

Freedom!

To Americans the word freedom is special, almost sacred. Two hundred twenty-nine years ago, our forefathers placed their names on a document, which jeopardized their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. It's not that we own the word freedom, but among all the peoples of the earth we appreciate it with gratitude.

There are so many beautiful aspects of being a free people that we celebrate. Like a kaleidoscope, full of multiple colors, I praise God for the hue that assures us the right and privilege to express ourselves. This is what The First Amendment is all about. As we approach this commemorative July fourth celebration, nostalgia overcomes me. This past week we were informed of the passing of the First Lady of American Fundamentalism, Mrs. Lee Roberson, the beloved wife of Dr. Lee Roberson, former pastor of Highland Park Baptist Church and founder of Tennessee Temple Schools. They were married sixty-eight years. I still remember when she spoke our Mother-Daughter Banquet. Our girls were young and my wife was especially happy to have her since she attended Tennessee Temple University. My mother-in-law said that among all the ladies that spoke to our ladies, Mrs. Roberson was perhaps her favorite, because although she was a lady of grace yet she was also down-to-earth.

Through the years I was blessed to have my path cross with the Robersons. Though it may be hard to picture for some who did not know the royal family, when in private conversation, Mrs. Roberson always rose to the occasion with humor and animation. She was an Alabama girl reared in the tradition of the old south. She was the kind of lady Hollywood tries to imitate in their pictures depicting the antebellum days. With her humor and opinion, she always held the ideal of the true values of Christianity. Mrs. Roberson was always free to express herself. I recall one day at dinner she said to me, "Brother Johnny, you are so silly, but I love you." She will be missed.

This past week also witnessed the passing of the foremost expert on the era of The War Between the States, Shelby Foote. He came from a long line of Mississippi writers. Ken Burns who made the famous documentary entitled *The Civil War* relied heavily on the knowledge of Foote and his massive volumes by the same title.

Shelby Foote was asked by presidents of the United States for tours and explanations of such battlefields at Gettysburg. He wrote novels and vignettes, but his prize accomplishment was the set of books on the Civil War, which took him twenty years to write. Foote wrote his books with an old fashioned fountain pen, which required periodic dips into an old ink well. The great writer said he just had a better feel for writing when he wrote by this old fashioned method. He said a certain cadence developed between his thoughts and the act of transferring them onto paper. Maybe this method was one reason it took twenty years to complete his massive history. It has been said that Shelby Foote wrote history like Homer wrote the Iliad. There was music to his words. They could provoke emotion with the act of learning. He had the unusual ability to bring history from dry catacombs into living breathing life! He among all the writers of the twentieth century was free to express himself. Let me share an example with you.

Brian Lamb of C-Span was interviewing Shelby Foote in a three-hour interview. There is no way in three hours anyone could talk to Foote without "The War" coming up. During the discussion, Foote talked of the atrocities of the era. He despised slavery while holding admiration for the South as well as The Union. The phlegmatic Lamb smiled slightly, almost knowingly and asked, "Now if the war were being fought today, which side would you be on?" Without hesitation Foote answered "Why, the South, of course." Brian Lamb was not able to hold back his surprise at the answer. He wanted to know why. The Mississippi writer could have gone into detail about states rights, but he didn't defend the cause. The great old historian softened his voice and in his lovely, lilting southern drawl explained (to the best of my memory), "These were my people, these were my neighbors, and their cause was my cause. As a rule,

you fight alongside the people you live with.” In his God-given talent and American gift of free speech, Foote put heart into a war that broke so many hearts. His answer was not politically correct, but it was courageously true for him.

May we learn from Mrs. Roberson and Shelby Foote to express ourselves freely.

I. Freely express your love to Christ.

"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment" (Mark 12:30). "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so..." (Psalm 107:2). What an honor to live in America where we have the freedom to be a witness! Let us exercise that right whenever we can. At the workplace, in our leisure, at home or on the road, by life and by lip - be a witness of and for Jesus!

This world needs to know that those wounds our Lord received on the cross were for the redemption of their sins. The Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah, longing for the better life, longing for forgiveness of sins, and simply needed just a little guidance. Can we not hear the cry of the hungry lost man when he said, *"...How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:31).* It is our duty, yea our privilege to do exactly what the deacon Philip did, *"Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35).*

II. Freely express your love your neighbor.

When our Lord was asked what was the great commandment, He answered that we are to love the Lord our God with everything we have and then He followed up with this statement, *"And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:31).* For several years we have enjoyed the neighbors next door. Mike has been a dear friend. I have seen him play with his kids, overcome mountains, and best of all; I witnessed him committing his life to Jesus Christ. He is moving now and recently I closed our conversation at our driveway with, "Mike, I love you!" And he returned with the same wording. I felt the need to tell my neighbor how I felt about him. I didn't want him to move away without knowing that. I know it may sound corny, but I am thankful to live in a country where I am free to express myself in the matter of caring for others. *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (I John 3:14).*

III. Freely express the truth.

The Lord Jesus said, *"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).* The late author, Jamie Buckingham said, "The truth will make you free, but first of all, it will make you miserable." There were times in my youth when mentors in the faith would straighten me out with the truth. Those may have been unhappy encounters at first, but it became liberating, when I would listen.

Peter had no problem dining and fellowshiping with the gentiles, accepting them as part of the body of Christ. However, when his old Jewish brethren showed up that still had a problem assimilating gentiles into the Church, Peter backed off with his acceptance and expression of love. The Bible records Paul's confrontation with the revered Peter, *"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision" (Galatians 2:11, 12).* How uncomfortable this must have been for the great Peter! But listen to how Peter refers to Paul's inspired writings later in life: *"...even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you" (II Peter 3:15).* Peter did not say, "That know-it-all Paul, who has no problem telling people off...." No, we see Peter learned to appreciate Paul's wisdom and he referred to him as "beloved." May we also express in freedom the truth and be thankful for those who do the same.

- Pastor Pope -

[Back to Pastor's Word](#)