

Resolution on Conference Theme: “Act As Freemen!”

When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt dedicated our nation’s Jefferson Memorial on April 23, 1943, the proceedings were more than academic ceremony. President Roosevelt used the occasion to remind our nation about the value of American freedom during the intense sacrifices and difficult tribulation of the Second World War. He said that his war-torn generation, whom we remember today as the greatest generation, valued that freedom in a way founding fathers like Jefferson understood well.

Roosevelt said of Jefferson: “He faced the fact that men who will not fight for liberty can lose it. We, too, have faced that fact. He lived in a world in which freedom of conscience and freedom of mind were battles still to be fought through—not principles already accepted of all men. We, too, have lived in such a world. He loved peace and loved liberty—yet on more than one occasion he was forced to choose between them. We, too, have been compelled to make that choice.” Roosevelt’s words remind us that the freedoms we enjoy today have been a trust passed down to us from many generations of Americans who were willing to make the sacrifices their day required to preserve liberty.

The massive second panel on the wall of the Jefferson Memorial records text from his famous Virginia statute, *A Bill for the Establishing of Religious Freedom* (1789). It reads in part: “Almighty God hath created the mind free. All attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burthens . . . are a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion . . . No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship or ministry or shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but all men shall be free to profess and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion. I know but one code of morality for men whether acting singly or collectively.”

The America of our day has seen a revival of suffering on account of religious opinion and belief. Business enterprises and religious ministries opposed to the sins of abortion, homosexuality, and transgenderism have endured that kind of suffering in our land. Perhaps this reflects the loss of an acceptance of that one code of morality for men which Jefferson so confidently assumed. Perhaps it reflects the fact that a U.S. president can speak accurately of his nation no longer with the phrase, “the Holy Author of *our* religion.” Whatever the source of this revival of tyranny over the conscience in our time, one Jeffersonian truth remains enduringly true, “Almighty God hath created the mind free.”

Jefferson learned that doctrine from the Bible. When writing to the persecuted elect of God scattered throughout the first-century world, Peter encouraged these suffering believers to live as freemen because Almighty God has created the mind free (1 Pet. 2:15-17). These freemen are servants of God alone in this sense. They honor all; they love the brotherhood; they fear God first; and they honor the king second. Their liberty of conscience is a gift from the God they fear, not the king they honor. They desire to do the will of God with well-doing, that they may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

Therefore, the Independent Baptist Fellowship of North America, meeting at its annual conference at Hope Baptist Church in Hanover, PA, June 21-23, 2016, resolves that we shall act as freemen, not using our liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. We affirm that we will not fear those who destroy the body, but only that One who can destroy both body and soul in hell (Matt. 10:28). We shall honor the king in his proper jurisdiction, affirming always the soul liberty of every individual whose mind the Almighty God has created free. Inspired by the American generations of Jefferson and Roosevelt and others, whose struggles and sacrifices against political tyranny passed the trust of freedom down to us, we willingly accept that the commitment to act as freemen is not without cost, committing the keeping of our souls to God in well-doing, even as unto a faithful Creator (1 Pet. 4:19).