

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."—Romans 1:16

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Christmas—Why Not?

By Robert Berendt

More than 40 years ago, I concluded I should no longer celebrate this popular, much-loved holiday. Let me explain why.



MY FAMILY HAD A LONG TRADITION of celebrating Christmas Eve on Dec. 24 followed by a family day on Dec. 25. It seemed like the right thing to do, since it is always a good thing for families to get together and for children to share in joy and peace. It is always a delight to see the shining eyes of children who are receiving gifts to unwrap. These events endeared this celebration to our hearts.

One day, for a reason I cannot explain in physical terms, I was confronted with a strong desire to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ (which I thought I had been doing). I met a number of people who were having the same strange experience. We had never once questioned the warm and loving sharing that we thought the Christmas season brought to mankind—but we asked ourselves, “What does God think about this?” “Are we truly pleasing God?” “Am I doing something that Jesus would do and that He would support?” I have come to understand this as God calling me to repentance from sin (John 6:44).

“Am I doing something that Jesus would do and that He would support?”

I began to think of the songs we sang. “O Tannenbaum” (or “Oh Christmas Tree”) came to mind. I was singing to a tree as though it were alive and had some strange power. We decorated it and placed our gifts below the tree, as though the gifts and good feeling emanated from and through the tree.

I thought about the words to “Silent Night, Holy Night,” a truly beautiful piece of music. I wondered about shepherds being in the fields on an evening at the end of December, which is a very cold time of the year where I grew up.

I remembered the financial difficulty we had to be able to buy gifts for everyone in the family and to buy the kind of gifts our children had asked of Santa Claus. I began to wonder about Santa Claus and the lies that were told to the children about him and his reindeer. “Rudolph with your nose so bright” began to sound hollow to me.

I eventually learned that Christmas observance is not an honor to Jesus Christ and is not God's will. As a result, I have not observed Christmas for the last 42 years, and I will never observe that holiday again.

My reasons

Here are some of the reasons I stopped observing Christmas:

- 1.
2. Exodus 20:4-5 reveals that God does not want us to use images in the worship of God. And Jeremiah 10:1-5 clearly shows that trees have commonly been used in idolatrous ways. Sin is the breaking of God's commandments (1 John 3:4). Idolatry is an affront to God. Deuteronomy 12:30-31 strongly commands us not to do so much as even ask how others worshipped their gods. Using anything that smacks of that which pagans use is sin.
3. Jesus Christ never sinned in His life (Hebrews 4:15). Our goal is to be like Him. We ought to shun anything that is sin and resist going against God's will (Hebrews 12:1-4). Using a tree, fertility symbols and icons in worship to God is a sin.
4. Lying and deceitfulness are of Satan and not of God (John 8:44). God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). The Christmas stories about Santa Claus and the shepherds in the fields on Christmas Eve were false. I found out that Jerusalem has rain and cold that time of year and it sometimes snows in the region. Sheep are sheltered in the wintertime, not left out in inclement weather.
5. The Bible tells us it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). But people are largely motivated by a desire to get and the pressure to give—and give more than they can afford. The popularity of Christmas is largely the result of it being promoted by manufacturers and retailers—it's the biggest shopping period of the year. As a result, Christmas fosters materialism, commercialism and personal financial difficulties.



6. I have known people who take the whole year to pay off their credit cards because of the shopping spree they had to go on to buy Christmas presents. I have heard people worry, fret and even complain about having to buy for this person and that person. I saw little joy in giving, and I saw children always expecting to receive. Giving gifts is a wonderful thing to do when it is done with joy, from the heart and for a good purpose. That can be done any time of the year.
7. In reading the Bible, I found that God had indeed given mankind many occasions to celebrate during the year. He called them "My feasts." They are all listed in Leviticus 23. These are the feasts Jesus kept all of His life. I remembered that the New Testament had

not yet been written in Jesus' day. If I was to be like Jesus, I would love what He loved, follow the spiritual steps He took and shun that which was not of God. I have found that the Holy Days of God far surpass any celebration that man has devised.

8. Sin feels good, and that is deceitful. Just because something feels good—even if it involves doing “good” things—does not mean it should be done. Only God can define “good.” Sin easily ensnares us and is deceitful (Hebrews 12:1; 3:13). Sin contains pleasures, but they are temporary and passing (Hebrews 11:25).

People are quick to point out that children enjoy this time of year. It is true that if there were nothing to take its place, children would lose something of value. God intends humans to enjoy activities that bring joy to children and adults alike. He clearly defines what those activities might be—but using symbols of other religions or incorporating the idols of pagan religions into His worship service is strongly condemned.

John 1:1-5; 1 Corinthians 10:4; and Philippians 2:5-8 are only a few scriptures that attest to the preexistence of Jesus Christ. Before He came in the form of a man, Jesus was the only being that was revealed to mankind as God (John 6:46). That tells us it was Jesus, before His incarnation, who wrote the Ten Commandments and thus defines sin for us all. It was He who defined sin and who came in the flesh to die in our place—for our sins.

In the giving of service and obedience, we can truly find the meaning of “it is more blessed to give than to receive.”

The link and connection between Jesus Christ as revealed to us in the New Testament and God as revealed to Israel in the Old Testament is too important for us to negate in any way. Jesus Christ stated that He does not change—He is the same, yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8; Malachi 3:6). That means His definition of sin and the reason He died remains constant. We have no right to redefine sin—we have only the obligation to show respect, love, honor and obedience to Him who defined sin and then died because mankind would not or could not live within the bounds He set.

As time has passed, I have come to understand and observe over and over again the blessings that come from carefully obeying God. Careful obedience is what God deserves, and careful obedience is what we need to give. In that giving of service and obedience, we can truly find the meaning of “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” It is God who is the greatest giver of all, and He gives to those who serve and love Him. Now it remains for us to choose to understand His commands and to live by them.

Recommended reading

How much do you know about the origins of Christmas? Take a look at some good encyclopedias or do a search on “origins of Christmas” on the Internet. Also request or download a copy of the booklet [*Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*](#)

What Does It Mean to Be Justified?

By Ken Murray

What exactly is justification? Why is it so important in God's sight? Most importantly, how can we become justified?



COUNTLESS BOOKS AND THEOLOGICAL PAPERS have been written on the subject of justification. What does it really mean? Why is justification so important to God? How can we become justified?

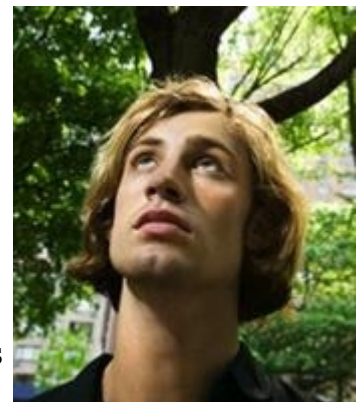
What is justification?

The words “justification,” “justify,” “justified” and “just” are found numerous times in both the Old and New Testament. Both the Hebrew *tsadaq* and the Greek *dikaiosis* refer to “justification,” meaning “made righteous.” Thus, justification means to be made righteous in God’s sight.

Why is justification so important in God’s sight?

Paul encouraged us to understand the importance of being justified, or made righteous, before God because it has a lot to do with our precious calling and being part of His family.

“Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, *these He also justified*; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:30-32, emphasis added throughout).



It is clear from the Scriptures that being justified, or made righteous, is an important part of our personal salvation.

Paul dealt with confusion regarding justification

The apostle Paul had to address certain misconceptions that those in the Church had concerning justification.

It is clear from the Scriptures that being justified, or made righteous, is an important part of our personal salvation.

On one hand, Paul had to address Jews in the Church who prided themselves in law keeping and boasted in their supposition that one *earned* salvation through “works.” Apparently, they felt God owed it to them to give them salvation, thus abusing the proper use of the law. “Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God” (Romans 2:17). “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith” (Romans 3:27).

On the other hand, he had to correct the gentiles in the Church who were also proud of their newfound knowledge and spiritual gifts. They felt that God was somehow indebted to them to reward them with salvation: “What do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1Corinthians 4:6-7).

