

Our Declaration Of Independence

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Independence. It's a word that invokes much emotion, especially to those in this country who enjoy many freedoms due to the Continental Congress' vote on July 2, 1776 to declare independence from Great Britain. It's a word that invokes many images in our minds. Fireworks. Hamburgers and hot dogs. Apple pie. Patriotic music. Red, white, and blue.

Indeed, we live in a richly blessed country. Even with all of its problems, it's the best country in the world. We are free to live where we want. We can work anywhere we'd like. We are allowed to make as much money as we can. We have the freedom to travel between the states and out of the country at our leisure. We can write and speak just about anything that's on our mind. We have the right to protest peacefully and speak negatively about our government and its leaders without fear of the government attacking us. We can worship our God according to our beliefs, rather than in a manner that the government dictates. Simply put, we have all manners of freedoms.

In recent months, countries in the Middle East and North Africa, such as Syria, Egypt, and Syria have struggled for independence from dictatorships or oppressive governments. They don't have the same rights and freedoms as we do. But they want it. They want what Thomas Jefferson called "unalienable rights" that are "endowed by their Creator". Among those rights, he said, are "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

I agree with Jefferson's assessment of those rights, but God never promised that we'd have those rights provided to us by our government. However, God has promised us something that is more precious than those unalienable rights: independence from the slavery of sin. We in our generation here in America have not experienced oppression or slavery from the powers that be. But every one of us of age has been mired in sin, unable to free ourselves, and in need of rescue. At times, we are deceived by Satan. Other times, we purposely rebel against God and his laws. The result is the same. We have transgressed God's laws and must pay the penalty. According to Rom. 3:23, "*the wages of sin is death*". Death is what we "earn" through our sin. It's what we should receive.

But God, in his immense love for his creation, has extended his loving arms, condescending from his glorious throne in the person of Jesus for the express purpose of accepting the punishment for our sins. "*But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed...And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*" (Is. 53:5-6). Peter, in commenting on the passage from Isaiah, said that Jesus "*bore our sins in His own body on the tree*" (1 Peter 2:24). God's profound plan to interpose Jesus' blood is what has given us the opportunity to be free from the snares of sin that so easily entrap us. Praise God for his wisdom, his foresight, and his love!

Now that I'm a parent, I am much more able to relate to the love God has for us. I can only imagine the anguish I would feel if my children were kidnapped by some evil man intent on harming them if the ransom was not paid. What parent among us would not allow anything to get in our way of rescuing them from that malicious individual? We would do everything in our power and then some! That's the love we have for our children and the desire for their safety. It's the same love that God has for us. We are his children that have been kidnapped by Satan. And without hesitation, he paid the ransom. Jesus took our place, giving us our freedom, our independence.

The difference in these two situations is that God knew this was going to happen ahead of time. He instilled in us the sense of right and wrong, he revealed himself and his will to us in the Bible, he warned us of the dangers of sin and of Satan, the father of sin, and he encouraged us to choose his ways instead of our ways. However, *“All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way”* (Is. 53:6). We are the ones that have placed ourselves in the circumstances of needing to be rescued. Isn't it wonderful that God had enough love to free us from our own sins even though we had previously rejected him?

Yes, sin is pleasurable...for a short amount of time. Yes, sin is appealing. Otherwise, there would be no temptation. But sin only promises short-term satisfaction. And in many cases, it's *very* short-term as the physical consequences of sin can come upon us very quickly. What Satan fails to mention is that sin has disastrous long-term effects, both in this life and eternally.

There is great need for us to not be myopic in our view of life. Paul encourages us to set our minds *“on things above, not on things of the earth”* (Col. 3:2). When we do this and obey God's will, we declare our independence from sin. And God has promised us that we will receive that independence. *“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered...And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 3:17; 22-23).