**Freedom in Jesus Christ**

***Thoughts on Independence Day***

 Although the word freedom will mean different things to different people, the New Testament teaches us that Christians have been freed from slavery to sin. The Apostle Paul writes about this freedom in Romans (6:7) and the fact that we're freed from the dominion of sin (Romans 6:14). Even though we will never be perfect in this life, we can know that sin no longer has reign in our lives and that Christians will never fall, totally and finally, away from God's saving grace. The Bible tells us of how and when sin entered the world.

 In the Garden of Eden, God created mankind in his image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27), but that image was marred at the Fall of Adam and Eve into sin (Genesis 3). Because of the sin of Adam, mankind is now born in sin. We sin because we're born sinners. Mankind born in sin has no innate ability or desire to ever be truly pleasing to God. We may choose to be moral or kind, but before God graciously saves us, our deepest desires are for ourselves. We are slaves to sin. When God graciously saves us by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ alone, we are given true (not perfect) desires for godliness and by his grace and the power of the Holy Spirit we can begin to make real choices to honor God as we participate in membership in a local church and grow in our knowledge of him through his word, the Bible. As we think of the way God initially made mankind in the Garden we would be correct to say that as we obey God's word we're moving back in the direction of what it means to be truly human i.e. to love God and neighbor and live the way he intended for us in the beginning.

 True freedom from sin begins at our salvation. As a new creation in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) we are no longer slaves to sin as we once were, but rather we are free in Christ. We now have the ability to obey the commands and teachings of scripture by his grace. When we disobey God, we are not living the way that he has made us which ultimately brings all kinds of difficulties. We Americans often pride ourselves in doing things our way and yet getting our own way, if it means disobeying God, is not true freedom.

 Christian pastor and author Timothy Keller talks about the fact that many people today wrongly think of freedom as complete absence of any constraints. Think, for example, of a fish. Because a fish absorbs oxygen from water rather than air, it's free only if it is restricted to water. If a fish is 'freed' from the river and put out on the grass to look around, what's going to happen? It will die. The fish, then, is not more free to be out of the water but less free because out of the water it is operating outside its nature. With this in our minds we can see that freedom is not so much about the absence of restrictions as it is finding the right restrictions.

 So, then, to follow the biblical logic, we understand that obeying the commandments of God brings true freedom, because in the commandments God is calling us to be what he has made us to be. Although all people are made in the image of God, only Christians-- those who are a new creation in Jesus Christ-- have any true desire or ability to obey God's commands from the heart. Being freed for heart obedience to God, by his grace, will make our lives the best they can possibly be. When we obey the teachings of scripture, based on a proper foundation of faith in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation, we are moving in a direction of true freedom the way God intended mankind before the Fall.

Reverend Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois