

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Little Letters
“Free to submit and slaves to truth”
Pastor Randy McNeal – April 3, 2011

Intro

Today we will be looking at the letters from Peter. 1 and 2 Peter are towards the back of the New Testament. They come before John's letters and after James. When Dave first mentioned the letters from Peter in his introduction he said that Peter was the “quintessential non-compliant”. The guy always got ahead of himself and thought he could do anything. As Dave preached I smiled and reflected to myself on how I often relate best to Peter. Humility has always been a struggle for me; freedom is so important. I laughed when Dave told me I was preaching on Peter, specifically submission because of the irony. I've come a long way on the road to submission, mainly because God often humbles the proud in painful ways, and so I speak to you out of one of my areas of growth. This thing often holds me back in my walk with God, my relationship with others, and my view of myself. I hope that we can find some shared experiences as we journey together on what it looks like to submit to God, authority, and each other.

The other topic we will speak of is one of my greatest strengths, and passions. I value correct Biblical teaching very much. It's at my core. Because of that I am always wary of false teachers out in the world that lead us, followers of Christ, astray with their false hope and selfish teaching.

Submission and False Teachers are the themes of 1 and 2 Peter we will look at today. If you read the rest of the books you will hear themes of salvation by faith and suffering for God that would remind you of these last two weeks of James that Dave has preached. Today, we'll take a break from suffering, and speak to submission and finding false teachers.

Freed to Slavery 1 Peter 2:13-17

As you turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 2:13-17 I'd like to ask a question. Feel free to answer like we have been the last couple of weeks.

“What is it that keeps us from submitting?” [allow time to hear answers]

When I think about submission my mind goes back to what Mike talked about with Philemon. We'll be using the term “slave” some today and all within the context of a choice that we make. Maybe a better term is **bondservant**, which was someone who was freed of the obligation to slavery but chose to continue in service under the care of the master. It's not slavery like we think of and the atrocities of our history with bringing slaves over from Africa. Here it's a choice to give up freedom; or as Mike preached, giving up our Rights.

Giving up our rights is essentially letting go of our pride. In Philippians our example of this is Christ who:

“Being in the very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped”.

I love that phrase. It's as if Christ literally “let go” [closed fist to open palm] of his rights. As we continue I'd encourage you to remember that phrase and the process of literally opening your palm, letting go of your rights. What is it in your life that keeps you from submitting? That you need to let go of?

Our passage is 1 Peter 2:13-17:

¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the

ignorant talk of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

The apostle Paul agrees with Peter in 1 Corinthians 9:19

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all."

"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority" is what Peter says. That's not an easy task and it wouldn't be beyond us to ask "why"? The verse explains that God uses the governments to punish those who do wrong; or maybe we see it as maintaining order. Then, when we live in compliance with the law, people see God better.

You can imagine that in a country of complete anarchy it would be tough to see God. If there were no boundaries, no justice, no peace then God couldn't be preached and we couldn't stand out as righteous. One thing that needs to set us apart as Christians from those who don't believe is that we live under the law of our country. We do this because God has power over the authorities and uses them to control the chaos of the free world so that by our compliance, our testimony of God actually has validity to it. When we refuse to comply with the authority set up above, to give up our rights to freedom, we lose our proof that we follow God. So submitting to God and to the authority that God puts up over our lives we:

- Pay our taxes
- Obey the speed limit
- When we disagree with our leadership we do so without degrading the person, whom God has appointed leader for better or worse.

All these things, submitting to the authority God has set up, increase our ability to point to God. Peter says we will "silence the foolish", those people who only want freedom. They will see our submission as integrity and find no fault in us to prove we don't really believe in God. Obeying authority makes God look better to the world around.

It's not just the act of obeying laws that's important. It's the heart of the matter.

Submission is the outward sign (good works) of an inward working (salvation by faith).

In the same way that our works do not save us, sheer compliance is not the attitude of submission. If your heart is still prideful, if on the inside you are still holding on [make fist] to your rights, then what good is it to obey? It's as if it's forced on you and you are not free at all.

But when you choose to let go of your freedom, you are free to submit. It's your choice and no one is forcing you. Like a bondservant you choose submission because you know it's a better life. By choosing submission, we achieve freedom. By choosing slavery we are freed because no one is forcing us to act in a certain way. Our heart is transformed.

