

What is True Freedom?

When a country is free, it gives freedom to its citizens in their speech, their writings, their organized gatherings, and their religion.

Freedom of speech and freedom of the press includes the right to speak kindly of others and the right to be critical of others, even to be critical of the leaders, like the president. Because every leader has been appointed by God, it's important for us to honor the leaders when we speak and write. Freedom isn't free if people act irresponsibly.

Freedom of organized gatherings includes the right to throw a party, start a new business or organization or church, or participate in a protest where people make signs and speeches to express their disapproval of something or someone.

Freedom of religion allows people to worship however they want and to change from one religion to another if they want to without the fear of being hurt or killed.

God holds the religious leaders responsible for teaching the truth about him. Those leaders are usually very influential in their societies because they teach people about God. Usually people believe what religious leaders tell them because the leaders are the teachers and are the ones who have studied the books.

As you see in the story on page 3, it was the religious leaders who arrested Jesus and sentenced him to death. They hated him because he exposed their hypocrisy. They taught the people to live one way, but they didn't follow their own teachings. God hates hypocrisy!

God gave the religious leaders leadership like the prophet Moses once had. (Essentially, God spoke to Moses and Moses told the people what God had said.) And the people knew that they should obey the religious leaders and follow their instructions. But if the religious leaders don't teach the truth about God ... or if they teach truth but don't obey it themselves ... then there are problems.

Before Jesus was arrested by the religious leaders, he said this to them (Matthew 23:23-26):

Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You give a tenth of mint, dill, and cumin, yet you neglect what is more important in the law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness! You should have done these things without neglecting the others. Blind guides! You strain out a gnat yet swallow a camel!

Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside may become clean too!

As you grow in your political freedom, be careful to give your citizens true, unhypocritical teaching about God. Also, allow your citizens to choose for themselves how they will worship God. Individual people – not the country as a whole – are responsible to choose to obey the truth. Fathers cannot make that decision for their children. Religious leaders cannot make that decision for others, either.

Be like the criminal who hung on a cross next to Jesus. Before he died, he chose truth. He chose life. He chose freedom.

For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. ... I am the bread of life. The one who comes to me will never go hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.

– Jesus