

This week this county celebrates its Independence Day. Hot dogs will be grilled, flags will be flown, and fireworks will shoot into the sky with brilliant color schemes. Indeed, it is a day to celebrate the freedoms we have as citizens of this country.

Many of us love this country and the opportunities it provides us—a nice place to live, beautiful natural features, and laws that allows us to live with relatively few headaches. And the same was true for Paul back in his day.

The Roman empire was massive. It had impressive roads that allowed for easy transportation and communication networks. It had aqueducts that carried precious water to its cities. It had public bath houses and sports complexes so that its citizens could enjoy a leisurely lifestyle. But most of all, it had special laws for its citizens that granted them favor over its non-citizen subjects. For Paul, this meant that he had a lot of freedom to speak what he wanted and do what he wanted without fear of reprisal from the government.

The same was not true for non-Roman citizens. When the church was in its newest form after the day of Pentecost it experienced persecution at the hands of Jewish leaders and Roman leaders.

In fact, Christians around the Roman Empire would later be put to death by being thrown into the Coliseum with wild animals or being lit on fire so as to light the streets of a city. This was Roman practice, this was law.

In the passage that was just read we hear of Paul being released from prison because he explained that he was a Roman citizen. For Paul, he saw no problem using the amenities of Roman citizenship to spread the gospel. While his Christian counterparts were being persecuted by the Roman government, he expanded the Christian empire into modern day Greece, Turkey, and Italy.

However, his luck of exploiting his citizenship would eventually run out. Christian tradition has it that Paul did eventually make it to Rome and that he died there in Prison. While his fellow servant of Christ, Peter, after making it to Rome, was crucified upside down.

So the point of Paul's story is twofold:

First, we as Christians can be thankful for our freedom and should feel comfortable utilizing the freedoms of our current government. However, that luck could run out one day and we **need to be prepared to be Christians first and Americans second!**

Second, Paul's story reminds of what is most important in life—and that is our Christian freedom. **In Christ we have a freedom unlike any other in the world.** We must harness it and on this country's Independence Day we need to recognize more than ever what Christ has done for us.

As Paul tells us in:

Philippians 3:17-21 ¹⁷ ¶ Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

And in regards to our freedom he says:

Galatians 5:1 Galatians 5:1 ¶ For freedom Christ has set us free.

Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:13-14 ¹³ ¶ For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

So let us be free, let us be Christians!