

**Do You Want to be Independent?
A Message for Independence Day.
By Phil Brainerd**

Introduction

When I was young (maybe 5 years old) one day, I decided to run away from home. I was mad about something, and I decided I needed to be independent. So, I packed a bag and walked to the front door. My mother asked what I thought I was doing. I told her, "I'm leaving -I'm going to move in with Grandpop and Grandmom. **They're** nice to me." My mother asked, "How are you going to get there?" I hadn't thought of that. Then I spoke words that I will never forget - Immortal words, at least in my memory. "Can you drive me?" My mother got this look on her face. It was the kind of look I would expect if I was an American pilot in World War Two, and I just landed my fighter on a Japanese aircraft carrier.

Apparently, I was not ready to be independent.

Over 200 years ago, the people of America fought against the British empire. They wanted to be independent. They wanted their own nation. They won, so they got it. That turned out to be a good thing. On Independence Day, July 4th, we celebrate - And we **should** celebrate.

That victory has created a culture. In America, Independence is highly valued. Oftentimes, independence is a good thing. It's good for young people to grow up one day, move out from their parents, start a family and be independent. It's good to be independent financially - No one wants to be dependent on the handouts of others if they can avoid it.

However, we're going to learn today that there are times when we don't want to be independent. Today we're going to learn some things about God and our relationship to him. If we can learn these things, it will greatly improve our lives.

I. God is Creator and Sustainer

The first thing we learn is that God is our Creator and Sustainer. We read in Colossians:

16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16-17)



The “creator” part is easy - We don’t need to re-read Genesis 1. God made everything, and lots of people understand that.

It’s the “Sustainer” part that most people don’t understand. Look at the last line of our Scripture: “...in him all things hold together.” When God created the universe, he committed himself to taking care of it for all eternity. Without his conscious thought and effort, everything would fly apart.

Imagine somewhere out there in the universe, there’s a little atom flying around. It’s made up of all kinds of sub-atomic particles. They all hold together because of the conscious effort of God.

The atoms then form into planets and stars. God knows about every one of them.

4 He determines the number of the stars
and calls them each by name.

5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power;
his understanding has no limit.

(Psalm 147:4-5)

When astronomers look through their gigantic telescopes and peer deep into space, everything they see is known by God, planned by God, and sustained by God. What does this mean? It means that everything is **dependent** on God. From the smallest of atoms to the largest galaxies, and everything in-between.

Do you know what else is sustained by God? All living things. Let’s read some texts from the Psalms:

Psalm 104

1 Praise the Lord, my soul.

Lord my God, you are very great;

you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

2 The Lord wraps himself in light as with a garment;

he stretches out the heavens like a tent

3 and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.

He makes the clouds his chariot

and rides on the wings of the wind.

4 He makes winds his messengers,

flames of fire his servants.

5 He set the earth on its foundations;
it can never be moved.
6 You covered it with the watery depths as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
7 But at your rebuke the waters fled,
at the sound of your thunder they took to flight;
8 they flowed over the mountains,
they went down into the valleys,
to the place you assigned for them.
9 You set a boundary they cannot cross;
never again will they cover the earth.
10 He makes springs pour water into the ravines;
it flows between the mountains.

Let's stop here for a second. Why does God do all this? There are lots of reasons. One reason is that God is a master artist, and that the world reflects the beauty of his mind. But here, the writer tells us why this is important to us:

11 They give water to all the beasts of the field;
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.
12 The birds of the sky nest by the waters;
they sing among the branches.

All the air and water and wind sustain the living creatures of the earth. You might say, "That's great – God sustains the animals. Why does that matter to me?"

The writer goes on:

13 He waters the mountains from his upper chambers;
the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work.
14 He makes grass grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to cultivate—
bringing forth food from the earth:
15 wine that gladdens human hearts,
oil to make their faces shine,
and bread that sustains their hearts.

It matters to us because we eat some of those plants. Farmers cultivate all kinds of food. Cattle eat the grass, and then they give us milk to drink. Other cows wind up in a McDonalds burger.

