

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

July 2

2023

Freedom Under God

Freedom ... The word is almost sacred to the American people, and over the world today it stirs great hope and aspirations. Our Declaration of Independence calls it an "inalienable" right and a truth "self evident." What is the source of this freedom, and what does it mean to us?

Free agency, the right to choose, is a gift from God. He elevated man above the beasts of the field: making man in his image (Gen. 1:26), sharing with man the power of choice. Man need not be slave to instinct or norm. He may rise above self, pursue ideals, seek truth, and embrace it.

But with power there is responsibility. The ability to choose the right exposes us to the danger of choosing the wrong. The same justice that rewards the righteous, must also condemn the wicked. Freedom, then, cannot be free. Even in the moral realm it imposes obligations, and there are none more bound than those who foolishly demand unbridled liberty and become slaves of their own folly.

In free government a man can vote as he chooses, but

he may not vote correctly. He may, by neglect or party politics, fail the responsibilities of this truth and encourage corruption.

In business, free enterprise allows a man to invest as he sees fit. But this is no guarantee of profit. He may invest unwisely, and "loose his shirt," the price paid for untrammelled opportunity.

A study of freedom in every facet of life will emphasize the obligations of those who enjoy it. Conversely, man's history shows that freedom is lost when its obligations are ignored.

Freedom in religion is widely acclaimed, but it is as widely misunderstood. The constitution guarantees religious freedom, but cannot make whatever one chooses to believe acceptable with God. At best, man can only endorse the freedom God originally granted a right inherent in the nature of man. Legislative, judicial, and executive authority in divine matters must be left to God.

The need to serve God according to his law is not diminished by free will. That need is, in fact, intensified. We are the more accountable before God for the way we exercise our free agency.

In the very early times the "priest-hood" of all believers (1 Pet. 2:5, 9) was dominated by a rising clergy system. Each one's obligation to "prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21) gave way to party loyalties and the word of the clergy. Soon the scriptural standard (Acts 17:11) was

replaced by the usurped "authority of the church," and history repeated itself. When the obligations of true liberty are slighted, liberty itself is lost.

Individual liberty was not wrested from the church. It was lost by default. "Churchanity" dulls individual will and stifles initiative. In religion, as in business and government, the socialized slave is tranquilized by his lot and loses his taste for the rigorous life of true freedom.

Dear Reader, how much of your own religion have you proven by God's word? Perhaps you were baptized (?) by sprinkling, but have you ever read New Testament authority for that? You may be a member of some denomination, but does the word of God authorize its name, doctrine, and practice? Do you accept a thing as right or wrong simply because the preacher so declares it? Do such questions irritate you? We hope not! They are asked to help you see how easily one may forfeit individual freedoms in favor of unproven traditions. Truth has nothing to fear from honest investigation, but freedom can be lost without it.

Fundamentally, religion is a choice of masters: God or self. Liberty under God is not the same as becoming your own God. Recognition of the Supreme Being should make us aware that man can no longer direct his own steps (Jer. 10:23). Jesus warned, "No man can serve two masters" (Matt. 6:24). Joshua said, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve . . .", then he added that a decision for God imposed obligations (Josh. 24:15, 19-23).

Most pitiful of all are the willfully blind. Thinking they serve God, these allow the winds of the day to make their decisions. They stumble in the darkness of self-service, yet know not they are blind (Rev. 3:17). Freedom is not for the fearful, the crowd pleaser, or the lover of ease in Zion. It must be grasped with resoluteness, and retained with sacrifice eyes wide open.

Freedom under God involves individual responsibility toward God: to know his will (John 17:17), and be freed from sin (John 8:32-36). Truth severs the shackles of sectarianism and gives assurance that we walk in his light. But we are warned that if we fail to properly exercise our freedom in religion, as in government and business we shall be bound by sin and finally perish.

✍ Robert F. Turner

Belleville church of Christ	
5635 S County Rd 200E - Belleville, IN - (317) 539-5258	
www.bellevillechurch.net	
Schedule of Services	
Sunday Bible Study	9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship	10:30 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship	4:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study	7:00 p.m.
Evangelist	
Brad Phillips	(765) 720-2816