

Owning Freedom

By Paul Norcross

God bless you in the powerful and worthy name of our loving Lord and Savior and King, Jesus Christ!

Today was a wonderful day to honor our servicemen and women around the world. I was asked to speak to a local gathering in my hometown as they dedicated a veterans memorial. It was a blessing to reflect on the freedoms we enjoy today, because of the sacrifices of so many. The attached article came together as I thought about what the Lord did in this gathering this morning!

May our Lord continue to bring us to the place of liberty, in whatever country we live, as we look to His perfect law of liberty with all those who love His appearing. God bless you and thank you for your love for Jesus!

With all joy and rejoicing with you in our Father's love,
--Paul and Rita Norcross

Today is Memorial Day, 2006, the day in which Americans celebrate those who have fallen in battle to keep this nation free. It was my privilege today to don the uniform that I have not worn in sixteen years, and present a memorial service to our townsfolk in Charlemont. I was asked to dedicate a memorial stone at our town hall upon which were engraved the names of those souls, past and present, who have served in the uniform of the United States Armed Forces. We salute them with sincere appreciation, and their families who have loved them, stood with them, and prayed for them.

It is an honor to honor those who serve a cause that is higher than themselves. I would like to explain some things about freedom which tend to become forgotten with the passage of time – why, for example, freedom requires continuing investment, first of blood and then of faith.

We live here in the New England environs of the Revolutionary War. We live perhaps within spitting distance of the trail used by Henry Knox to break the thirteen month siege of Boston in 1776. The route from Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain to Dorchester Heights above Boston runs through the Berkshires, upon

which Knox's cannons were arduously hauled by 42 oxen driven sleds in the deep February snow. Though we live where honorable men and women have fought and served the cause of freedom, and though we can appreciate that winning freedom requires selfless sacrifice, blood, and anguishing effort, we often forget that there is a difference between winning freedom, and owning it.

The Revolutionary war was about winning freedom. The Bible declares that where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But the corollary is also true. Where the spirit of the Lord is not, there is slavery. Benjamin Franklin understood this during the drafting of the Constitution of the United States. Deadlocked in the dreadfully intense Philadelphia summer heat of 1787, conflicting north-south issues such as the one over slavery fueled such contention that John Hancock gave up and returned to Boston. Our nation needed a document on which to govern, i.e. to own what was initially won by blood and divine providence in eight years of war. Despite months of wrangling to craft this seminal document, a rational solution eluded the founding fathers for months. Would there ever be a consensus to make a Constitution?

Finally, on a sweltering August day, an aging Franklin arose with unparalleled wisdom to remind the delegates of the daily prayers these same men had prayed for the protection of our soldiers each morning in the same hall during all the preceding years of war. He concluded with a challenge that we must hear and apply afresh today: "I have lived, sir, a long time. And the longer I live, the more convinced I become of this truth – that God governs in the affairs of men, and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it possible that an empire can arise without His aid?"^[1]

In the stunned silence which followed, the assembly resolved to pray and fast to God for three days. When they returned from their private invocations, astonishingly the Constitution flowed smoothly into place. Important compromises were worked out. That the remarkable deadlock was broken after prayer and fasting underscores the divine underpinnings of this unique document, the one to which every American service man and woman to this day takes an oath to support and defend against all enemies foreign and domestic, so help them God.

How is this relevant to our memorial tribute today? In two key ways.

First, whether we recognize it or not, God governs in the affairs of nations. Those nations which publicly and corporately depend upon Him for counsel and wisdom win the right to advance to the next round -- to sacrifice for its freedom. Why? Because only upon such dependence does the door of freedom actually open.

“Where the spirit of the Lord is” enables liberty even if it still takes a subsequent fight to obtain it. Freedom cannot break out without the assistance of the Lord of hosts, Jesus Christ, who died and rose again to set men and women free. He is still willing and perfectly able to do so when He becomes preeminent in the human heart, and the heart of its nation.

But where the spirit of the Lord is not, such as in nations that do not yet hold Jesus Christ as Lord, or wherein nations assume they acknowledge Jesus but actually deny Him in their public behaviors, all the freedom fighting in the world will have hollow effect until Jesus Christ is restored to a place of honor.