Paul answered the extremism of both camps when he said: “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? *Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?*” (Romans 11:34-35, New International Version).

It is a common fault among humans to think that by the good things we do, God owes us salvation.

How can we become justified in God’s sight?

It is important to understand that we don’t earn righteousness by self-righteously keeping God’s laws and then claiming that we are righteous before God. Paul explained that we need to understand that “a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified” (Galatians 2:16).

In other words, there is a proper sequence to becoming righteous in God’s sight.

Living faith includes and is demonstrated by works of obedience and service.

sinning.

That sequence begins when God calls us and gives us spiritual understanding of His Word. We come to believe in His Word and have *faith* in the “true God” (1 John 5:20). When we grow in faith, we see our sins, our wrong thinking, wrong words, wrong actions and our need to *repent*, which means to be deeply sorry for breaking God’s laws and to dedicate one’s life to not

Our faith in God drives us to repent of our sins and be baptized. At this point, we are forgiven by God’s grace (free unmerited pardon) and are considered righteous before God.

We continue to remain righteous in God's sight when we *continue to obey* and live by His laws, and repent, confess our sins and ask for forgiveness whenever we slip up and sin (1 John 1:9). We become converted to the mind and conduct of Christ (Philippians 2:5).

The apostle James clarified this point by saying: "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). Living faith includes and is *demonstrated* by works of obedience and service. Once we set our course to live God's way, by faith in Him and by repentance of our sins, we are to follow Him and live by His laws and right way of life, not our own customs and religious ceremonies. If we slip, we should exercise faith and repentance immediately, and make the course correction to follow God's laws.

Each year during the Passover service, we participate in the foot washing and partake of the unleavened bread and the wine. These symbols are an annual reminder of our baptism when we were forgiven and made righteous or justified in God's sight. Daily in our prayers and lives, we should put to death the old man or old woman, just as Paul admonished us (Ephesians 4:22-24), and be renewed in our minds daily with God's Holy Spirit, to be the new converted man or woman.

It is then, through daily faith, sincere repentance and loving obedience that we will be considered justified, or righteous, in God's sight.

Recommended reading

For more information about God's Holy Days, which lead us through the steps to justification, please request our free booklet [*God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope For All Mankind.*](#)



One of God's Greatest Gifts

By Debbie Werner

God has a wonderful gift He wants to give you! It's a gift that will help you grow—if you use it to its full potential.



RECEIVING A GIFT FROM SOMEONE is exciting—the anticipation of what might be under the brightly colored wrapping paper, the camaraderie built between the giver and the receiver of the gift and the joy of discovering something new are all part of the fun experience. God delights in us giving gifts because He is the greatest gift giver of all. One of the greatest gifts He has ever given mankind has been His Holy Spirit. He gave it to us out of a loving desire to see us grow, and we need to understand why this gift is so precious so that we can use it to its fullest potential.

One of my favorite scriptures, 2 Timothy 1:7, highlights why this gift is so amazing: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of *power* and of *love* and of a *sound mind*” (emphasis added). Fear drags us down, it holds us back, and it makes us miserable, inactive and depressed. But God’s gift counteracts all of these things. Let’s look at the three components of God’s gift of the Holy Spirit.

The power of the Holy Spirit

Strong’s Concordance notes that the Greek word for “power” in this scripture means “ability, abundance, meaning, might, miracle, power, strength.” God’s power is proactive—giving direction and focus and the strength to carry out His will. With it, He changes our lives: “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:27). Do not despair over seemingly entrenched bad habits such as smoking, swearing, coveting/jealousy, an eating disorder or gambling. Rest assured that God can and will help you change if you repent, are baptized and receive the power of His Holy Spirit in your life.

The power comes from God, but we also have the responsibility to use it! We can have God's Holy Spirit as a force for change in our own lives if we choose. Of course, we all have moments when we feel weak and powerless, but God can still work with us. Isaiah 40:29-30 reads, "He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." If you feel like you're overwhelmed with your own weaknesses, turn to God and ask Him to fill you with His power—His Holy Spirit—and He will help you change and help you have the desire and the strength to make the changes yourself.



