

"Submission"
1 Peter 2:13-17
November 26, 2006
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In the scripture passage we are about to read, God, through the apostle Peter, first reminds us of whom we now are by God's grace
Because of our new relationship to him and each other, God now calls us to a new relationship with those around us.

1 Peter 2:9-17 "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king."

Michael Richards, better known as "Kramer" in the popular television series "Seinfeld," got in some trouble this past week.

He was performing at a Los Angeles comedy club when a man began to heckle him.

It seems Richards "lost his cool" and responded attacking the man with vulgarity and racial slurs.

It was recorded on video and distributed widely over the Internet.

The outburst was striking because of how excessive it was and because it was so public by so public a figure.

But my question is where did such feelings come from?

When filmmaker Mel Gibson was stopped by traffic police several months ago he lashed out at the police officer.

It raises the same question – where do such thoughts and feelings come from?

We just came through a political campaign season here in America.

It seems that politicians are fair game to be shot at with any name-calling we choose.

We not only disagree with their positions, we feel free to deprecate and despise them personally.

The vitriolic words used of President Bush these days are disturbing and the equally angry and demeaning words used about President Clinton in past days, even by Christians, were equally disturbing.

When someone intentionally or even unintentionally cuts us off in traffic, slowing us from getting to an important appointment, where do those demeaning names we call him or her come from?

So many times in a week we speak and act in ways that suggest we are subconsciously thinking, “How dare someone misunderstand us, inconvenience us, belittle us, or attack us?”

Our self-centeredness is stunning isn't it?

I think I have told this embarrassing story before, but it fits here quite well.

I was taking a seminary course here in Denver several years ago with a large group of students.

I sat down one day next to a man I didn't know and before having a chance to get acquainted with him the instructor began the lecture.

Papers were passed around the classroom and I attempted to hand the last one to the man next to me.

He didn't take it; he didn't even look at me.

I kind of shrugged and laid it on the corner of his desk.

Another set of papers came and again I attempted to hand one to the man but again he ignored me.

I kind of slapped it down on his desk.

By that time I was rather irritated with the man and had several rather demeaning thoughts about the kind of man he was given his rude and inconsiderate behavior toward me.

By the time that class was over I had no intention of meeting him and got up to leave.

But as I stood I saw something that changed everything.

I saw him reach for a white cane on the floor by his chair.

How embarrassing; I was all bent out of shape about how I was being ignored and I was thinking all kinds of things about this man's character.

Our self-centeredness is stunning isn't it?

In our biblical text for today, the Apostle Peter is addressing very real concerns.

The Christians to whom he's writing live in a world hostile to their faith.

It may not yet be full-fledged physical persecution but they are living in circumstances that are distressing nonetheless.

- Some of them are servants and slaves with masters who are not Christians.
- Some of them are married to spouses who don't follow Jesus.
- They live in a society of people and even government leaders that make it hard for them.
- At the very least these believers are slandered.

Likely that has repercussions in their homes, their jobs and even on them as citizens of their community.

Certainly the temptation is there to see themselves as a persecuted minority and to strike back in self-protection.

Again, at the very least, they probably assume they are entitled to think ill of those who oppose them.

After all, these people are acting like their enemies and enemies of Christ and his church.

But what does Peter say?

1 Peter 2:13-17 “Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.”

The primary instruction is to “submit.”

Submit yourselves! Be submissive in your very attitude; defer to others.

Oh, but this runs counter to almost every natural reaction we have!

We'll come back to the issue of submission in a moment, but notice to whom we are to submit.

In verse 13 it says, “to every authority instituted among men.”

And when it next mentions the king and governors, I am tempted to assume these verses have most to do with how we Christians are to relate to government.

With that in mind I was also tempted to turn quickly to Romans 13 where the Apostle Paul speaks more extensively to the Christian's relationship to governing authorities.

But the more I studied the passage, the less convinced I became that our relationship to government was the primary issue here.

The phrase, “to every authority instituted among men” can just as accurately be translated, “to every human creature.”

Certainly that includes those in authority over us, such as those mentioned in the text, but even in these verses the principle is applied more broadly than that.

The “foolish men” of verse 15 undoubtedly applies to more than just government leaders.

And in verse 17, the principle is definitely applied across the board when Peter writes, “Show proper respect to everyone...”

Paul does the same thing in Ephesians 5:21 where he writes, “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”

Then, as Peter does later in his letter, Paul goes on to speak of several relationships: marriage, parenting and servants/bosses.

But the principle is submission, a deferring, and a concern for others ahead of us, that is to be applied to “everyone” which obviously includes those in authority, but doesn’t stop there.