Martin Luther "The Freedom of a Christian"

"A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."

I love this work by Martin Luther, not the king, the guy from the fifteen hundreds who started the protestant reformation, where we find our roots today. He spends the entire time preaching that "faith alone" is what saves us. That's the inner working. It's out of this change of heart, this freedom from sin that we choose to submit. The submission itself can only come if it is prompted by the freedom. Out of our gratitude for being set free we look to God and say, "I will be your servant because life is so much better".

When we choose service out of our freedom, we know our faith is real. We know our hearts have been changed when we give up whatever "rights" we perceive to have.

[Illustration]

I can't think of a group of people who have a better opportunity to exercise submission in freedom than our youth.

You see, in the adult world, we don't always have the choice to submit. We are forced into slavery by a lot of outside factors:

- We have bills to pay
- A family to provide for
- An employer, even if we don't like them, that we have to listen to (by the way Dave, I like you)
- We even have harsher punishments for our mistakes.

Gone are the days of when we were minors by the laws standards; where a simple year of probation and 20 hours of community service keep our record clean. Now if we mess up we have a record of it that hinders us in getting a job, providing for our family, and can even get us in jail. So youth have a lot more freedom, but if you would exercise submission you would have even more.

Sure you can break the law and get away with a clean record. But is community service, probation, getting kicked off sports teams or school really freedom? By choosing to act poorly you are choosing to have the authority force you to make choices of service. By freely choosing not to engage in acts that are illegal or immoral you don't bring about the heavy hand of punishment and are really more free.

Take curfew for an example. Have you ever asked your parents if you could stay out late and they say "no". When you ask why they say things like "because I said so" or "because I'm the parent that's why" or "we trust you we just don't trust the people around you" or my dad's favorite "nothing good can be going on after 10 pm". That's right, my curfew was 10 pm, which in my family meant I better be home by 9:55 or I was grounded. To be early was to be on time, to be on time was to be late, to be late was unacceptable.

Do you ever wonder why your parents don't give you reasons for decisions they make? Try seeing it through their eyes:

One day you will no longer be under their care. You'll leave for college or get an apartment and will be free to make your own decisions. They are fearful that you will make poor decisions and get hurt. They don't want to see you hurt. They are fearful because they will miss you. All they want to know is that you care for them in this same way, that you respect them, that you need them. Believe me, you need them. I probably ask my parents for advice now more than when I was in high school and wish I had asked more questions back then.

So when it comes to curfew, maybe you look at it this way. Choose to give up your freedom to do whatever you want and be out as late as you want. When your parents say "you've been out every night this week" they are really saying "we miss spending time with you". So choose to stay in every once in a while. Choose to come home early for curfew. Call if you are going to be late. All these things seem like they aren't freeing but if you build that trust up with your parents you will actually have more freedom. When you've submitted to their rules and respected them and ask "can I stay out past curfew" they are more likely to say "yes" because you've shown them you care and that you can be compliant. Trust me, I got to break my 10 pm curfew a lot more when I started doing those things.

So what is it in your life that you are holding onto? What rights do you not want to give up? What keeps you from submitting?

This act of rebellion is painful. As you think of this specific thing I want you to make a fist. I want you to squeeze as hard as you can. Let this symbolize how important this thing is or how hard it is to give up. Squeeze like you are holding onto your freedom with everything you got. Squeeze like someone is trying to rip it away from you.

Now release your hand, and feel the peace. The tension is gone. It's not painful anymore. The act of submission actually makes you feel free doesn't it? It's a continuing process. I often symbolize my letting go of things by making a fist and then opening it up; symbolizing my release of my rights and submission.

Remember that it's not the act of submitting that makes this all work; it's the heart. It's the character. It's who you have been changed to be.

“ Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works.”

Warning against False Teachers 2 Peter 2:1

Freedom without submission and false teachers go together. False teachers preach freedom without submission.

2 Peter 2:19

“They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption for people are slaves to whatever masters them.”

- Who is your master?

Our text is 2 Peter 2:1 and it says:

¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.

