

“Take the Stand”
Galatians 5:1, 13-26

Series: Be Free Week 5: Freedom to Live by the Spirit

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He called it “The Great Question.” John Adams was intensely aware of the danger and importance of this moment. While the oppressive heat of a Philadelphia summer gave way to lightning, thunder and pelting rain, Adams made the case for independence. As he spoke for two hours, he remembered feeling “carried out of myself in spirit as enthusiastic preachers sometimes express themselves.” Thomas Jefferson recalled that Adams “spoke with a power of expression that moved us from our seats.” Looking into the future, Adams saw the birth of a new nation. “We are in the very midst of revolution – the most complete, unexpected, remarkable of any in the history of the world.”

The next day, word reached Philadelphia that a hundred British warships were sighted off Long Island. With this sobering news in mind, they voted: twelve states in favor with New York abstaining. The American colonies declared themselves independent and free of Great Britain. John Adams wrote to his beloved wife Abigail that this day,

will be the most memorable epocha in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations (fireworks) from one end of the continent to the other from this time forward, forevermore.¹

Of what day does John Adams speak? July 4th? No. July 2nd – the day the vote was taken. What happened on July 4th? The signing of the Declaration of Independence by Congress? No, that was August 2nd. The first public reading of the Declaration? That was July 8th. The first printing of the Declaration? July 5th. July 4th was the day that Congress finished cutting out one fourth of Thomas Jefferson’s words, approved the final version of the Declaration of Independence and one delegate signed it: John Hancock. In fact, so little happened on July 4, 1776 that John Adams did not record anything in his diary. Thomas Jefferson’s diary only mentions that he took time off to shop for a new thermometer and ladies gloves. And the fate of that first copy of the Declaration? After John Dunlap used it to print and distribute 100 broadside copies, the original handwritten manuscript was thrown away.

Yet that revolutionary document which begins, “In Congress, July 4, 1776” contains these immortal, enduring, universal words,

¹ David McCullough, John Adams,

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 calls on “nature’s God,” “The Supreme Judge of the World” for assistance. And it triumphantly ends

And, for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.

John Adams had no doubt the hand of God was behind every step of this earth-shaking endeavor.

Yet two hundred fifty years later, we face a startling question: what does it mean to be free? What is the freedom God gives us? Why is the Declaration important? It unleashed a growing movement of greater personal and political freedom for all. In the centuries since, the spark of freedom, ignited in Philadelphia, inspired movements and revolutions around the world.

Today, in America, we possess many cherished and valuable freedoms. We are free to worship, speak, write, gather, vote and live as we want without government interference or punishment. Yet these freedoms are not free. They come with a cost. This price is paid not only by our armed forces but also by our government which protects our freedoms. These freedoms also come with limits. We create laws because sometimes my freedom to do what I want steps on your freedom to do what you want. I don’t have the freedom to control you and tell you how to think, speak, worship, vote and live. I don’t have the freedom to take what belongs to you or to harm and hurt you. Just as Freedom comes with a bill, it also comes with boundaries. That is freedom in America.

Freedom in Christ is different. The first Christians, in the New Testament, were not politically free. Some were slaves, very few were Roman citizens. They had no rights. There were no laws to protect their liberty or the free expression of their faith. In fact, they were persecuted by the government and their neighbors for their belief in Jesus. They took their stand for Jesus Christ, sometimes at the cost of their lives. Their freedom was not paid for with the blood and lives of soldiers but with the blood and life of their Savior Jesus. Their freedom was not guaranteed by the government but by the Holy Spirit.

The truth is: Jesus wants to make us free.

If you follow my words, you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. And if the Son of God makes you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:34, 36

This freedom cannot be created by an act of Congress, signed into law by the President or guaranteed by the Constitution. It is not political, social, religious or economic freedom. The supreme freedom Jesus gives is spiritual freedom. Our Creator not only wants to give us life, liberty and happiness in our nation but also in our souls. He does this in three ways.

First, Christ frees us from selfish desires. In Galatians, the Apostle Paul writes, It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify

the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. Galatians 5:1,16-17

There is a war going on. It is not over there but in here. Our selfish desires are hungry. They want to be fed and indulged. Yet they are never satisfied. Here is where freedom in America and freedom in Christ differ. American culture encourages you to freely do whatever feels good. That is the way our culture makes money, gains influence, amasses power. I am not judging the culture. But I have seen the harmful effects of feeding your hungers. Our selfish hungers cause the breakdown of our families, communities, nations and international relations.

This all starts when we are young. What's one of the first words children say when they see a toy? Mine. Everything is: MINE! It's all: MINE! Until it's broken then it's: YOUR'S. When you see grown ups acting selfish like this what do we say? "Stop being a baby." We attempt to control our desires with willpower, but they slip through our grip. We enact Laws to keep us from overindulging our selfish desires. Meanwhile the culture keeps feeding our hungers. Despite our best attempts to stop, we so love our selfish desires that we willingly put on what Paul calls "a yoke of slavery." A yoke is placed on the neck of an animal to drive it. Our selfish desires drive us.

