

What Free People Do
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1 Peter 2:11-17

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. 12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

13 For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, 14 or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. 15 For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. 16 As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. 17 Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Introduction: Steph Curry and the Warriors Silence the Critics

This week the Warriors won their fourth NBA championship in eight years. Immediately after beating the Celtics in game six of the finals, the talk immediately turned to all the doubters who said, among other things, that Steph Curry wasn't the best player in the league and that he would never see another championship. Curry let his play speak for itself, and what it said silenced the critics.

In our text this morning, Peter is describing how his sisters and brothers will not only silence their critics, but also proclaim the gospel by their actions and draw unbelievers toward Jesus. As Peter is penning these words, the Christians to whom he is writing are facing various forms of persecution from regional governor Pliny just as Christians throughout the Roman Empire are suffering under Emperor Trajan. Christians are being accused of doing evil as a justification for having evil done to them – by the very people whose authority Peter says they should accept. How can he say this? WHY would he say this?

To frame this question well, I wanted to have Paul's teaching about evil in mind. So last week we learned that, at the beginning of Ephesian chapter 2, Paul tells us that evil comes from the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world is another name for the self-serving system. The flesh is another name for our self-rationalizing egos. The devil is the personification of that spiritual force which that tells us this is not only not-bad, but is in fact the greatest kind of good. Taken together these forces permeate absolutely everything. It is - to borrow Morpheus' description of the Matrix – “the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.” But in our case, there is no blue pill. We can't step out of the program. The only way *out* is *through*. Jesus is showing us that way because he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. As the Body of Christ in the world, we embody this way as well.

So while we can't just step out of this system, we don't have to buy into it. That is Peter's basic point. The truth, Peter says, is that you are God's special possession. You don't belong to this system, and you don't live by its rules. In fact, it is vitally important that you NOT respond in kind to the evil done to you. By living virtuous lives, you make it plain that you belong to God. By living honorably, you silence your ignorant critics and demonstrate your allegiance to your Lord Jesus and his government of goodness. By showing honor to the emperor and loving one another, you prove that you are spiritually free people.

Core

Truly free people don't get caught up in ego trips but instead live honorable lives of love.

Peter begins by telling them that they aren't part of the system. They are now aliens in the culture they were born into, and exiles from their true home in Christ's kingdom.

Aliens and exiles aren't impressed by arrogance. Celebrity, self-promotion, money, power... these are what bloated, empty, fragile egos pursue. They are the desires of the flesh that kill the soul.

Aliens and exiles live virtuous lives of humility. Being humble doesn't mean they think less of themselves. It means they think of themselves less. They are concerned with the welfare of their neighbors as Jesus taught them to be.

Aliens and exiles are deferential to worldly authority, but they never bow down to it. The emperor is worthy of respect, but only God is worthy of worship.

Above all, **Aliens and exiles value their responsibilities more than their rights.** They see living a life above reproach as their high privilege. As daughters and sons of the Most High, they see themselves as called to higher standards of compassion, mercy, justice and sacrifice than the unbelievers around them.

So I want to offer you a bit of a thought experiment.

Call

Identify your own personal bill of rights -- that is, 10 "rights" that you have - things that you should have the freedom to do and to be. Then ask yourself: What is the corresponding responsibility that you have as a disciple of Jesus?

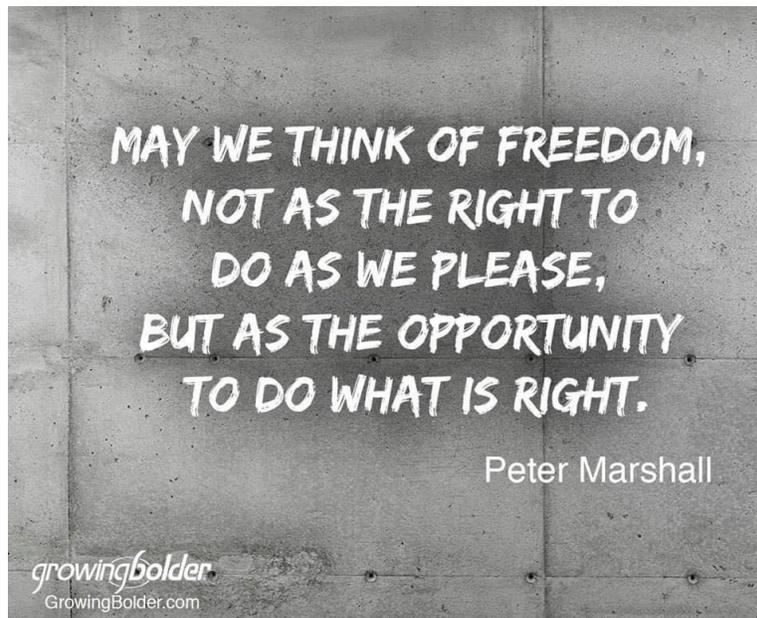
Example: I have the *right* to enjoy my home without my neighbors annoying me.

I have the *responsibility* to be thoughtful and considerate to my neighbors even if they do occasionally annoy me, and to help them out when they are in need.

Other examples of "rights"

I have the right to spend my time and my money as I wish.

Earlier this week on Facebook this image showed up on my newsfeed:



I got curious about it, and learned that Peter Marshall was a Presbyterian Minister who was born in Scotland, served as the pastor for New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC and was appointed to serve as chaplain of the U.S. Senate in 1946. This quote is drawn from the Opening Prayer for April 25, 1947.

This is the prayer in its entirety:

Our Father which art in heaven, we pray for all the people of our country, that they may learn to appreciate more the goodly heritage that is ours.

We need to learn, in these challenging days, that to every right there is attached a duty and to every privilege an obligation. We believe that, in the eternal order of things. Thou hast so ordained it, and what Thou hast joined together, let us not try to put asunder.

Teach us what freedom is. May we all learn the lesson that it is not the right to do as we please but the opportunity to please to do what is right.

Above all, may we discover that wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. May we have that freedom now, in His presence here, to lead us and to help us keep this Nation free. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

That Marshall's prayer should feel so resonate and so needful 75 years later shouldn't surprise us. The goodly heritage that is ours is at risk. We see the division of rights from duties and obligations all around us. We need the Spirit of the Lord is being present in all things we call Christian so that we can be free in the truest sense of that word – free to do what is right at all times and in every occasion.

Amen.

For the Benediction

As we finish up, let's hear Peter's instruction once more, this time in the Message paraphrase. I've changed it a little to make it a Confession we can read together as our closing benediction:

What We Free People Will Do

From 1 Peter 2:11-17 (The Message)

Friends, this world is not our home, so we won't make yourselves cozy in it.

We won't indulge our egos at the expense of our souls.

We will live exemplary lives among the natives so that our actions will refute their prejudices.

Then they'll be won over to God's side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives.

We want to make the Master proud of us by being good citizens. We respect the authorities, whatever their level; they are God's emissaries for keeping order.

We exercise our freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules.

We treat everyone we meet with dignity. We love our spiritual family, we revere God, we respect the government.

We will do good so we might cure ignorance. This is God's will. Amen.