Of course, we must remember that the power of God's Spirit doesn't do the work for us. Overcoming the bad habits and weaknesses we have still takes all of our effort and is at times very challenging, but with God's Spirit it is possible to overcome them.

Some of us more impatient people may need to remember that we are all unique individuals and God works with us each in a different way. Don't be discouraged if you see someone else have powerful and instantaneous changes in their lives while you feel as if you're just two steps past the starting line. God works with us each at a different pace because He knows what works best to help us make the most powerful and lasting changes in our lives.

The love of the Holy Spirit

True love is what makes life worth living. I'm not talking about the movielike romantic love where the birds are singing and the two lovers see stars, but godly love that is unselfish and filled with the concern for the well being of others. The gift of God's Spirit is an expression of God's love for us. This type of love is everlasting: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). What an encouraging thought!

Love comes in many forms: listening to others, forgiving others, encouraging others, submitting to the preferences of others.

In turn, through His Holy Spirit, His love flows through us and out toward others. It's a pretty amazing transformation to see over the course of a life since our natures are all so self-focused and because we live in such a selfish world. If you're looking for ways to develop this kind of love, pray about the qualities found in 1 Corinthians 13 and start with small acts directed toward those who are closest to you, whether they are family, friends or coworkers. Love comes in many forms: listening to others, forgiving others, encouraging others, submitting to the preferences of others. The list goes on and on. God's Spirit can help you develop this depth of love for others and for God Himself.

The sound mind from the Holy Spirit

The English words for "sound mind" mean "discipline" or "self-control" in the Greek. God's Spirit in our lives can help us live up to the principles found in His Ten Commandments. The discipline found in these timeless laws helps us to obey God and live our happiest and most productive lives.

God's Spirit helps ease our minds from these worries and helps us to be disciplined in all things.

God does not want us to be out of control and worried over every little thing in our lives. He tells us not to “worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on... But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things” (Matthew 6:25, 33-34). God's Spirit helps ease our minds from these worries and helps us to be disciplined in all things.

It is comforting to know that God is truly in our lives and has laid out for us the path to success and the fulfillment of our potential. With that knowledge, each of us can have a sound mind that allows us to have the proper focus on obedience and love toward God and others. His Spirit, in essence, helps us to live the ultimate balanced life. When we are balanced, we are in a much better position to help others. With the power, the love and the sound mind that God can give us by His Holy Spirit we can then help others in the same journey to balance. God's Holy Spirit is truly the gift that keeps on giving!

Recommended reading

For more information and enjoyable reading on this subject and more, please request our free booklets [The Road to Eternal Life](#) and [Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion](#).

Lessons From Creation

By Kevin Ford

The apostle Paul proposed an interesting challenge to the skeptics of his day. “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made...” (Romans 1:20).



IN OUR MODERN SCIENTIFIC AGE many feel it has become harder to maintain faith in God. In fact, no previous age has been witness to so many demonstrations of God's supreme power and creative genius.

In past eras people wondered at the mystery of human conception and birth. Today we can watch the various stages of the incredible miracle of a human fetus growing and developing in its mother's womb. What was once merely puzzling by its mystery is now awe-inspiring by its observance.

Biochemistry now reveals that what were once thought to be relatively simple processes, such as the clotting of blood or the forming of images on the human retina, are actually of mind-boggling complexity.

Knowledge need never lessen our sense of awe and wonder at the beauty that exists in our world. A trained musician with an understanding of musical forms and the principles of harmony can still be overwhelmed by a Beethoven symphony; a physicist with a thorough knowledge of the laws of refraction can still be moved by the beauty of a sunset.

Knowledge need never lessen our sense of awe and wonder at the beauty that exists in our world.

Coincidence or the handiwork of a Creator?

The list of amazing coincidences is impressive: the ideal distance from the sun, a 23-degree axis tilt (to provide changing seasons), an accompanying moon whose gravitational pull stabilizes the rotation and inclination of the earth as well as creating tidal activity, an ozone layer to shield us from harmful solar rays—the list goes on and on. There is even the presence of a nearby giant planet (Jupiter) whose gravitation diverts the comets and asteroids that might otherwise endanger the earth. No wonder that even atheistic scientists now acknowledge that if only one of a thousand variables were lacking, life on earth would not exist.



