

CYBERCOLUMN: Freedom_simpson_63003

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By Berry D. Simpson

In the movie "Braveheart," the last word out of William Wallace's (Mel Gibson) mouth as the English torturer was literally ripping his body apart was "Freedom!" I don't know if that was historically correct, but it was certainly the theme of the entire movie, and it is the justification for many of the things we do.

Freedom, however, is a dangerous thing. When you give someone true freedom they may not use it the way you wanted. They may not use it the right way.

For example, the United States just spent money and lives liberating Afghanistan and Iraq from oppressive dictatorial regimes that trampled on civil rights and fostered worldwide terrorism. But now that it is over, what will we do if the Afghans, voting in free and open elections, elect the Taliban? We can't go back in and overthrow a freely elected government. What if the Iraqis vote for a Shiite ayatollah as their leader, and they hate us? What will we do about that? Giving someone freedom is risky because a truly free person may not use that freedom as we wish.

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One of the reasons Americans resent the recent stand by France against our president is because we think they should be more grateful for all the American lives sacrificed to give them freedom. We feel we've earned a little more respect from them. But instead of being forever grateful to us, the French government thinks it should have an equal position to the United States on the world stage, and to prove its independence and leadership, it has staked out a position opposite from their very liberators. "How dare they," we think, "after all we've done?" That's the trouble with freedom; the freed are free to run away and turn their backs on their freedom givers.

As parents, one of our jobs is to pass along freedom to our children. As they get older, say 20 and 22, we feel obligated to let them make their own decisions and bask in their own freedom. However, we want them to make the same choices we would make, live the same way we live, go to bed the same time we go to bed and pay for their own way the same way we pay for our own way. (Sorry, that last one was about responsibility, not freedom, even though the two go hand-in-hand.) They cannot grow up without freedom, yet that very freedom allows them make choices we don't like. Giving freedom is risky.

God took a great risk when He gave us freedom through the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. Galatians 5:1 says, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free." What God wants us to do with that freedom is to stand firm and don't be a slave to sin. Instead, what we often do with our freedom is run away, stake out our own position, prove our position on life's stage and establish our independence from God. We waste our freedom; we don't use it the right way. God knew that might happen when he set us free, but he did it anyway, since it is only through freedom that we can truly love him.

In the movie "Bruce Almighty," God granted omnipotence to Bruce (Jim Carey) because Bruce thought he could handle situations better than God did. However, unfortunately for Bruce, he discovered he could not make his girlfriend, Grace (Jennifer Anniston), love him by using his powers. He couldn't even manipulate her to love him by leaving clues and hints scattered all around her path. He could win her back only when he gave her the freedom to leave, hoping only for her happiness and peace.

Bruce couldn't force the free will of other people because of the limitations placed on him by God. In the real world, however, God can do whatever he wants, including trampling on our free will. Yet he has chosen to restrict himself and grant us free will as a gift. He has limited his own powers over our life in order to set us free with no guarantee that we will love him in return, with no promise that we will walk in his ways. Even though God knows that his ways are what's best for us, they will protect us and make us wise, they will warn us away from harm, they will keep us close to him, he has granted us the freedom to live how we want.

Freedom is a dangerous thing, but I wouldn't want to live any other way. I want my kids to be free to be adults. I want the people of the world to be free to elect their own leaders. And I want to be free before God to love him and serve him.

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