

Declaration of Christ Dependence

The United States of America will be 247 years old, July 4. That's a long time for a nation to remain free. But, when you look at our history in the context of world history, America is just a child among nations like Egypt, China, Japan, Rome & Greece. We are so young. And yet we stand tall among these nations because of the principles on which we were established: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people 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. Thus begins the Declaration of Independence, which we celebrate tomorrow. And do not let anyone fool you. Freedom ought and needs to be celebrated. So many churches and ministers today loathe patriotism in the pulpit. I am not one of those. I celebrate today with you the freedoms which God has blessed our nation with. Now I cannot tell you whether God has blessed us with liberty and therefore we are free or we have wisely and simply built our liberty based on biblical principles and thus we are free. In any case, our freedom is from God. Now let me temper our celebrations with caution: With freedom comes great responsibility. We are not free to live excessive lives. We are not set at liberty to pursue selfish ends. Our independence should not make us infidels. As Paul so eloquently put it: "You, my brothers, were called to be free, but do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature."

The framers of our great nation were just as serious about their political and religious freedom. In fact, they made little distinction between them. That is why the Declaration of Independence says that liberty is a right endowed not by nature but by God himself. We have been serious about liberty ever since. Patrick Henry said, "I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death." Thomas Jefferson with a bit of humor and absolute seriousness said, "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." And it need not be pointed out that the First Amendment to the Constitution is that Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech or of the press. We are serious about freedom. Why? Because we are called to be free. Those are Paul's words, and they are deeply theological, but they are the bedrock on which our country is founded. God gives humans freedom. We are made in God's image free to live and think and act and in Christ as He gives us freedom and the grace to be at liberty from our sins.

Now let us be sober for a minute. There always have been and always will be those who are opposed to freedom. Paul faced it. Martin Luther faced it in the Diet at Worms. Lincoln fought it on the battlefields of Gettysburg so all could be free. Martin Luther King encountered it in the streets of Memphis. And John F. Kennedy in his Inaugural Address warned the enemies of liberty: "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we will pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of Liberty." Liberty and civility could just as well be expressed with Freedom and Responsibility. Our freedoms bare a heavy burden. Great thinkers recognize this. Peter Marshall declared, "The choice before us is plain: Christ or chaos, conviction or compromise, discipline or disintegration. I am rather tired of hearing about our rights and privileges as American citizens. The time has come - it is now - when we ought to hear about the duties and responsibilities of our citizenship. America's future depends upon her accepting and demonstrating God's government." Pope John Paul II proclaimed, "Every generation of Americans needs to know that freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought." John Adams, "Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide." Edmund Burke shared these challenging words, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

The Apostle Paul understood the inseparable link between liberty and civility. In Galatians 5:13 he declares, "Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love." Use your freedom to serve. In other words: Freedom ought to be used to pursue good. After Paul's long defense of freedom in Christ he launches into the fruits of the Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness & Self-Control. The message is clear. Liberty and civility are two parts of a whole. Our declaration of Christ Dependence leads us to be the sacrificial hands and feet of Christ. Don't let the abundance we have acquired through liberty make us selfish. Celebrate with me today not just our liberties but our heritage of civility. Let's not just celebrate our Independence let us proclaim our Christ Dependence and commit our lives to the one who gives us eternal life!