“Taken one by one, these conditions already look like unlikely accidents. Taken together, they elevate the Blue Planet to the level of a probably unique phenomenon, a miracle of balance between a thousand variables which should never have come together”. *L’actualité*, August 2001, p. 25, emphasis added). For thousands of years, human beings have gazed up into the night sky with wonder and seen in it the handiwork of a great Creator.

“When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him” (Psalm 8:3-4).

For thousands of years, human beings have gazed up into the night sky with wonder and seen in it the handiwork of a great Creator.

We don't know how much King David really understood of what he was seeing. It is unlikely that he realized the moon to be about one fourth the diameter of earth, or that one day men would walk on its surface. He may have imagined the stars to be small points of light only a few miles above the earth's surface. Is it less or more impressive to learn that some of these “points of light” are so immense that if the giant star Antares were in the position of our sun, the earth's orbit would be within its surface?

Our increased understanding of the nature of the universe should only give us an even greater awe for God's creative power, for as the frontiers of knowledge move constantly outward, their discoveries only become more sensational.

Jesus put the question to His disciples, "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). For most of humanity, the answer will, sadly, be no; but for us—Christians with eyes to see and hearts to comprehend—there is surely no excuse.

Recommended reading

Please request our free booklet [*Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*](#)

“When in the Course of Human Events...”

By Robin Webber

Freedom never simply just happens. It has to be envisioned, considered and, yes, at times given birth through great sacrifice. Before one can reach a destination, the course must be laid out.



IT'S A MUGGY AND SULTRY AFTERNOON as I sit down to write this article. The feel of the air and the time of month take me far back to a long-ago summer when others gathered to write in these same last weeks of June.

In the sweltering heat of colonial Philadelphia, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston and Roger Sherman were crafting a document that would revolutionize Americans' social contract with one another. It would come to be known as the Declaration of Independence. How important was its message? Abraham Lincoln would later call it the "sheet anchor" of all American liberties. Its theme? Freedom!



America's republican experiment exploded on the world stage in that summer of 1776, but it had been simmering over a decade, as the British crown, parliament and the colonials could not agree on the colonies' future. But events didn't just hit a flash point on July Fourth. Freedom never simply just happens. It has to be envisioned, considered and, yes, at times given birth through great sacrifice. Before one can reach a destination, the course must be laid out.

As the time of full fruition had now come, the chief drafter, Thomas Jefferson, would throw down the gauntlet in penning the now-famous words, "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary..." The founders of the republic would securely wrap themselves in the rightness of their cause by affirming their position and timing in relationship with the "laws of Nature and Nature's God."

Proclaiming liberty throughout the land

But is such a phrase now lost to history? Have you considered when else in the course of human events it will become necessary for an even greater revolution to occur? Consider what we find on another piece of iconic Americana that was used to summon the citizenry of Philadelphia to hear the first public reading of this revolutionary document on July 8, 1776.



Engraved on the Liberty Bell is the inscription, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants." While the bell no longer rings, these words yet speak of a liberty in the making, a course of events still to come.

Let's understand the significance of the context of these words, taken from Leviticus 25:10. The following verse deals with what the Bible refers to as the "Jubilee." This was declared every 50 years on the biblical Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). In the Jubilee year, families that had lost their land had it returned; people who had become indentured servants due to economic conditions were released; debts in general were forgiven.

Talk about a revolution in living! Imagine a brand-new start. Indeed, it was a chance to have a brand-new future without being chained to a past full of mistakes. Yet the Jubilee was not an end in itself, for God used the covenant people of Israel to point to an even greater time of liberation that He had in mind.

To set at liberty those who are oppressed

The thought of Jubilee is not simply an Old Testament concept. Jesus further demonstrated this future focus of Jubilee. "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Luke 4:18-19).

