

July 4, 2015 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church  
John 8:31-34, 36; Galatians 5:1 Liberty and Justice for All? By Andy McDonald

Freedom, just the word creates mental pictures and a visceral sense.

What does it really mean? Can it be an actual reality? While I find it very appealing for me, am I willing to grant it to others?

There are people possessed with the pursuit of freedom. For some it is the pursuit of national freedom, like that celebrated in the United States of America today on July 4. We celebrate the course of human events that made it necessary to dissolve the political bands with the British. We declared our independence and today there are places all around our world where people are pursuing emancipation from oppressive governments—freedom, liberty.

Others, even in our nation, pursue civil rights. They protest against racial, religious, ethnic, gender discrimination and demand the protection of minority opinions. They seek freedom.

I find it fascinating that in the summer of 1776, in declaring our independence as a nation the second paragraph of that declaration begins with these words. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

And then it took 94 years to arrive at allowing all men to vote regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. And then it took another 50 years, half a century, to allow women to vote.

In our world today many search for economic freedom. Not just the freedom to work, but to enjoy the economic benefits of that work in

freedom from hunger, from poverty, and unemployment. The freedom to invest and grow business and income.

We all want personal freedom, to go and do and be.

But even when people speak of freedom there's much misunderstanding. Often careful thinking, diligent defining of what freedom means may be missing in the conversation for freedom.

Like the Marxist orator who was waxing eloquent on the street corner about the freedom all would enjoy after the revolution.

'When we get freedom,' he cried, 'you'll all be able to smoke cigars like that,' pointing to a successful gentleman walking by.

"I prefer my cigarette," shouted a heckler.

Ignoring the interruption the Marxist continued: "When we get freedom you'll all be able to drive in cars like that," pointing to a Mercedes driving by.

"I prefer my bike," shouted the heckler.

The dialogue continued like this until the Marxist could bear his tormentor no longer. Turning on him, he said, "When we get freedom, you'll do what you're told."

So Freedom, how would you define it?

1. It is the state or quality of being free—having liberty
2. Exemption or liberation from the power
3. Exemption from arbitrary restrictions or a specified civil right: political liberty
4. Exemption or immunity from a specified obligation or discomfort

In the New Testament when we meet Jesus he is presented as the world's supreme liberator, the supreme source of freedom.

It was just after his fast in the wilderness and the temptations that he went to Nazareth. On Sabbath, as usual, he went to the synagogue and

when it was time for the scripture to be read he stood up and he read from Isaiah words of freedom.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors, and that the time of the Lord’s favor has come.”

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. Luke 4:20 says, Everyone in the synagogue stared at him intently. Then he said, “This Scripture has come true today before your very eyes!”

This is Jesus, the one who is the supreme liberator, the source of freedom.

Many have and still do debate about whether

- good news to the poor
- freedom for prisoners
- recovery of sight for blind
- release for the oppressed
- year of the Lord’s favor

are these material or spiritual or both, the reality is that the proclamation of Jesus is one of freedom, release, and liberty.

Jesus frees us from guilt. Without forgiveness of our sin, our condition and our behavior, there is no freedom. But the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ was declared in advance in Psalm 130:4, “there is forgiveness with God.”

Nothing feels worse than being guilty and nothing better than being forgiven. 1 John 1:9 is pivotal, “If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!”

Not only does Jesus free us from guilt but he frees us from the essence of sin which is self-centeredness.

Last week we looked at the 11<sup>th</sup> of the 12 classical Spiritual Disciplines and they are means to give God access to our lives. The Spirit enters our very personalities and by God the Spirit we are changed from the inside out.

The stingy become generous, the rude-polite, the haughty-humble, the grumpy-sweet, we are transformed from self to unself as we come to the grand reality—no longer do I live but Christ lives in me. Christ in me is my hope of glory. Jesus frees us from guilt as he forgives and he frees us from self-centeredness as he transforms, and

Jesus brings freedom from fear. Sure fears may arise but when they do Jesus brings freedom from fear. We fear things like sickness, loss, old age, death, the unknown. There are superstitious fears, irrational fears. Jesus brings freedom from all fear. Jesus was born, lived and ministered, and died. That's the story of all our lives. But that wasn't the end of Jesus story. Jesus rose from the grave and was exalted above all and now everything has been put "under his feet."