Democracy is not the same thing as freedom, simply because democracy is merely a method (though generally a good one) of governance. It is not freedom itself. Freedom and liberty cannot succeed apart from the spirit of the Lord. We see this in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we should be praying for true freedom of religion to become established so that the advances in civil liberties can be retained. Enabling democracy is not at all the same thing as enabling freedom. Democracy is a form of government and may be installed by men, but freedom is a form of the Spirit from above, and may only be installed by our heavenly Father.

George Washington knew this well. Consider his prayer during the Revolutionary War:

And now Almighty Father; if it is Thy holy will that we shall obtain a place and a name among the nations of the earth, grant that we may be enabled to show our gratitude for Thy goodness by our endeavors to fear and obey Thee. Bless us with wisdom in our councils, success in battle, and let all our victories be tempered with humility. Endow also our enemies with enlightened minds that they may become sensible of their injustice, and willing to restore our liberty and peace. Grant the petition of Thy servant for the sake of Him whom Thou hast called Thy Beloved son; nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done.[2]

Democracy may seem like freedom compared to the reign of a Saddam Hussein or an Adolph Hitler, but when administered without the Author of freedom’s guiding hand, even democracy will enslave. If you think otherwise, then ask any liberal under a Republican White House, and similarly – ask any conservative under a Democratic White House. Both decry each other. Yet the Scriptures declare that when a man’s ways please the Lord, even his enemies are at peace with him. But lest one slips too quickly into the temptation of partisan prejudice, remember that God reads your heart like you read a newspaper. He knows its every secret idol, and every unforgiving attitude (which rules or even lingers) in your heart. He knows

who contributes to freedom out of purity and faith in Jesus Christ, and who undermines it with impurity and unbelief in Jesus Christ.

Without the spirit of the Lord behind democracy (or any other system of government) slavery can only follow. Unity is part of the liberty that arises from the spirit of the Lord. Democracy without Jesus Christ is as tyrannical as any monarchy, communist, socialist, tribal, or fascist Islamic state. This is because liberty is a gift from the One who gives it, and that gift comes from above. Liberty and freedom have little to do with forms of government, or economic, political, social and religious equality. Rather these things are products of the liberty which begins and is sustained in Christ.

My second point concerning how all this is relevant and appropriate to the memory and appreciation of those who serve our nation in the armed forces is that there is a difference between achieving freedom, and owning freedom. Let me explain.

When a nation is under tyranny, it does not matter the flavor. Tyranny can be from king or parliament, from poverty or wealth, bureaucracy or anarchy, racism or cultural diversity. Freedom can and does exist in any venue as long as Jesus Christ is permitted free expression. Where He is denied or culturally regulated, bondage will ensue. History demonstrates that it takes blood and faith to build freedom, but only continuing exercised faith in its Author can maintain it, because His specialty is breaking the bondage of sin. Sin enslaves and produces tyranny. The cross liberates, and produces freedom. But to own freedom, one must continually and actively embrace the same cross that produces it. And let there be no mistake; God sees through tokenism.

So this Memorial Day, the day on which we honor those who have and who continue to be willing to invest their blood in the construction of freedom abroad and keep it maintained at home, let us appreciate also the daily investment of faith required in the home to maintain what servicemen and women have helped to build. Let us be as serious about our homeland responsibility to own freedom as our service personnel are to build it. How is this done?

The Bible has a freedom owner's maintenance plan, and it is noted in 2 Chronicles 7:14.

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

May God bless this nation, and every nation around the world, and every heart which yearns for the liberty of the spirit of the Lord.

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[1] Paraphrased from From Sea To Shining Sea, Peter Marshall and David Manuel (1993, Fleming H. Revell, Grand Rapids, MI)

[2] Reprinted from The Boys of '76: A History Of The Battles Of The Revolution, Charles Carleton Coffin, (Maranatha Publications, Inc., 1998), as sourced from George Washington The Christian, William Johnson, (Mott, 1981).