There are false teachers out there who want to preach freedom without submission. They want you to deny the Lord; Christ as master. They preach this lie and we need to fight against this. Even in submission we must stand up for what is right.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: an example of submission and fighting for truth

When I think of submission and standing up for what is right I think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a German pastor in the time of World War II. He was working in America when the war broke out and gave up his freedom here to go and be with his congregation in Germany. He went back knowing he had to submit to a corrupt government he didn't agree with. He went back to counter the lie being taught that God hated the Jews. Hitler claimed to be a Christian and to be doing God's work and Bonhoeffer stood up against this false teaching in submission.

In his submission he fought against the injustice. He was part of an assassination plot on Hitler. Eventually, he was found out and arrested. In prison he wrote many great letters and papers about God and Faith. In fact, he would say he was more free in prison than he was outside because of the time he devoted to study and writing. Before his execution, while on trial, he still submitted to authority. In one of his letters to the government regarding his arrest he signs “Hail Hitler” as a sign of respect for the German leadership. He didn't agree with Hitler and was fighting to stop him. In the fight against injustice he maintained his character and submission. He showed respect as much as it may have disgusted him to do so.

One thing we should realize about false teachers is that they often deny absolute truth. They say it's more about the journey, the conversation and the answers really don't matter.

Every journey needs a destination just as every conversation needs to find truth.

Bell "Love Wins", false teacher or truth seeker?

There is a book out right now that has sparked a lot of controversy. Rob Bell's Love Wins is a best seller. You can't find it in stores, it's back ordered online, and the Christian community is a buzz. I can't hang out with other pastors for very long before the conversation of "what do you think of Bell's new book" comes up. I've read the book and I have my opinions. I don't think now is the time for me to share them but if you care to know I'd love to grab coffee and talk through it. Why I want to mention this book is not because of my opinion but because there is so much controversy. As Christians, we need to fight against false teaching.

I'm not saying Bell is a false teacher but the problem is that many Christian leaders think so and are challenging him to make sure he is not impregnating Christianity with false doctrine. You should do the same. To sit here week after week accepting blindly the message brought to you is the same warning that Peter is talking about. Know your scripture, know the message of the Gospel so when you hear something that sounds false like "there is no hell" you can raise your hand and ask "what about all the scriptures that say there is a hell"? If this is to be a true discussion it must find its roots and ending point in scripture. Sure, it's possible that you will challenge something and through discussion you may find out you were wrong. Isn't that better than walking through life with a misguided notion of what the Bible is saying?

I think it was CS Lewis who said "the question is greater than the answer." I believe this is because if we are questioning it means that we are active in our journey and not just complacently accepting. However, being active in your journey means you have an end goal in sight and are not just walking around aimlessly lost.

That means when Dave preaches on James saying "faith without works is dead" your ears should perk up and you should say "but the Bible says 'it is by grace you are saved through faith and not of yourselves'". How can these two coexist? Through that conversation you come to a destination of knowing that we are saved through faith alone and that salvation works itself out by prompting us to do good works out of gratitude.

Also, if I or any pastoral staff member says something that is confusing enough to lead you astray, we are accountable as teachers to atone for that misguidance. Hold us accountable so on the Day of Judgment we can stand in confidence of our faith and calling.

We need to seek truth when we hear something that sounds false. For a good review of Rob Bell's book "Love Wins" see Kevin DeYoung's review. The web address is in your sermon notes.

The problem with false teachers is exactly what Peter says. They deny the Lord. They say Christ isn't the only way. They preach freedom to do and believe whatever you want. Relative truth has to be one of the Devil's greatest lies because it keeps us as slaves to sin.

We lost our rights to eternal life in the Garden of Eden and we continue to forfeit those rights with our propensity to sin. It is only by Christ, the specific person of Christ and the act of dying in our place that we are brought back into freedom with God. It is only as we submit to Christ's rule and rely on his death and resurrection that we are truly free. That's the truth that we should be fighting for and teaching our children.

Conclusion

As we move into a time of communion, an act of submission on our part to God, I'd like to take some time to reflect on truth. In this video you will see first how the lies of this world often can be a type of bondage we are in if we choose to live in that way. You will then see it reversed to show God's truth in our lives that we must submit to if we are ever to be free.

(show video)

Benediction

Pray:

"Although I am an unworthy and condemned [person], my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so that from now on I need nothing except faith which believes this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his [unimaginable] riches" (Luther, Freedom).