Freedom in Christ is different. Jesus breaks the yoke of slavery. He does this not by laws on the outside or will power on the inside, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. You seek the Spirit, follow the Spirit, live by the Spirit day by day. What do you do with your selfish desires? You don't negotiate or compromise with them. You crucify them. Paul says,

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Galatians 5:24

When you crucify something, you put it to death. Not all desires. Just the selfish, harmful ones. Every time they appear. How? You must ACT! – Acknowledge, Confess, Tell. When a selfish hunger arises – don't indulge it. Acknowledge it as harmful. Admit it. Confess it to God and ask the Spirit for help. Finally Tell someone about it – someone you trust, who understands, maybe who even has the same struggle. Don't delay or play with it. ACT on it. Nail it to the Cross and the Spirit of Jesus will set you free.

The more you become free, the more you feel free. If you carry around guilt for a wrong you did in the past, Christ can set you free. If you are burdened with hurt feelings and bitterness, Christ can set you free. If a broken relationship weighs you down with shame, Christ can set you free. If you are tangled up in an addiction you can't stop, Christ can set you free. If you are afraid of the future or death, Christ can set you free. Best of all, when Christ sets you free, He does it for free. He paid the price of your freedom. You can't earn it and you don't have to. Throw off the yoke! Stand up and be free!

When Christ sets you free from selfish desires, He also sets you free to serve. Paul continues, "You were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love" (Galatians 5:13). The best way to avoid falling back into slavery is to serve Christ. There is a simple choice, either you serve the world or Christ. When you serve Christ, His Spirit grows inside of you. Instead of the vines and weeds of sin, the Spirit

produces the sweet fruit of love and joy and peace, fruits of patience and kindness and goodness. Gentleness and faithfulness and self-control start to grow and blossom and ripen. Here's a funny thing about fruit: the tree can't eat it's own fruit. It has to be given away. The fruits of love, joy and peace spread to your family, your circle of friends, your community, your nation and your world. When you serve Christ, you are set free by the Spirit and you begin to help others to be free as well. What is one thing you can do to serve others in the name of Jesus? You can reconcile a relationship, feed someone hungry in Trenton, help out with VBS, give to help those recovering from the earthquake in Venezuela. Serving is a great antidote to selfishness.

Third, Christ sets you free to stand for Him. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). Our pledge says we are one nation under God. But are you under God? Will you take your stand for Jesus Christ? Do you care more about what God thinks than what people think of you? Are you willing to be identified in your home, your school, your neighborhood and your job as a follower of Jesus Christ? Will you share the Good News that Jesus Christ can set them free?

Years ago, my daughter came back from the Creation Festival with a T-shirt which said, "I AM" and then it had a picture of a fish. When her friends at Cheerleading practice asked her, "What does that mean?" she said, "It means, 'I am a Christian.'" That was a small but significant stand for freedom for Kristin.

The freedom we celebrate this weekend is due, to the heroic and sacrificial acts of our armed forces over the last 250 years. Chief among them were those who fought against the threat of fascism and totalitarianism during World War II. We can only imagine how different our world would be today if these soldiers did not stand up for freedom and defeat the forces of oppression.

Take for example the 27th Regiment of the United States Army. They were among the first to fight back against the Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor since they were stationed in Hawaii. They were in the thick of it during the battle of Guadalcanal, the Northern Solomons and finally the brutal fight across the Philippine Island of Luzon. They restored freedom to each of these islands but they knew the most dreaded battle lay on the home island of Japan. Then came the bomb and the end of the war.

Now the 27th Regiment, called the Wolfhounds, were sent to restore and rebuild Japan. Imagine the tension, the animosity, the hatred that could have existed between conqueror and conquered. Yet among the Wolfhounds was a 19-year-old Sargeant who carried a small Bible in his breast pocket. Out on patrol one day, his squad came upon a heart-breaking situation. Twelve children, devastated by the war, were living in an orphanage near Osaka, Japan without blankets and barely enough food. Local people were looting the Holy Family Home run by the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. Alerting his commanding officer to the suffering of these children, the 27th Infantry Regiment Wolfhounds dedicated themselves to making life better for the children of the home. They gave them their own blankets and provided them with food and powdered milk. They protected the children from the thieves. From that day until now, the 27th Regiment has supported the Holy Family Home as it's personal mission. Its website says,

“Nothing but the highest credit must be given these American men for the depth of compassion and caring shown to Japanese orphans after a devastating war for all sides.”

That Sargeant First Class was Orville Hutchens. Until recently, the 27th Regiment did not know any of the original Wolfhounds who found the Holy Family Orphanage were still alive. In fact, Lee will be 100 on September 19, 2026. He was recently honored at the Phillies Game, he will lay a wreath at Arlington Cemetery, and he will be the special guest of the 27th Regiment at their annual gathering.

Perhaps the greatest honor is that Lee took a stand for freedom, took a stand for peace, kindness, gentleness and love, took a stand for Jesus. And for that, I believe, Jesus says, “Well done Lee.”