

## *Free to Say What We Believe*

This month, our nation celebrates freedom. We declared it in 1776. We won it at Yorktown in 1781. We wrote it into the Constitution in 1789 and the Bill of Rights in 1791. We celebrate it every Fourth of July.

This freedom was not easy to gain, and it has not been easy to keep. For over 240 years, we have fought for it. We have fought with those from foreign lands and even with our fellow citizens. We have fought to establish and preserve freedom for ourselves and for others.

Will we think about those battles as we sit back and enjoy Fourth of July Fireworks? Will we remember the price that has been paid—and continues to be paid—while we're sitting at the picnic table or out on the boat on Independence Day? Will we take any time at all during this month to realize what a great gift we have in our freedom, and what this freedom is for?

You see, freedom brings more than an opportunity to have fun. With freedom comes responsibility. Being free does not mean we can do anything we please, that we can live without boundaries. As citizens of this country, we have to abide by the laws set down by our government.

As a Christian, I recognize that this is something God wants me to do. St Paul wrote, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Romans 13:1-2). For this reason, Paul told Timothy, "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

A peaceful, quiet, free life is a great treasure. Yet this is a treasure we Christians are squandering. Our nation's constitution states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." That means that, by law, we are free to say what we believe. We are free to tell people we have all broken God's law and deserve God's punishment. We are also free to tell people that God has forgiven our sin, that he has set us free from punishment because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The gift of life that is ours in Jesus Christ—a new life in this world, and a more glorious life in the age to come—gives a far greater freedom than any nation's laws can give or guarantee. We who know Jesus Christ have a taste of what this new life means. We not only have the freedom to speak about it to others, we have a responsibility to do so.

So during this Fourth of July celebration, don't be afraid to say what you believe. As the month goes on, speak up about your faith in Jesus. Be prepared, as Peter wrote, "to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15-16). By law, you have the right and the freedom to say what you believe. Thank God for this precious gift, and use your freedom wisely and well!