God doesn't just sustain the universe. He doesn't just sustain the animals. Because he sustains all those things, he sustains us. That means: We are all totally dependent on God to sustain us.

Recall what we just read a moment ago. “In him all things hold together.” We said that all things hold together because of the conscious effort of God. Question: What would happen if he stopped holding things together? Everything would fly apart. Or, everything might just stop. Everything would cease to be.

Understand, God is sovereign and wise. He has a plan for his universe. Sometimes, that means withholding the sustenance that he provides for the living creatures. Reading on in Psalm 104:

27 All creatures look to you
to give them their food at the proper time.

28 When you give it to them,
they gather it up;
when you open your hand,
they are satisfied with good things.

29 When you hide your face,
they are terrified;
when you take away their breath,
they die and return to the dust.

30 When you send your Spirit,
they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.

(Psalm 104:27-30)

When God stops sustaining, things die. The wonderful structures that maintain life break down. Breath, we’re told, is taken away. Living things return to the dust. But then, the Spirit returns, creates new life, and renews the face of the ground.

What is the point of all this? Everything in the universe is totally dependent on God. We’re dependent on God for our existence. We’re dependent on God for life. We’re dependent on God for sunshine and air and water and food.

Do you want to be independent? From God, no! In fact, it’s impossible to be independent of God.

II. God Provides Everything That Makes Us Human.

There are other important things to understand about our dependence on God. Let’s sum them up by saying: God provides everything that makes us human.

It’s wonderful that God provides for all the animals. But, is that all we are? Are we just one more form of “critter” on the earth?

I ran into an interesting article on a web site called "ThoughtCo". It's entitled, "What Makes Us Human?" The author identifies a number of things that make humans stand out from other living things.

Thumbs

Some are physical. For example, we've all heard about opposing thumbs. Monkeys and other primates don't have that. We are unique in the way that we can grab things. We can do more than swing from tree to tree. Our thumbs let us create tools.

Voice Box

Maybe you didn't know that our voice box is unique. It's positioned different than other primates. Add to that, our tongues and lips are much more flexible than the apes. That allows us to speak and sing. You learn something new every day.

Brains

Our brains are certainly much more complex than other animals. That allows us to process a lot of information.

Eternity

However, are we only different because of a few physical features? The article goes on: Unlike the animals we are aware of death. We can think ahead to it. We plan for it. When we can, we give special treatment to our dead - Like burial. Why is it that we can think ahead to death and the animals cannot? The great king Solomon tells us: "He has also set eternity in the human heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

God has given us an understanding of eternity. We don't just live from moment to moment and then die. We think. We can ponder our existence. Shakespeare's character, Hamlet, could ask himself: "To be, or not to be". God has not given this to any of the animals. When they die, they die.

More than an understanding of eternity, God has given us the ability to understand who created it. Only we understand God. We certainly don't understand everything about him. However, we understand a lot about him and why he is important.

So, again, we ask: Do you want to be independent? If we were fully independent from God, we would lose everything that truly makes us human.

Knowing all this, who would want to be independent of God? Why would they want to do that? Why are we talking about all this?

III. People Who Want to be Independent of God

Well, sadly, there are people who want to be independent of God. They want to rebel. A few times each year, we visit Psalm 2.

- 1 Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?
- 2 The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord and against his anointed, saying,
- 3 “Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles.”

(Psalm 2:1-3)

We read here that the kings of the earth want to “rise up” against the Lord. They want to “band together.” This is not an individual rebellion - This is a team effort.

Why would they want to do that? Answer: They’ve developed wrong ideas about God. They think that God wants to put them in chains and shackles. In the 1700s, the people of America thought of King George as a tyrant. So, they didn’t want him as their leader. They were probably right. However, today, some people think that God is a tyrant. In the same way that the United States wanted to break away from the British, these people want to break away from God.

Where did people get such ideas?

First, we have an enemy – the devil. Here’s what the Scriptures say about him.

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers... (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Our enemy causes people to be blind so that they don’t see all the wonderful things that God is and all the wonderful things he offers to us.

Second our own sin causes us to be blind:

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:21)

So, we have a world full of blind people who don’t understand the love of God. They want to be independent of God. They want to rebel.

