




LIFE NEWS



Rights or ... Responsibility?

BY RON STORY, COMMUNITY LIFE PASTOR

There seems to be much in the news and in conversations of late regarding our rights, especially our rights as Americans. As much as we love and appreciate our great country, our higher allegiance as Christians is not to America but to the Kingdom of Christ. As believers, we are now citizens of Heaven (Philippians 3:20), ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), and the way we are to live here and now is to be lights to the world, shining the love of Jesus wherever we might be.

I know that a large part of American patriotism is based on our rights: the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. My question today is: "How much of our Christian life is based on rights?" It seems to me that the emphasis of scripture is not on our rights but on our responsibilities. We do have rights, but our responsibility to love

God and those around us often supersedes our personal rights.

In 1 Corinthians Chapter 8, we see first-century believers arguing over what foods they have a right to eat. Some have issues with food that has been offered to idols, while others see idols as no big deal, so their conscience is clear, and they have the right to eat whatever they want. Paul shares, "Take care that this right of yours does not somehow become an obstacle to someone else." (1 Corinthians 8:9) "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble." (1 Corinthians 8:13) Now, as a meat lover, never eating meat? ... That is true sacrifice!

Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 9 that though he has the right to get paid for his ministry of preaching the gospel, he

does not make use of that right so that no one can criticize him for being in it for the money. He says, "We endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ." (1 Corinthians 9:12)

What does our "right to life" mean for the Christian? It means we now have the right to eternal life with Christ, now and forever. We are not to live selfishly in this life, pursuing what we want and what pleases us. Jesus says we are to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Him. (Matthew 16:24) Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

What is our right to "liberty?" Christ has set us free from our bondage to sin and Satan, and we are now free to submit to God's Spirit in us to choose to please God rather than our own self-centered nature. (Galatians 5:11) We are free to set aside our selfish rights in order to serve and love others. (Galatians 5:13) We are set free from the "have-to's" of the law and trying to earn our salvation. In Christ, obedience is a "want to," and His Spirit gives us the power to obey from the heart.

What about our right to "pursue happiness?" Isn't it interesting that Solomon's pursuit of happiness and meaning in the Book of Ecclesiastes ended up as ... "vanity?" Only as we put God first in our lives can there be meaning to life. "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." (Ecclesiastes 12:13) Nowhere in the Bible do we see the command; "Be happy for I am happy." In fact, God says, "Be holy for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16) The goal of the Christian life is not to be happy, but to be holy, to become more and more like Jesus, and that often means setting aside our rights, emptying ourselves, being a servant, and dying to self so that Christ might live through us. (Philippians 2:5-11)

So, as believers, instead of a Bill of Rights, how about a Belief in responsibility? Let us responsibly live a life that honors and pleases God above ourselves, that freely values and loves others above ourselves, and that pursues not happiness for ourselves, but holiness that reflects and glorifies God! In other words ... It's not about us. It's all about JESUS! 🙏



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I AM CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST. IT IS NO LONGER I WHO LIVE, BUT CHRIST WHO LIVES IN ME. AND THE LIFE I NOW LIVE IN THE FLESH, I LIVE BY FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD WHO LOVED ME AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME. GALATIANS 2:20