

To Live in Freedom

Independence Day, 2007

July 1, 2007

It was spring of 2002. New York City was still traumatized by the events of 911 when former Beatle Paul McCartney came on to the Big Apple on his "Back in the USA" tour.

The crowd sang along as he and his band played Beatle favorites as well as songs from his 80s band, "Wings."

Then, without announcement and without fanfare, he premiered a new song simply titled "Freedom." The words go like this:

*This is my right, a right given by God
To live a free life, to live in freedom*

*We talkin' about freedom
Talkin' bout freedom
I will fight, for the right
To live in freedom*

*Anyone, who wants to take it away
Will have to answer, cause this is my right...*

The reaction of that New York City crowd was electric. The Brit had given voice to the some very American convictions about freedom: that it's the gift—the birthright of all—and a gift that is given by all.

The second conviction is that it's worth fighting for: "I will fight for the right to live in freedom."

231 years ago, a group of men in Philadelphia also resolved that freedom is a right given by God and that it's worth fighting for. On this week of independence, I want to ask a few questions:

**What is freedom?
Is freedom God's gift?
Is freedom worth fighting for?**

They may seem like simple, even obvious questions. But they are more complicated than they seem on the surface.

First,

What is freedom?

There's a problem here for Christians who take the Bible seriously. The Bible doesn't talk very much about government or about political freedoms. What it does talk about in general terms is freedom from oppression. That's always to be preferred.

Remember that most of the time, God's people in the Bible lived under some kind of oppressive rule. Think of Israel under Egypt or under Babylon or Persia. Then in the New Testament, the church gets started under the Romans. There wasn't even a chance of changing things. There weren't elections or political parties of anything like that. God's people had to learn to make the best of it.

But one thing is very clear in the Bible: freedom is better than slavery. Israel lived for centuries as the slaves of the Egyptians. The Book of Exodus is all about God hearing the cries of His people, and how He brings them out to live as a free people in their own promised land.

In Exodus 6:6, God tells Moses:

"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you

with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment."

Freedom is better! In the New Testament, Paul tells slaves that if they became followers of Jesus, be the best at serving their masters, but at the same time he says in 1 Corinthians 7:21, "although if you can gain your freedom, do so."

What is freedom?

It means to be free from oppressive restraint. It means the right to be part of selecting our leaders. It means the right to believe live as want without interference by government. It means the right to assemble as we wish.

I don't think you can improve too much on the line 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 enshrines what we have come to believe as Americans: freedom comes from God. It's true that Jefferson and many others at Philadelphia weren't Christians, or at least held views that weren't consistent with Biblical teachings. Even so, you could hardly live in 18th century America and not be influenced by the deeply held convictions of the Puritans of New England, the Quakers of Pennsylvania or the Reformed Church people of New York.

Second,

Is freedom God's gift?

When these profoundly Christian early Americans sought the answer to the question,

"Where does freedom come from?" they would turn to the beginning of the Bible.

In Genesis 1, on the sixth day of creation, God made the first humans. Look at Genesis 1:26-27:

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.