



"Freedom is a possession of inestimable value."
—Cicero

23-Jun-17

Our Declaration of Independence (Part One)

Here in the United States, we are rapidly approaching our nation's Independence Day. It was two hundred and forty-one years ago, on July 2, 1776—not July 4 as many people believe—that the Second Continental Congress, meeting in the sweltering city of Philadelphia, voted in favor of the statement that affirmed their determination to liberate the American colonies from oppressive British rule. Getting the delegates to decide for independence had not been easy, but in the end, after much debate, they placed their signatures on the document and their lives on the line.

One of the co-authors of the Declaration, John Adams, wrote to his wife Abigail that he believed that July 2, would be "celebrated as the most memorable epoch in the history of America." He predicted that future Americans would commemorate this day as an annual festival with wild celebrations of pomp, parade, games, sports, guns, bells, and bonfires.

Nevertheless, the commemoration of that momentous event has been moved to July 4, when Congress approved Thomas Jefferson's revised Declaration of Independence. Interestingly, both Adams and Jefferson, after lifetimes of dedicated service to their nation, died on July 4, 1826, exactly fifty years later.

The 1337-word Declaration detailed twenty-six abusive actions taken by the English Crown against the American colonists. It also listed the several attempts to seek a remedy for these grievances, which George III, the tyrannical king of England—as many colonists saw him—had neglected and ignored. Its authors closed the proclamation of their cause by professing [faith](#) in the protection of Divine Providence and by pledging in this noble undertaking their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor.

It is good for us to focus occasionally on the freedom that [God](#) has given to us, those in the church of God. It is a freedom that the rest of [the world](#) just does not have—and cannot have without God's personal intervention. It is something for which we should be truly thankful.

When Adam disobeyed in the Garden of Eden, attempting to become independent of God, he still was not free. He just changed the ruler that he would submit to, switching his allegiance from a loving and benevolent One, God, to a tyrannical and malevolent one, [Satan](#). Adam—and all mankind since—got a raw deal: The Adversary's oppressive actions against humanity number much higher than the mere twenty-six that the American colonists pinned on England's King George III!

In [Colossians 1:13-14](#), the apostle Paul provides an overview of what God has done for us: "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His [love](#), in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." Before we knew Christ, we, too, were held captive by "the [god of this age](#)" ([II Corinthians 4:4](#)). However, as Jesus tells us in [John 8:32](#), "The truth shall set you free."

By His sacrificial death, [Jesus Christ](#) has released us from the imprisonment of Satan. Our new circumstance means we now have the freedom of whom we choose to obey (see [Romans 6:16-23](#)); we now have true moral agency, the ability to make moral judgments based on the standard we choose to follow. This self-governance is one of the definitions that *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* gives the word "independent," and Dictionary.com adds that to be independent means that we are "not influenced or controlled in matters of

opinion, conduct, etc." Further, it also says that it means, "Not subject to another's authority or jurisdiction; autonomous; (and) free," something that is not consistent with the terms of our relationship with God.

In a 1998 sermonette about liberty and independence, Richard Ritenbaugh explained independence through an illustration: "You know what a pendant is. If you have a necklace, the pendant is the thing that hangs on the necklace, whether it's a jewel setting or a charm of some sort. So a thing is independent if it does not hang from a common fixture, like a necklace. The pendant that is not hanging on the necklace is in-dependent." While a truly independent Christian is a figment of the imagination, those who are called by God have the choice to be independent of the necklace—dare we say "chain"—which the world has around humanity's neck.

But being independent of this world and its ruler is hard work, as we will see in Part Two.

- John Reiss

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Jesus and 'the Spirits in Prison'](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Peter's statement that Jesus 'preached to the spirits in prison' (I Peter 3:19) has for years baffled many a Bible student. Richard Ritenbaugh examines this verse in context, showing that the traditional interpretation is woefully off-base to the point of suggesting a totally unbiblical conclusion.

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