Though its perfect application has never been achieved, it has provided a guiding light, a high ideal, over the past two centuries.

To many in America, it appears as if the events of the Revolution and the Founding are ancient history and thus irrelevant. They have grown up in an era in which freedom has been passively accepted as a birthright rather than cherished as a treasured gift or costly won on a bloody field. Younger Americans have been spoiled by the sacrifices of preceding generations, and for this reason, they do not realize the responsibilities freedom imposes. As the cliché runs, "Freedom is not free."

In this regard, a quotation often attributed to Thomas Jefferson (though actually from the pen of his contemporary, John Philpot Curran) is appropriate: "The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance [frequently condensed as, 'The price of liberty is eternal vigilance,' a concept Jefferson echoed in his own writings]." This form of the quotation makes three things clear: 1) God is the source of true liberty; 2) God has granted liberty to men; and 3) man's responsibility to continue receiving liberty is to be awake and aware while on guard.

Against what? The context of the quotation deals with indolence—laziness—in the face of encroaching bondage. The warning is against apathy and lack of effort to restrain the forces, primarily in the realm of ideas, that threaten to reduce or eliminate human liberty. This is a necessary warning because, though most people would rise up in righteous anger against sudden totalitarianism, these same people tend to give their freedoms away piecemeal for security, bread and circuses, and promises of future reward.

In post-9-11 America, do Americans value liberty enough to stand guard over it against the approach of tyranny? Some do—the ones who have read the history and documents of the Founding Fathers and realize how rare and precious it is to live in a society where each individual is free to fashion his own life. Yet, the percentage of such people is shrinking year by year, as the older generation dies and progressive ideas influence the younger generations to give up liberty for high-sounding but enslaving concepts like income redistribution, diversity, multiculturalism, no child left behind, universal health care, and free college education. And even many of the older people, becoming fearful in their twilight years, are quick to trade their freedoms for security from terrorists and bill collectors.

Perhaps the most telling sign that Americans are willing to let their liberties slip away is the nation's level of immorality. The Bible is very clear that [sin](#) enslaves and destroys ([John 8:34](#); [Romans 6:6](#), 16), while God's way of life liberates ([Psalm 119:45](#); [Luke 4:18](#); [II Corinthians 3:17](#); [Galatians 5:1](#), 13). It is for this reason that the nation's second President, John Adams wrote, "The preservation of liberty depends upon the intellectual and moral character of the people."

As we celebrate the anniversary of American independence this weekend, we should consider how valuable liberty is—both physical and spiritual—and how far we would be willing to go to secure and preserve it.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Liberty vs. Independence](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Although we, through Christ's sacrifice, have been freed from the curse or death penalty of the law, we have not, as most Protestants believe, been freed from law keeping. We have been liberated from the degeneration of sin, the fear of death, corruption, and the elements of this world. If we live

righteously, through the power of God's Spirit (the mind of Christ), we remain free from sin. We are delivered from the bad bondage of sin (leading to death) to a good bondage of righteousness (leading to life), becoming indentured servants until our death, at which time we become transformed into God's spiritual offspring. As slaves of righteousness, we are dependent upon our master. As followers of Christ, we are not independent but interdependent and interconnected as Christ's body. Freedom comes from surrendering to God's will.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Why Worship God?](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Worship is ingrained into human beings; it is almost as if we must worship something. So, why should we worship the God of the Bible rather than some other person or thing? What benefits does worship of the true God of Creation bring to those who worship Him? John Ritenbaugh provides three fundamental reasons why worship of the God of heaven and earth is necessary and beneficial to those who seek Him.

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