To understand the prophetic impact of His words, we must couple them with the words of the Song of Mary. After the angel told her about giving birth to the prophesied Messiah, she declared: “For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty” (Luke 1:49-53).

Yes, the Jesus of the manger and the cross is returning as the literal King of Kings and Lord of Lords over this earth.

This song of exultation echoes the words of Isaiah, when the prophet describes a world in which “every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (Isaiah 40:4-5).

More than simply a miraculous re-altering of the surface of the earth, the word “mountain” is used to convey nations, kingdoms, power and authority. This is directly speaking of the total collapse of human society and God’s reordering of civilization from top to bottom. These passages define a revolution that is on its way—a revolution advanced by none other than God.

The “when” of timing is essential

Jesus’ first visit to this earth in human form certainly conveys the urgency of “when in the course of human events it becomes necessary...,” for indeed humanity needed a way to spiritual salvation. In fact, it’s interesting how the apostle Paul conveys the special timing: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4).

“When” did Christ come? When the Greek tongue was widely spoken, when Roman roads made travel easier and when Jewish synagogues were dispersed throughout the empire—all factors that allowed the rapid spread of the gospel.

However, Jesus’ first coming did not accomplish the transformation of humanity that the prophecies foretold. The human condition shows this to us plainly, with today’s North Korean missile launches, anti-Semitic rhetoric coming out of Tehran, butchery in Baghdad and the human hopelessness of Darfur.

Are the words of Jesus, Mary and Isaiah just lost in the wind, or is there yet one more dynamic convergence of time when “in the course of human events it becomes necessary” for actions that will alter all human history—not merely for 230 years, but forever?

Matthew's Gospel speaks of the time in which God must forcibly stop man's inhumanity to man, if the human race is to exist for even one more day. Christ is the speaker: "Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22). The Creator of time is also the master of timing, and He is going to intervene to save humanity from itself. If He intervenes too soon, an unappreciative humanity would decry Him as unfair, claiming they could have handled their own problems. If He comes too late—well, there is nothing left to save.

*Imagine a world
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Yes, the Jesus of the manger and the cross is returning as the literal King of Kings and Lord of Lords over this earth and its by then abolished political systems that proved incapable of governing. Talk about a revolution. But not in the historical sense—from below—but from above!

And then, God is going to proclaim liberty to all the world's inhabitants in the fullest application of Jubilee. Imagine a world that is going to be free from the spiritual tyranny of Satan, free from selfishness, free from sin, free to start over, free to make good choices, free to fully understand, embrace and experience God's great love for His creation. Just imagine the collective sigh of relief that will reverberate across the heavens as spiritual, mental and emotion burdens are lifted off the backs and hearts of humanity.

God reveals this moment through Paul: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now" (Romans 8:18-22).

Sounds like a time of Jubilee, doesn't it?

Freedom comes with a price

But none of this comes cheaply. Freedom always demands sacrifice. God gave His only Son that we might have a way back to Him (John 3:16). This price is precious beyond comprehension. Notice in the above passage from Romans that God says believers would suffer in this present age. So suffering is not a stranger to the Christian experience. We need a clear vision of our purpose and our potential, lest the suffering overwhelm us.

Ask yourself, Is the prophesied freedom, instant and forever, worth it? Your answer will determine how you will "walk the walk" the remainder of your days.

Funny, I haven't even thought about how hot this June day is for the last couple of hours. Maybe there is a lesson here. When your mind is on big things, all the little things just seem to melt away, leaving us a clear view of what is truly important.



I wonder if Jefferson, Franklin, Adams, Livingston and Sherman had the same experience as they toiled away at explaining in detail how “in the course of human events it becomes necessary” to do what they were about to do. Did they have a vision that would match their values, and thus allow them to deal with all that was about to befall them? We find their answer in their concluding lines.

Enter with me into that room in Philadelphia of old and look over their shoulders as they, one by one, apply their affirming signatures under these words: “And 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.”

Their words also echo God's freedom directive of Isaiah 30:21, “This is the way, walk in it.” It is “the way” of sacrifice based upon an understanding that freedom does not come cheaply, whether for temporal gains or spiritual causes.