



Rector's Essay - Liberty

By Jarrett Kerbel (07/10/26)

Our celebration of Independence Day causes me to reflect on liberty, both Constitutional liberty and the liberty we have in Christ. Both are precious. The former - Civic Liberty - provides a broad arena of freedom that allows us to practice our faith without constraint or fear of a Government imposed religion. The latter - Liberty in Christ - is the gift of Grace that comes when we are set free by the death and resurrection of Jesus and then empowered by the Holy Spirit to choose conformity with Christ as our way of life.

Liberty in Christ is freedom from all the forces in us and around us that corrupt and destroy our humanity and our relationship with God. Humans without God can enjoy a thin version of freedom that is more akin to willfulness; arbitrary, impulsive, or compulsive activity impelled by confused desire.

In Chapter 7 of his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul describes the human soul without God, this way:

“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.”

Until we are regenerated by Grace, and engaged in the ongoing sanctification of the Holy Spirit, we are fighting a losing battle with all that rebels against the ‘with-God life’ in us and around us. Our willpower is limited, misdirected, confused, and enslaved.

Once God's grace sets us free, then we are able to accept a 'with-God life,' which is real freedom. Put simply, God is loving us into the freedom to love like Jesus.

Now, someone might object and say, "Life conformed to Christ is a constrained life, so it cannot be a free life." When, in actuality, a life set free to walk in the way of Jesus is the highest expression of human freedom possible. We are truly free when we are able to choose the good, the true, the beautiful, the grace-full, the virtuous, and the life-giving path, not according to our own impaired judgment but according to the model and teaching of Jesus.

Our willpower is limited and disordered without God's grace which restores our alignment with Godliness.

In conclusion, JD Salinger tells the following story in his novella *Raise High The Roof Beams Carpenters*,

"Would you like to know how Charlotte got those nine stitches?" I asked suddenly, in a tone of voice that sounded perfectly normal to me. "We were up at the Lake. Seymour had written to Charlotte, inviting her to come up and visit us, and her mother finally let her. What happened was, she sat down in the middle of our driveway one morning to pet Boo Boo's cat, and Seymour threw a stone at her. He was twelve. That's all there was to it.

He threw it at her because she looked so beautiful sitting there in the middle of the driveway with Boo Boo's cat. Everybody knew that for God's sake-me, Charlotte, Boo Boo, Waker, Walt, the whole family." I stared at the pewter ashtray on the coffee table. "Charlotte never said a word to him about it. Not a word." I looked up at my guest, rather expecting him to dispute me, to call me a liar. I am a liar, of course. Charlotte never did understand why Seymour threw that stone at her. My guest didn't dispute me though."

Almost everyone I know, including me, has a story like this one in their lives. The story of an irrational, hurtful, impulsive action that defies explanation. For many, such a moment startles us into an awareness of our confused, and disordered inner life, and our need for outside assistance to right ourselves. Thanks be to God we have God to turn to for just that.

