



FREEDOM'S GATE

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Merriam-Webster defines the word "independent" as (1): *not subject to control by others; self-governing* (2): *not affiliated with a larger controlling unit* (3): *not requiring or relying on something else* (4): *not looking to others for one's opinions or for guidance in conduct.* It's no wonder the word "independent" is used only once in the Bible in reference to unity in marriage (1 Corinthians 11:11, NKJV). Apparently, celebrating independence is more a tradition of man and carnal mindset than a Kingdom principle.

I like the way Hebrews 10:20-23 in the Amplified Version clarifies this; "20-By this fresh (new) and living way which He initiated and dedicated and opened for us through the separating curtain (veil of the Holy of Holies), that is, **through His flesh**, 21-And since we have [such] a great and wonderful and noble Priest [Who rules] over the house of God, **22-Let us all come forward and draw near with true (honest and sincere) hearts in unqualified assurance and absolute conviction engendered by faith (by that leaning of the entire human personality on God in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness)..23-So let us seize and hold fast and retain without wavering the hope we cherish and confess and our acknowledgement of it, for He Who promised is reliable (sure) and faithful to His word."** The Word of God tells us to lean our *entire human personality* on God in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom and goodness by faith through His very flesh, the

new and living way, Jesus Christ. Our complete trust and confidence should be in our position in Christ alone. John 15:5 affirms, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for *without Me you can do nothing.*" Our sufficiency must rest in the grace of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:5; 9:8; 1 Corinthians 15:10). In other words, abide **IN** (a position of) **DEPENDENCE** on Christ Jesus and His many promises to keep you (Philippians 4:6-7; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 2 Timothy 1:12; Jude 24). And while we know and believe this, desiring truth to "flesh out" in our daily lives, isn't it remarkable how often we allow fear (rooted in facts) to repel our faith (in truth) and steal our peace? Like Peter, we take our eyes off the One on Whom we are utterly *dependent* and focus on the flood of our circumstances; positioned **IN** independence.

I was recently reminded of this on a whitewater rafting trip to Blue Ridge, Georgia on the Ocoee River. Divided into two sections, the Middle Ocoee includes 20 continuous Class III and IV Rapids that drop 260 feet from start to finish. The Upper Ocoee River was the site of the 1996 Olympic Whitewater competition including Class V Rapids; considered the most dangerous whitewater in the world. The combined course is ten miles and takes 3.5 hours to float. After much planning and excitement, the day of adventure arrived. I spent the morning in prayer and thanksgiving. I would be "floating" in Christ down the Ocoee River and Faith would keep me.

I had never been whitewater rafting before but the website boasted "no experience necessary." (Never believe everything you read.) Perhaps I should have been concerned to see only three other females in a sea of eager adrenaline junkies waiting to board the bus carrying us to the launch-site. Perhaps I should have been concerned

IN-Dependence Day

By Jodi Hopkins

by the term "launch site". Before boarding the bus, groups of six were assigned to a guide. My guide was the fifth female (God's hidden blessings). Elizabeth took one look at me feverishly tightening every visible strap on my equipment and politely inquired if this was my first whitewater trip. When my sheepish grin revealed my inexperience she asked, "Are you timid?" The righteous are as bold as a lion. I boasted, "Elizabeth, I'm fearless." As we rode on the bus through the

Cherokee National Forest, I was wondering when we'd receive instructions and if I'd missed the video back at the Outpost. Elizabeth thought it best if I sit in front of her in the back of the raft (God's hidden blessings). As I climbed in behind the others and we pushed off into the whitewater, we received our basic instructions: give me one (stroke); give me two; drift (don't paddle); get down (bottoms on the floor of the raft with paddles up) and remember to "wedge" your foot under the seat in front of you. For the record, I was concerned with "get down", but I quickly proved to be proficient at this essential rafting skill.

The Ocoee Gorge is breathtaking and after the initial impact of the ride, I settled into enjoying the thrill of whitewater rafting. The confidence and skill of any group will determine the degree of difficulty chosen by the guide in maneuvering the river and raft. My crew and guide were an experienced, fun-loving group and I quickly relaxed comforted by God's assured provision and protection. After all, I had prayed and I was receiving the answer to my prayers. After three hours of skillfully navigating both the Olympic whitewater and the multiple Class IV Rapids on the Middle Ocoee (while still remaining in the raft), we were accustomed to proposed challenges from the guide to maximize impact and effect.

With less than a quarter-mile left to float, Elizabeth prepared us for the grand finale as we passed through *Hell's Hole*, a Class IV. On the other side, it's deep and easy to swim should anyone get thrown; which she assured us everyone on the left side of the raft would. With me safely on the right, the group agreed with roars of enthusiasm. As we entered into the rapid, however, something unexpected happened in the navigation of the currents. Suddenly, the entire raft was tossed into the air throwing everyone into the whitewater. When it landed upside-down, I was trapped under water beneath the raft. Almost out of breath, I desperately reached for the side of the raft hoping to pull myself out from under it. When I finally surfaced gasping for air, I began looking around. Several rafts had gathered to provide rescue and I briefly climbed into another. I saw my group reassemble upstream with Elizabeth maneuvering the raft to float toward me. I was instructed to jump out and swim toward my own raft. Once I did, I felt the current begin to carry me downstream with the last section of whitewater visible ahead. I flipped over to avoid the rocks beneath the surface swimming backstroke upstream toward my raft but the current was too strong and I was too tired. The raft was still out of reach and I was completely out of energy. As I dropped my arms in exhaustion and the current pulled me down river, fear consumed me and I literally thought I was going to die.

