

“The Freedom that Guides Us on the 4th”
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Sometimes we need guidance. I know I feel that way, especially when I am travelling out of town. E.g., recently, I admit, Elena, Nathan, Mrs. Reynaud and I were driving home from Houston, eastbound, and I had to get off I-10 E to find a rest area, but I got off one exit too early and I had to get back on I-10, but the way back on was not obvious at all; finally, after driving around and taking some turns, I made my way back on I-10, and I was pleasantly pleased for about five minutes, until I noticed something weird—the exits and the numbers on the exits revealed to me that I was going in the opposite direction, westbound back to Houston! So, feeling rather embarrassed, I admitted my fault, and eventually got turned back around. Sometimes we need guidance when we are driving. Sometimes we need guidance in living our lives because we are going in the wrong direction. And sometimes our nation needs guidance because it is going in the wrong direction. Our passage gives us helpful guidance, especially for us and our nation.

READ 1 Peter 2:11-17 (p. 233)

CONTEXT: Peter is writing to believers— Jew and Gentile— in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) about 30 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection, so around the early 60’s AD. In the context he has just instructed them in the beginning of the letter of the resurrection of Jesus through which we have a new birth (1:3) and the moral implications of how the believers are to live (2:1-3). He has told his readers they are a chosen race, God’s own people, who have received His mercy.

READ vv 11-12. “Peter addressed the believers as strangers, as non - citizens, who are to live honorably/well even though they are at war with the desires of the flesh and are assaulted verbally as doers of evil. Cf. 1:1,14-15,17.” The two words in our text “aliens” and “exiles” are pretty much synonymous, and help Peter’s readers to understand they are to live lives of detachment from the world. We are reminded of Paul in Philippians 3:20, “But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is there we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” That is who believers are. It is interesting that the Stoic philosopher Epictetus from the first century AD stated, “But while He [God] allows thee to enjoy it [sc. thy property], use it as a thing which does not belong to thee, and as a traveller uses a hostelry” (from E.G. Selwyn, *1 Peter*, p. 169). Christians, though, are different from the Stoics in that God is personal and wants us to enjoy the things of this world, yet we are not to be possessed by them, but independent of them. If you have lived away from home or outside the country for a time, you can relate to what Peter is saying here. E.g., I recall when Elena and I lived in Scotland we took a trip home after our first two years, and we would go for walks and say things to each other like, “Remember when we ate at that restaurant last? Well, the number of days since we ate there is the same number of days until we go home!” We are to long for heaven like that. E.g., Corrie Ten Boom was known as a tramp for the Lord in her travels from the Netherlands to visit others for the gospel. And as we live that way we are to abstain from the desires of the flesh —

as in Galatians 5:19-22. It is interesting the terminology used here— such desires “wage war against the soul”. The verb here is a military term for soldiering, and our NRSV translation is an admirable one. E.g., I am reminded of the hymn, which was inspired by biblical texts like v 11, “Onward Christian Soldiers”, where it says, “Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before. Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe, forward into battle see his banner go!” The foe for us as Christians is sin and fleshly desire, and anyone who really wants to walk faithfully with Jesus knows that this is a great struggle. If we are to be blessed as a nation, it starts with godly men and godly women. E.g., I have heard from Christian speakers of what a great struggle men have with porn today, because it is so easily accessible; I have heard that porn is also a struggle for women today. How do we wage war on such desires of the flesh. E.g., I think the first way is what people say about the first thing to do in winning a war— admit you are in a war. Second, for the Christian, get those things out of your life that you cannot handle— whether that be friends, cell phones, access to a computer with no one around, going to hotels with porn available, etc. Third, have someone to whom you are accountable, who can ask you on a weekly basis, how are you doing in that area this week? Fourth, develop your relationship with the Lord relying on the Holy Spirit.

READ vv13-15. “Peter instructed the believers to accept the authority of the government as one placed there by God. Cf. Mark 12:13-17; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Titus 3:1-2 along with Acts 4:19-20; 5:27-32.” We are to obey the laws of the land, obey the speed limit when we drive, pay our taxes faithfully as Jesus instructed, and we are to pray for our nation’s leaders— like President Biden and Vice President Harris, Governor Edwards, and Mayor Cantrell, as Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:1-2. But we are not to obey the government if it call us to participate in things contrary to our faith, as we see the early church had to choose in Acts 4:19-20 and 5:27-32.. E.g., Chinese churches have to choose whether to

serve the Chinese Communist Party first or God. There are times our government gets it right in its decisions and laws. E.g., the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But there are times, unfortunately, when our governmental system makes the wrong decision. E.g., this week the U.S. Supreme Court ruled to pass on making a decision on a public school bathroom issue where a girl who thinks she is a boy wanted to use the boy's bathroom in her high school, and the result is that a lower court's ruling which approved of the girl using the boy's bathroom was allowed to stand. This is a tragedy; bathrooms should be separated by male and female. The government may try to force us as a church to allow those who think they are the opposite sex to use the opposite sex bathroom, and this cannot happen.

READ vv 16-17. "Peter admitted that the believers had freedom, but that was only to be used in the context of being a slave of God. Cf. Romans 6:15-19; Galatians 5:13-15." READ Galatians 5:13-15. So we are free, but true freedom ironically means being a slave of God, of righteousness, as in Romans 6:15-19, and therefore a slave to others out of obedience to God. We are free in a number of areas that are gray morally— like drinking alcohol (but we are not free to get drunk, which is dissipation), the way we dress (not in a sexually provocative manner, though), and whether to take on debt. But we are not free to disregard the teachings of Scripture. We have seen the struggle in Methodism in the last week or two. E.g., in Great Britain the Methodist Church there decided to permit same-sex marriages. E.g., on June 25 the General Council on Finance and Administration has decided that when we as a church conduct our annual audit and report on the breakdown of gender of our congregation we now have three options: male, female, and non-binary. The UMC has now decided to use its freedom to legitimize someone's gender dysphoria, that there really is a gender other than male and female. This turns God's ordered creation into chaos, and we will not be following this chaos when reporting our numbers at Lake Vista UMC.

“What does this text mean for our celebration of July 4th?” Sometimes we ourselves need guidance, and our nation needs guidance. We are to celebrate our nation, the greatest the planet has ever known, and celebrate the freedom we have in our nation, and yet never take it for granted. We are, though, to celebrate our God and serve Him first, and speak out when our nation is wrong. If ever there is a conflict between serving the Lord and serving our nation, we are to choose the Lord, and pray we never have to face such a decision.