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The Two Sides of Freedom

By Bill Watkins

As our nation moves toward its 145th Independence Day, there is much that mars our celebration. Across our nation — and indeed the world — there are voices raised in anger about hatred and injustice.

America was founded upon the principle of freedom and equality for all its citizens. The idea is noble and laudable and should be enshrined — not only in our Constitution — but also in the hearts of every American. This experiment in freedom is unique in the world, and even though it has been codified in principle and law, it is still an experiment. Its practice has often failed because of the flawed humans who are charged with living it out.

This failure is not primarily a white vs. black or black vs. white issue. It is a human issue that results when we fail at one side of the two sides of freedom.

Freedom has two sides which are equally important. One side is liberty — the other is responsibility. We demand the liberty. We chafe at the responsibility. We love the freedom to travel freely to anywhere we choose. We tend to resent the policeman who enforces the speed limit while we travel.

Liberty can only be maintained when each of us respects the liberty of others. The deprivation of the rights of some does not give individuals and groups permission to trample on the rights of others. The responsibility to limit and control ourselves is an essential element to the freedom of all.

How do we become better at the practice of the freedom that we desire to achieve? Scripture provides a path.

Every person must be considered as an equally valuable individual made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Every person has the right to be heard and every person has the responsibility to listen (James 1:19-20). Retaliation only leads to more conflict and division in human relationships (Matthew 5:38-42). The ability to bless those who curse us can only come when we see that God has already given blessings to us (Matthew 5:43-48). In response to the inequities of the world, we must do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). We must begin speaking **to** one another rather than shouting **at** one another (Malachi 3:16). Forgiveness and understanding must triumph over wrath (Romans 12:14-21). True freedom is only possible when we take ourselves out of first place in our lives (Philippians 2:3-4).

I'm praying for you, and I'm praying for America. God bless us all!