Here's one example. Years ago, I was watching a Super Bowl. During the halftime show, the performer sang the song "Imagine", by John Lennon. Here are the lyrics:

Imagine, by John Lennon

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us - Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today... Aha-ah...

John Lennon thought that there is no heaven or hell. That means there's only right now. There is only "living for today." There is no sense of eternity in this song. Lennon sings on:

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion, too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace... You...

John Lennon thought that we can have world peace if we will only get rid of religion. Without countries or religion, there will be nothing to kill or die for.

So, what did Mr. Lennon think we should do?

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

John Lennon wanted everyone to join him. When I watched this show at the Super Bowl, I saw something scary: Tens of thousands of people sang along with the song. I guess they were accepting his invitation.

So, what should we do in the face of all this? King David tells us in the Psalms.

1 Blessed is the one
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.
2 Blessed is the one
whose sin the Lord does not count against them
and in whose spirit is no deceit.

Psalm 32:1-2

First, the people of the world need to understand that all rebellion is sin. Sin is more than breaking God's laws. Sin is our attempt to remove God from his rightful place, both in the universe, and in our lives. Once people understand that, they need to understand that only God can forgive the sins that have been committed against him.

Many folks have learned that, but we sometimes stop there. We fail to understand that there are further benefits to forgiveness. David says: "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven..." (Psalm 32:1). Blessed is a word that means, "happy". The blessed person has received something good - Something wonderful.

Let's read on.

3 When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night
your hand was heavy on me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer.

(Psalm 32:3-4)

If we have sin in our lives, and we keep it to ourselves, it eats away at us. David said it felt like it was going all the way to his bones. It stole his strength. What did he do about it?

5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, "I will confess
my transgressions to the Lord."
And you forgave
the guilt of my sin.

Psalm 32:5-6

The solution? Confess! David confessed his sin to the Lord, and the Lord forgave him.

Now, notice something. David said, "my sin". Some people spend a lot of time confessing the sins of others. "Look at that terrible person over there!" No – the only relief for sin is to own up to our own sin. Confess it. Then, God forgives.

6 Therefore let all the faithful pray to you
while you may be found;
surely the rising of the mighty waters
will not reach them.
7 You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.
(Psalm 32:6-7)

David says to pray and ask God to forgive - but don't put it off! Do it now when the Lord may be found. Once you do that, God becomes your hiding place. God protects us from trouble. Earlier we said that the god of this world has blinded people. Ask God to protect you from that. Instead, ask him to open your eyes. Then, there is singing and praise. That's when you hear the songs of deliverance.

8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.
9 Do not be like the horse or the mule,
which have no understanding
but must be controlled by bit and bridle
or they will not come to you.
(Psalm 32:8-9)

Finally, God forgives, but he does not completely remove our sin nature. A little rebellion remains in the best of us. So, we must commit to following God. If we do, he will instruct us. He will counsel us through his Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. If we follow him, we achieve all the benefits of children of God. If we don't, we are reduced to the status of animals. They need bits and bridles and leashes. You don't want any of that!

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

Do you want to be independent? Centuries ago, the Americans wanted to be independent from the British. They won. So, we celebrate. But independence from God? No.

First, it's impossible. God sustains the universe. We can't exist without him. Rather than pretend God doesn't exist, we happily acknowledge our total dependence on him.

Next, it's sad. If we leave God out of our lives, we leave out everything that makes us human. Only God can give us those things. Again, instead of trying to rebel, accept his love. Then, we can grow in the gifts he has given to us. The things that make us special in the universe.

Finally, turn away from sin. Sin is rebellion against God. Ask God to forgive. He will. As long as you hold on to your sins, you will waste away. When you confess and forsake your sins, your life changes for the better. Through the cross of Jesus Christ, your eternity changes for the better, too. Sadly, John Lennon is dead. And based on what he sang about, his eternity is very sad.

The secret to a happy and meaningful life is to admit our total dependence on God. This Independence Day, we celebrate the independence of a nation. But we also need to celebrate the God who sustains us and gives us life - And our total dependence on him.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:
PeaceWithGod.net