No matter what comes our way, no matter how bad or good things may get, NO FEAR, because Jesus has won and we know how this story ends. No need to fear.

Jesus provides freedom from guilt, freedom from self-centeredness, freedom from fear and we get freedom with a purpose.

John Stott writes:

The true cry for freedom is not only for rescue from some tyranny, but also for liberty to live a full and meaningful life.

Once a country has been delivered from a colonial regime, it is free to discover and develop its own national identity.

Once the Press is delivered from governmental control and censorship, it is free to publish the truth.

Once a racial minority is delivered from discrimination, it is free to enjoy self-respect and dignity.

So while freedom from guilt, self-centeredness and fear are great freedoms –for what purpose have we been set free?

Jesus said if the son sets you free you will be free indeed.  
Jesus said, You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

I believe Jesus sets us free so that we might be our true selves as God made us and meant us to be, and I believe God made us for LOVE! We were created for relationships of love.

When Jesus frees us from guilt, self-centeredness, and fear he intends that we invade the world and make a difference.

Freedom isn't just a privilege but an obligation. It is the free those who have experienced God's freedom that can bring freedom to our world.

What would you do about nearly 36 million slaves. With no guilt, no self-centeredness, and no fear, those things from which Jesus sets us free here's what can happen.

Zach Hunter was a 12 year old who had been troubled disturbed when learning about slavery in his history class. But when he heard that there were more than 27 million people in modern day slavery he determined to be a modern day abolishinist. He loved the quote by William Pitt, "We are too young to realize that certain things are impossible so we will do them anyway."

What can one 12 year old do about modern slavery. He wasn't delusional that he could singlehandedly end modern day slavery but he started doing something. His freedom compelled him to seek freedom. He started with friends and family to give their loose change. It grew into a campaign Lose change to loosen chains.

Grown to be about finding your passion. Whether it is modern day slavery, or wells for fresh water, or needs for tutoring in your local school.

God has freed us from guilt, from self-centeredness, and from fear and we can go make a difference.

I believe we have been set free to be our true selves as God made us and meant us to be. And God made us for LOVE.

Poet Robert Soutwell wrote:

“Not when I breath, but when I love, I live.”

Listen we ought to set off fireworks, and wave flags, and eat a hotdog we should celebrate the Freedom this country has brought to our world, But Freedom isn't just a privilege it is a responsibility.

We ought to celebrate Freedom from guilt, sin as self-centeredness, and fear but not just as something to enjoy but as a platform from which to be our true selves to be lovers.

Love is self-giving. When two people fall in love they have this unnatural willingness, maybe even a drive to give of themselves, for the other.

True freedom is freedom to be my true self as God made me and meant me to be.

And what is that? God made me for loving.

But loving is giving, self-giving.

What this means is that to be myself I have to deny myself and give myself

This is what Jesus was talking about when he said that whoever tries to hold on to their life will lose it but whoever loses their life for his sake, will find it.

To be free, I have to serve.

Jesus is the one who brings freedom. Like our video of our members said real freedom is ours only in Jesus.

He frees us from guilt  
He frees us from self-centeredness  
He frees us from fear

All for the purpose of freeing us to love.

One more pass at this:

Jesus summed up the whole duty of us humans as this:  
Love the lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and  
Love your neighbor as yourself.

You want freedom, perfect freedom, freedom really worth celebrating,

Giving away ourselves in self-sacrificial service  
Giving of the self in love to God and others, that equals  
Perfect freedom!

John Stott says it this way:  
True freedom is freedom from my own silly little self in order to live responsibly in love for God and others.

# TAKE *away* →

What is one of your best 4<sup>th</sup> of July memories?

When you see the word “freedom” what do you think?

How do you feel about Jesus providing freedom from guilt, sin (self-centeredness) and fear?

How has your freedom from these affected how you treat others?

If God made you for loving how does denying yourself in order to give yourself fit you understanding of love?

Where do you see freedom at risk today?

What are some concrete ways you can help bring freedom to our world?

What will it mean for you to love God and others this week?

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