**UPSIDE DOWN & INSIDE OUT**

***Paradoxes Christians Must Live***

***#2 – Slavery Is Freedom***

**"For the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the** **protection of the Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each** **other, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."**

With that oath staring them in the face fifty-six men stepped to the table at Independence Hall in Philadelphia and put their signatures on that famous document that has changed the world. As Lincoln later put it in his Gettysburg Address, “our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” These courageous 56 patriots pledged their lives, fortunes and sacred honor. Indeed, they did. Do you know what happened to them over the course of the ensuing Revolutionary War?

While some of the historical facts are sketchy, we know with accuracy the fate of virtually all of these men. These were not wild-eyed rabble rousers and emotionally charged mercenaries on a vendetta to overthrow a government. These were all men chosen by their 13 colonies to represent them at the Second Continental Congress. They were all statesmen with much to lose and little to gain --- except their freedom from tyranny. They were plantation owners and wealthy merchants and accomplished lawyers and respected judges. They were all educated and highly esteemed by the colonists who elected them to be their representatives. They signed, knowing full well the consequences of their actions. As Benjamin Franklin wittingly put it, “We must now all hang together, or most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.”

Five were captured by the British and tried and executed as traitors. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Nine died from wounds or hardships from fighting the war as soldiers. Some had their sons die in battle for freedom. One had all his merchant ships captured by the British navy and destroyed. He sold his home to pay his debts and then died in rags. My favorite story is the pivotal Battle of Yorktown. The British had occupied Thomas Nelson’s home and used it as a headquarters. Nelson, with a smile, turned to General Washington and said, “Sir, open fire on it!” They did. His home was destroyed. He later died bankrupt, but free.

Why am I telling you this? What does American history have to do with Christian freedom? The colonial patriots felt like they were slaves to the crown of England and determined to cast off the yoke of bondage to become free. Christians were once slaves to Satan but cast off those chains to become free men in Christ.

But this is a paradox. Freedom is not free. Slavery is freedom. I must become a slave to Christ in order to become a free man in Christ. Jesus said, “*Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin… Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed*” (John 8:34-35). But to be free indeed I must put on the yoke of Christ. Yes, that’s a hard saying. It seems on the surface to be absurd, but upon deeper study you realize it is true. Thus, a paradox.

Christ’s famous quote in Matthew 11:28-30 has forever baffled the world. *28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

All of us who have labored under sin, carrying on our backs the heavy load of guilt and the fear of hell, have jumped for joy at this great invitation – “*I will give you rest*.” We feel like Israel of old when they heard Moses tell Pharaoh, “*Let my people go*!” and then marched out of the brick kilns of Egypt to head toward the promised land of milk and honey. Leaving the whip of the taskmaster to enjoy the inheritance of Abraham they escaped slavery to embrace freedom. So too with those of us who are Christians.

But not so fast. We love the part where Jesus says, “*I will give you rest*.” However, we often fail to grasp the part that says, “*Take my yoke upon you*.” That doesn’t sound like “rest” to me. That sounds like more slavery. A yoke was an instrument that bound an animal for the purpose of forced labor. How can that be freedom?

Think about it. What freedom is there to being yoked? A yoke has two harnesses. You get clamped down in one. Seems bad. But who gets clamped into the other? “*My yoke*” says Jesus. He puts His head into the other harness, turns to look at you, and says, “Let’s do God’s work together!” Are you now feeling energized, knowing you are working side by side with Jesus Christ? As you prepare to bear God’s work you think about Who you are teamed with. You might take a peek at Christ’s broad shoulders and reflect on Isaiah 9:6, *“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given;
 And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called:
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

Suddenly all of God’s commands He asks of me to carry out His work become a whole lot lighter. *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (I John 5:3).* In fact, once freed from the yoke of Satan, Christ’s yoke feels as light as a feather. Together we plow the field, knowing we are bearing the fruit of the Spirit. Together we produce a bumper crop of *“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law”* (Gal. 5:22-23).Ahhh, yes, “***against such there is no law***! It doesn’t feel like work at all. Working alongside Christ I feel free as a bird. He’s carrying the bulk of the load.

Have you ever watched a first-time skydiver? Gus Wegman was a dear friend of mine and wanted to feel the freedom of flying. Paralyzed from the neck down since age 31 he was now in his mid-60’s. He found a Skydive company that worked with the handicap. He hired them. I watched the video and laughed until I cried. My buddy jumped out of a plane at 9,000 feet… strapped to an expert! He later told me when I asked if he felt the weight of his partner on his back, “Not at all, He gave me confidence and told me to enjoy the ride. All I felt was freedom! It was the greatest experience ever!”

That’s exactly how I feel yoked to Christ. I’m His slave but I feel so free. He gives me confidence to enjoy the ride. Being a Christian is the greatest experience ever!

Until tomorrow… will you now pledge your life, fortune, and sacred honor to Christ? Yes, it may cost you dearly in this life, but then again, freedom is not free.

I love you. Rick