

Freedom and Religion

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Ezekiel 2:1–7; Psalm 123; 2 Corinthians 12:2–10; Mark 6:1–6

- “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” (1st Amendment to the United States Constitution).
- This is a true blessing, and one that we can easily take for granted.
- Many Christians throughout the world are forced to worship in secret, risking their lives every time they try to gather with the body of believers.
- What are we doing with this right to freely practice our faith in Jesus? Are we taking every opportunity to use this freedom to its fullest? How is God calling you to exercise your freedom to exercise your faith?
- Unfortunately, many have chosen to exercise their freedom of religion by walking away from the faith. This is a sad choice from our perspective.

America as rebellious house

- The Christian faith has played a significant role in the history of our country, but it is hard to say that America is a “Christian nation.”
 - Barna, “State of the Church 2016.” 73% of Americans self-identify as Christians. “When a self-identified Christian attends a religious service at least once a month and says their faith is very important in their life, Barna considers that person a “practicing Christian.”” Only 31% of Americans meet this criteria. When you add a filter asking what people believe on key doctrinal issues, only 7% of the population could be classified as an “evangelical Christian.”¹²
- “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (MTD). *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (2005) by Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton.
 - “A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.”
 - “God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.”
 - “The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.”
 - “God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.”
 - “Good people go to heaven when they die.”³

¹ Barna “State of the Church” study from 2016. <https://www.barna.com/research/state-church-2016/>

² Evangelical Christian: Meet the born again criteria plus seven other conditions. These conditions include saying their faith is very important in their life today; believing they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians; believing that Satan exists; believing that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; asserting that the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches; believing that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works; and describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today. Being classified as an evangelical is not dependent upon church attendance or the denominational affiliation of the church attended. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as “evangelical.”

³ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/moralistic-therapeutic-deism-the-new-american-religion-6266/>

- MTD is a summary of what the majority of Americans believe. This includes the vast majority of those who self identify as Christians, even many of those who attend church.
- To call America a “Christian nation” can lead to the dangerous notion that the culture we live in and our Christian faith are one and the same. It can also lead us to believe, as the church, that the work of evangelism has been mostly completed in our country.
 - Israel was a “rebellious house” in Ezekiel’s day because they were the covenantal people of God and they had turned away from him.
 - America is a “rebellious house” because it is full of people who have continued in the way of Adam and not given their hearts to the Lord.
- What we need is discipleship in the church and evangelism in the wider culture
 - Different approaches to evangelism for different times and places.
 - Paul’s approach to the gentiles (Acts 17:22-34) vs. Peter’s approach to the Jews (Acts 2:22-36).
 - Catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.
 - “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” Psalm 34:8
 - Salt and Light (Matthew 5:13-16).
 - Winsome: attractive or appealing in appearance or character.
 - Pray for our leaders and for those who don’t know Jesus.
 - Whether they hear or refuse to hear, they will know that a Christian has been among them.

Exiles

- America is a wonderful place to live. We should seek its good, protect its freedoms, and seek justice for those who are oppressed. But we must also remember that it is not our true home, for we are citizens of the Kingdom of God and ambassadors of this kingdom to everyone we meet.
- 1 Peter 2:9-12.