

This week, like we do every year, we will be celebrating the 4th of July, or Independence Day. We celebrate Independence Day on July 4th with cookouts, parades, parties, bands playing, family reunions and of course fireworks. The 4th of July is a significant day in the history of our country because on July 4th 1776 the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, which was a statement that we, the United States of America were a separate country and no longer a part of Great Britain or under its authority. The thirteen American Colonies had already been at war with Great Britain for a little more than year at this time. The first shot of the Revolutionary War was actually April 19, 1775 in the battles of Lexington and Concord. I lived just a few miles from Concord for a couple of years when I got out of college, and I visited those sites a number of times during those two years to get a feel for American history. In the Declaration of Independence, the writers declared that the 13 Colonies of the United States were free. Freedom implies both being free from something and free to something else. In this case the colonists were free from

taxation without representation and the tyranny and rule of Great Britain. Instead, they were free to pursue life, liberty and happiness and free to govern themselves.

Galatians is a letter written by Paul to the church in Galatia.

There were people in that church who were trying to say that everyone had to strictly follow the laws of Moses in order to be saved... that salvation was by grace plus works and without the works there was no salvation. This letter challenges the need to strictly follow practices such as circumcision and dietary laws in order to attain salvation. Paul reminds the people that the Law does not provide salvation but rather identifies both sin, and man's hopeless and helpless state of being able to achieve salvation by being "good enough." Paul reminds the people that they are free from the constraints of the Law and sin and free to live an abundant life in Christ by providing them with a "Declaration of Dependence". Please stand with me for the reading of the scripture from Galatians 2:20.

(Read)

This is our declaration of independence from sin and death and our declaration of dependence on God through Christ. Freedom from sin and eternal death, freedom for forgiveness, joy, peace, hope, and eternal life. In this declaration of dependence on God, we see several things:

1. The Great Association

The writers of the Declaration of Independence disassociated themselves from the King and Great Britain. Paul, in his Declaration of Dependence, does just the opposite. Paul says that he has been crucified with Christ. He associates himself with Jesus as He hangs on the cross, washing away our sin, guilt, and shame with His blood. Taking the punishment for your sin and mine and receiving God's wrath upon himself. The cross, at that time, was a tool of death, scorn, excruciating pain, and humiliation. Jesus transformed the image of the cross into a place of life, love, victory, joy, and forgiveness. Jesus was motivated to go to the cross by his unwavering love for a people who loved only themselves and were blinded to the glory of God by their own sin, by selfishness, and by self-righteousness. He went

to the cross not for his own benefit but for yours and mine. Not for his own sins, but yours and mine. Not to save his own life, but yours and mine. We come to the cross because we are drawn by the love of God who sent his one and only Son to die for us so that you and I could have the opportunity to be forgiven of our sin, past, present and future and receive the free gift of eternal life in heaven with God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son. When we receive Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, we receive forgiveness of sin, but at the same time we are crucifying our old way of life where sin and the world had control and authority in our lives. We are committing to leave that old way of life at the cross and turn to walk a new way of life, with Jesus Christ in control of our lives. We are not an independent people. We are a dependent people because we cannot save ourselves; we need the forgiveness of sin that was paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. You are not your own, you have been bought with a price.

2. The Great Adoption

Once we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, we receive a new identity because now the Holy Spirit lives within us. That makes you a temple of God. 1 Cor 3:16 says “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” When you receive Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, you become adopted into God’s family which makes you a child of God. Rom 8:15 says, “You have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” and it continues in verse 17 “and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.” That’s why Paul was able to declare that “it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me.”

So often we try to live up to the expectations of our parents, coworkers, teammates, spouse, or friends. We want to “measure up.” We want to be “good enough.” As Christians, in our spiritual lives, we should always be wanting to please God. Our human nature wants to “feel worthy” of going to heaven or for Jesus Christ dying for us, but the reality is that we can never be worthy. Well, I’ve got good news for you. When you receive Jesus Christ, you don’t have to worry

about “being worthy” or “measuring up” or being “good enough.” You and I could never measure up to God’s standard or ever be good enough on our own. That’s the point. That’s the glory of Christ in us. Once again, we are not an independent people. Our eternal salvation depends on Christ in us.

3. The Great Alteration

There is even more good news! Not only are we free from the penalty of sin but we are free to live an abundant life in Christ! In our human nature, we usually live life based on our own desires and our own strengths and abilities. Paul puts it like this, “If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”

Saul, before he became Paul, had lived his life based upon his personal goals, desires and family background. He was

educated, he was a Pharisee, he was a Hebrew of Hebrews which means he was a strict adherent to the law. He persecuted the church with a tenacity and ferocity and zeal that surpassed all others. He lived his life exceedingly well based upon worldly standards and his own strengths and abilities. But then later on in that same passage Paul says that all those achievements in his life were rubbish, garbage, dung compared to having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and knowing him.

The manner in which Paul lived his life was radically altered and that's why he could say, "this life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

Paul's life was radically changed and turned upside down when he encountered Christ.

His relationship with Christ became his top priority. Nothing got in the way of that relationship. Jesus told us the same thing when he said to seek first His Kingdom and His

righteousness, and then everything we need will be provided for us.

Paul says that he lives his life by faith. Faith is not a whimsical notion that translates into “I really hope this works out” or “I hope this is the right thing.” Faith is knowing, believing, trusting and doing without physically seeing.

Faith is believing that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sin.

Faith is believing that Jesus rose from the grave on the 3rd day and ascended into heaven where he is preparing a place for you. A place which he offers to you as a free gift.

Faith is knowing that you have received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and received the free gift of forgiveness of sin.

Faith is knowing that when you die you will go to heaven to be with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Faith is trusting God's word when he says he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Faith is trusting God's word that he has a perfect plan for your life.

Faith is trusting that God loves you more than anyone else ever could.

Faith is trusting that God loves you just the way you are but loves you too much to leave you that way.

Faith is loving the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.

Faith is loving others more than yourself.

Faith is taking that next step that the Lord is prompting you to take even though you don't think you can do it.

Many people think the Christian life is boring and filled with rules and regulations. The life of faith I just described is far from boring. It's exciting because you never know what God is going to do in and through you. It isn't filled with rules and

laws that weigh us down. Even though we still need to do our best to please God, our debt has been paid and we are free to live the abundant life in Christ.

We are not independent. We are dependent on Jesus Christ. When people see the difference in your life and ask about it, you now have a Declaration of Dependence,

“I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me and this life which I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

While I'm not a big fan of “The Message” paraphrased version of the Bible, it sometimes words things in a way that make me think more deeply about the meaning of a passage. The passage I just read is paraphrased in the Message like this:

“What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn't work. So, I quit being a "law man" so that I could be God's man. Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified

myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not "mine," but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to go back on that."

Let me ask you a question. Do you know for certain that if you were to die today that you would go to heaven? If the answer is "no" or "I think so", then you are still chained and bound by trying to be good enough. You can never be good enough because God's standard for entering heaven is zero sin ever. It is a no tolerance policy. One strike and you're out. You and I can never be good enough on our own. We are a dependent people. We depend on the grace and mercy of God exhibited through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ on the cross to pay for the penalty of our sin. Accepting the free gift of forgiveness of sin is the key that unlocks the chains and sets you free from the wages of sin, which is eternal separation from God, and sets you free to live the

abundant life in Christ Jesus that our Father in Heaven wants you to live. If you need to accept that free gift, today is the day. There is no guarantee of tomorrow. If you need to come to Christ or if there's other business you need to take care of with God, the altar is open. Come during the closing songs and take care of it today.