

**Reflection on Galatians 5  
In Light of the US Supreme Court Decision  
On Roe v Wade**

**Dr. Don Flowers, Jr  
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Freedom!

If there is a more Baptist word I don't know it! Baptists, at our best, have always been champions of freedom: soul freedom, Bible freedom, church freedom, church-state freedom.

Freedom has been the great contribution Baptists have made to the religious conversation in our world.

Freedom.

Is there a more American word? How often do we hear that proclaimed as the great gift of being American? From invocations at NASCAR races to State of the Union addresses, we are good that is the attribute that distinguishes us from the rest of the world.

Freedom

We have fought wars—a brutal war in our own land to make sure all our citizens are free. Freedom has been the rallying cry for our participation in wars from Southeast Asia to Europe to the Middle East.

Freedom.

In just a few days we will celebrate Independence Day, the day we cast off the bonds that held us down as subjects of the British Empire. We will set off fireworks, have parades and celebrate....Freedom.

It has been the hallmark of our country.

But this week.

This week for the first time in our nation's history the Supreme Court took away freedoms that had stood for nearly 50 years. In a controversial ruling that reverberates across our land they abolished Roe v Wade, the landmark ruling that overruled state laws against abortion, that opened the right to privacy, that led to so many other decisions.

It was controversial from the beginning. And in the succeeding 49 years it has only become more so. It has divided the courts, Congress, states, even families. In fact it has divided individuals—torn by the decision, by conflicting feelings.

To be honest, I am perhaps the last person that needs to be speaking on this topic. I am a white male, who has lived nearly my entire life under Roe v Wade. It has always been the law of the land, the way things are. The concerns of the right to an abortion are not germane to me. That is a decision I will never have to face.

But as a pastor...

I have heard the knock on the door late on a Friday night of a tear soaked teenager who fears she is pregnant. I have sat with a family who is struggling with what to do after learning that the 26 week baby they had hoped for has serious genetic issues that will not allow him to live long, and the life he had would be filled with pain.

I have heard the stories of a teenager who was raped by a family member at such a young age she didn't even know they were pregnant until she gave birth on the toilet.

It was incidents such as these that led me to work to prevent teen pregnancy with the SC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, now Fact Forward. The efforts of so many over 25 years has led to a 70% reduction in teen pregnancies and according to the Guttmacher Institute, a 17% reduction in abortions in the past 4 years.<sup>1</sup> That is just in SC.

So many have worked tirelessly to make sure that abortions are safe, legal and rare. At times that has been misunderstood. More than a few times I have been accused of being pro-abortion.

Pro-abortion! Is that even a thing? Do you know anyone who is going into pre-natal clinics and trying to entice mothers to have an abortion? Forget about the crazy internet stories that show up right there beside Bigfoot sightings! I have never met anyone who is pro abortion.

I have met countless individuals, male and female, who out of their sense of compassion and freedom have made sure that individuals are cared for as they make the more traumatic decision of their life; who have walked with them into a clinic, sheltering them from the signs, the taunts, the hate-filled slurs from protester. I have known doctors who have cared for patients with such compassion that I am deeply moved. They are no more pro abortion than a fire fighter is pro inferno!

But in many ways, all of that is of no substance, at least not now. The Supreme Court ruled that we would be like the church in Galatia, giving up our freedom.

Paul had help found that church introducing them to the freedom that comes in Christ, that there is nothing that they could do, or not do to get God from loving them more or less. They were beloved children of God.

But somewhere along the way some others came and convinced them that there were things they needed to do, mainly become Jewish and be circumcised. After all, the leaders of the Jerusalem church were Jewish, so shouldn't they?

This had led to a divide in the church and Paul felt he needed to address it! He reminded them *"For freedom, Christ has set you free!"*

For freedom!

It won't make everything wonderful. Freedom means we can make bad choices, and Paul gives us a sampling of some of the ways we misuse our freedom. (Interestingly we rarely get past the first few physical misuses!)

But God is willing to take that risk. God has always been willing to take the risk for freedom. That is the story of the garden when God gave the first humans choice. As they

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/state-facts-about-abortion-south-carolina>

got ready to cross into the promise land Joshua invited the people of Israel, *“Choose this day whom you will follow.”* Jesus’ invitation was always one of freedom, *“Come follow me.”* God is always on the side of freedom! Always!

That doesn’t mean it is a smooth path. Anything but! Ask our friends of color who have had to struggle just to drink out of a water fountain, to not be choked to death over selling a few cigarettes. Freedom isn’t free!

We had a warning that their decision was coming. A leaked memo told us the direction the court was leaning. But the warning didn’t take away the shock, the hurt, the anger. Again, for the first time in our nation’s history rights, the freedom to choose, has been taken away! There were hints that it is not the last. Justice Thomas in his decision hinted that other decisions need to be revisited—those around contraceptive, same sex relationships, in vitro fertilization. We may be at the beginning of something we have never seen!

So the question that was asked at our house last night was, “So what do we do?”

I wish I had THE answer, but I don’t think there is one magic response. We need to do all the things we know to do!

We need to show up and vote! We need to confess that this decision is due to our apathy, to our lack of involvement in the process. We took so much for granted, even when warned. We chose to sit out campaigns because we didn’t like a candidate. We failed to do our part. We need to remember that there is only one issue in a presidential campaign—the Supreme Court!

We need to be involved! This decision is now moving to the states. For too long state legislatures have passed draconian bills to incite their base knowing that the courts would prohibit their enactment. No more! We must let our local representatives know that will stand for freedom! That we aren’t going back!

We need to support organizations that are working to protect the health of women and children. They are the ones who are going to be hurt, even killed due to this ruling. If you don’t know those organizations, let me know and I can help you figure out who in your area needs your assistance.

What we cannot do is give way to despair. I have fought that myself. I have heard from friends who have given up. That is not an option for people of compassion and faith! We have to keep hope alive! Václav Havel reminds us *“Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.”*<sup>2</sup>

We also cannot give in to hatred and violence. I have had that temptation, and I am sure that there will be those who will take that route. But as followers of the Prince of Peace, the one that gives us our freedom, we are reminded that our lives and our actions

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/668109-hope-is-definitely-not-the-same-thing-as-optimism-it#:~:text=%E2%80%99Hope%20is%20definitely%20not%20the%20same%20thing%20as%20optimism.of%20how%20it%20turns%20out.%E2%80%9D>

should display the fruits of the spirit, *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.”*

This has been a hard week for those who treasure freedom. It is ok for us to sit with our hurt, our anger, our fear, our despair.

But let's not stay there! Martin Luther King, Jr., reminded us that *“the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”* Change takes a long time, but it does happen. This decision took a long time coming and it will take us time to overturn it.

But we will! We will! Because we are people of freedom, and God is always working towards liberation.

Thanks be to God!