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So where was my dependence? Was I IN dependence of the One who keeps me? Or had circumstances (facts) shaken my confession of faith? Was I leaning the “entirety of my personality” on Christ, the force of faith, or had fear moved me out of dependence on Him into a position of independence based on my own self-sufficiency and strength? I was not resting in-dependence of Faith, I was walking (floating) independently by sight.

The fruit of independence is ultimately fear...

With my last bit of energy, I started swimming toward the bank and clung to a rock until my group reached me. Later that day as I was reflecting on God’s goodness and faithfulness, I realized my

absolute dependence must rest in Christ alone. I had never experienced the force of fear. It was sobering how easily my faith was shaken when faced with dire circumstances. The fruit of independence is ultimately fear, and fear will ultimately determine in whom (or what) you place your faith. What you fear is what you have faith in.

The heartbeat of Independence Day on July 4th is a celebration of the beginnings of national independence but more significantly it is a picture of a *unified* nation (The United States) established on the foundation of Christian values and principles. Humbly I pray for the unity of the brethren in the bond of peace—that we would turn from an evil heart of unbelief (independence) to abide in a position of dependence on Christ who alone keeps us and keeps our Nation.

Praying for Authorities

Over 25 years ago, I found the scripture in 1 Timothy 2:1, 2: “Therefore, I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” Holy Spirit wrote this on my heart and I began to make this a part of my daily prayer.

I very quickly understood the serious meaning of these verses and the effect that it had on my personal life. Notice one of the benefits of praying for authorities is that we will have a quiet and peaceable life. Is that not what all of us desire? Then why do we not pray as God has asked?

Many Christians do not understand that God has placed the welfare of a nation on the prayers of His people. 2 Chronicles 7:14 tells us that if God’s people will pray and seek His face.....that He will heal their land. I remember when our current president, President Bush was elected. Many of you will recall the intensity of the moments and days before the final decision was announced. For me, it wasn’t about the “candidates”, but about God’s purposes. I was fervently pressing for righteousness ruling in our nation, reminding Father that His people had prayed and had a right to it.

Election time is just around the corner for this nation again. As His Body, we should be praying often for the leaders of this nation as well as other nations, but in this moment of time, we should be pressing for righteousness to rule our land. Brothers and sisters in Christ, you need to stop your yak yakking and “political conversations”, zip your lip and pray as God’s word has instructed us.

Spend time fellowshiping with your Dad in prayer and the Word and He will speak His wisdom to you. He has plans for this nation and He has a man for the white house. Start blessing this land – you dwell here! Honor authorities and bless them and the blessing will return to you.

~ Anne Pranger

THE High Price

Flesh versus Spirit – they are contrary to one another; like independence is to dependence – total opposites. Both require a high price; usually death is involved, either physical or death to self. In one, men may die a physical death and still not win, but in the Spirit, if you choose to die to self, you win every time.

About a year and half ago, Anne and I went to Galveston, Texas to do a powerful New and Living Way conference with Pastors Jerry and Cindy Hardesty. While there, we stayed a couple of days for some R and R on the beach. However instead of our anticipated sunny day walking by the water, it rained. So we drove over to San Antonio, Texas to visit the Alamo.

I first heard the story of the Alamo 58 years ago when I was in the first grade. It so affected me then and it still affects me today. Over 140 young, intelligent, and brave men in their prime with wives, children, and dreams were such heroes! There they were, looking over the wall seeing over 5,000 troops with their leader, Santa Ana, who was saying “You can leave and no harm will come to you. You can go home to your families and back to your daily lives. But if you don’t leave and you stay and fight, there will be no quarters. We will take no prisoners and you will all die!”

Over 140 men said, “We will die for independence,” and they did. They died for us to be free. Their battle cry was, “Remember

the Alamo.” As Americans, we must remember those men. As long as there is breath in this body, those men will not have died in vain; I am eternally grateful.

In the flesh, men would choose to die for independence and many have. Even today, we have men and women willing to die for independence all over the world – e.g. Iraq, Afghanistan. Again, I am most grateful. Lord, we pray right now that You let Your perpetual light shine on them and their families.

Flesh men are willing to die for independence, so flesh can live free and independent (Bless God for the USA). However, while your natural man desires independence, your spirit man, the new creature you are, becomes **independent** by reckoning yourself dead and becoming totally **dependent** on Christ. God’s plan is that you live on this earth totally independent of the world system and totally dependent in the Spirit, relying on Christ.

In the natural, many men (flesh) have laid down their lives to gain independence; but even dying didn’t get some of them independence because there is always one who “doesn’t win”; one still dies. But to every man that dies to self and lets Christ live His life through that man’s flesh body, that man always wins his independence.

I thank God we live in a democratic free nation that is by the people and for the people. We are free to speak, assemble, achieve, build, own land, etc. as we wish. We are a people living in cities, states, etc. that make up our nation because men and women were willing to fight and die for our freedom, so we could have individual independence.

However, once independence is achieved, we become **dependent** on our governing system and each other to allow us to be **independent**. We all live in a system with each other and we have different ideologies, cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, dreams, wants, etc. Suddenly my freedom seems to encroach on someone else’s freedom and vice-versa.

The only **true** freedom is to die to your **independence**, turn your whole life over to Christ, enter His Rest and you will experience “real freedom”: **IN-dependence (IN CHRIST!)**.

~ Joe Pranger