



Free indeed

by Pastor Robert M. Reid

Our nation has been fighting a war in Iraq to free from bondage a people who had experienced brutality and oppression by an evil despot and his tyrannical regime. President Bush called the December 15, 2005, election in Iraq a “watershed moment in the story for freedom” for the people of Iraq.

When most people think of freedom, they think of liberation from political oppression. That is how the Jews in Jesus’ day saw freedom. They were under the rule of Rome, but they were technically in a free territory and therefore able to enjoy a measure of freedom. In fact, when Jesus said to the religious leaders, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free,” (John 8:32) they were offended. They replied, “We are Abraham’s descendents, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, ‘You will be made free?’” (8:33). How quickly they had forgotten Babylon!

People can be politically emancipated and still be in bondage. In reality, the greatest bondage is not political. It is spiritual. How many people in the United States of America are free politically, yet are entangled in bondage to sin that saps the vitality out of their existence. As one person describes the situation, “Deep down we are frustrated with an ominous reality: God created us to soar, but our sinful human nature clipped our wings. We were crafted for glory but wallow in captivity” (Chris Tiegreen). How many people do we see within our “free country” bound by sin that destroys their bodies, paralyzes their spirits, cripples their relationships, and warps their thinking? Often popular-cultural personalities, who seemingly have all that our country’s freedom can offer, live lives of desperation and defeat. A surprised culture wonders in amazement how this could be so.

The problem is sin that enslaves a person (8:34).

Sin causes even the freedoms we have to morph into a diabolical tyrant that manacles us to practices that offer diminishing returns. The answer to that problem is a Divine emancipator. Kenneth Pillar describes Him this way: “Jesus Christ is the key which unlocks the door of the prison cell of our own making.” To use Christ’s words, “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (8:36).

What are people free to do who are spiritually emancipated? Perhaps greater things than we expect! Our sights are often set too low. We assume the limitation of our humanness – “I’m only human” – rather than realize the potential of our union with Christ – “I can do all things through Christ who empowers me” (Philippians 4:13). By lowering our sights we are like the proverbial caged bird that sits perched in a cage with an opened door. As one person observed, we had been abused by our slavery to sin and Satan, “but abused people often prefer what’s comfortable and predictable rather than handle the responsibilities of liberation.” Therefore we settle back into the squalor of sin rather than revel in the richness of our freedom in Christ. In doing so we miss the freedom to do that for which we have been released. Malcolm Muggeridge summarizes the emancipated life this way: “The only perfect freedom is serving God.”

We have seen the cost to free a nation from a despot as American men and women gave their lives for that cause. What would you think, if after having won that freedom, those freed continued in bondage? You would be disappointed at least, and in all likelihood angry. How then do you think God feels, having given His Son to die for our spiritual freedom, yet watching those emancipated by His Son’s death continue to live in the bondage of sin? Our challenge is to “Abandon mediocrity, rest in His strength, and never settle for anything less than complete purity. He calls you to be free indeed” (Tiegreen).