The parallel to our 1 Peter 2 text then is not Romans 13 but Philippians 2:3-4 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

And so Peter says, “Submit!”

I can’t think of anything that runs more against the grain of our human spirit than submission.

When we talk about money we are reminded that the most effective antidote to greed is generosity.

Nothing lays an ax to the root of greed better than giving money away.

In the same way the most effective antidote to self-centeredness is submission.

To both survive and thrive in the midst of a hostile culture, Peter knows that believers must have an attitude and a conduct of submission to others.

From other passages of Scripture, we know this doesn’t mean absolute submission under all circumstances, so I won’t take the time to show you that; is too apparent to need argument.

Instead this submission is a disposition; it's an attitude, which is to affect every relationship we have.

What does it mean to submit to others?

Listen to several other bible passages:

Mark 10:42-44 "Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all."

Romans 15:1-2 "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

And then the verses we saw earlier: Philippians 2:3-4 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

This submission is deference toward others, a respect for them, and a willingness to be inconvenienced for their sake.

Out of respect for the other, we place ourselves below him or her in ways that are appropriate to the relationship whether it is to God, to government, to a boss, to a spouse, to a teacher or to a peer. (I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, 84)

Why? Why should we submit to others?

Peter gives us two reasons:

First of all, "for the Lord's sake."

Jesus is the primary reason we submit to others.

Submission is first of all an attitude rendered to the Lord by rendering it to others.

We are called to be like him as it says in Philippians 2:5-7, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be

grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...”

Our natural inclination is to control, not submit.

But Jesus said in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

Submitting to others “for the Lord’s sake” means we will treat people as Jesus would.

When Paul described his relationship to those around him, this is what he said in 2 Corinthians 6:4-9 (listen both to the attitude and the actions): “as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance... in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; (regardless of how they are received) through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown...”

This submission is the practical side of love for others.

It is the way love is demonstrated.

John 13:34 “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

The disciple of Jesus is one who has made a simple decision; not an easy decision but a simple one.

Jesus said, “Follow me, do what I do, in my way,” and we decide to do so or not.

If we say we will follow him, we are no longer our own bosses. We don’t do our own thing. We have given ourselves to the Master and we leave “self” behind.

(Elizabeth Elliot, *Discipline, the Glad Surrender*, 24-25)

Later Peter will write, “Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.”

“Christian freedom rests not on escape from service but on a change of master.” (Selwyn in Karen Jobes, *1 Peter*, 177)

We love to think of following Jesus in some great cause but most of what following Jesus means has to do with choices in the mundane of the daily.

Elizabeth Elliot tells the story of a couple that had been married only a week or two when the wife went out shopping.

The husband wondered what he might do for her while she was gone that would please her and show how much he loved her.

A brilliant plan came to mind.

He got down on his hands and knees and scrubbed the kitchen floor.

It was a demeaning task in his opinion, and he felt exceedingly humble while performing it.

How amazed his wife would be.

He waited in eager anticipation of her return, thinking how blessed it is to give.

She drove in the driveway, breezed into the kitchen, set the groceries on the counter, and glanced at the floor.

“Oh – the floor’s clean. Thank you honey,” was all she said and went about putting things away.

The man said he went into a three-day funk.

He was hurt; he was insulted; he was not properly appreciated; and the blessing of giving drained out in an instant because he had not received the kind of thanks he had expected.

(Elizabeth Elliot, *Discipline, the Glad Surrender*, 31)

That husband didn’t scrub the floor out of true deference/submission, he did it as a way to earn something for himself (his wife’s praise).

And he certainly didn’t do it unto the Lord – his own self-centered reaction proved that.

Deference to others is first of all out of deference to the Lord.

“Submit yourselves **for the Lord's sake...**”

“Your attitude should be the same **as that of Christ Jesus...**”

But Peter also gives us another reason for submitting to others:

1 Peter 2:15 “For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.”

This reminds me of what Peter wrote just a couple of verses earlier in 1 Peter 2:12 “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

In both verses God says do good to others.

But it's more than that; he says to do good even to others **who slander us.**

Maybe not until Jesus comes again, but sooner or later, your good toward others will prove their “ignorant talk,” their “accusations,” wrong, to the glory of God.

Peter is writing to people whose government, whose bosses and, maybe most hurtful of all, whose family members see them as odd at best and as dangerous at worst.

And in their ignorance of the truth about God, they think and say all kinds of things about them.

Slander is the most insidious form of persecution.

Twice in this past week I've been with people who are being slandered.

One was in the context of a family the other in the context of a business.

In both cases very incorrect, insulting, even damaging things have been said to others in the family or organization; said not to strangers who don't matter but to relatives and friends who do matter.

The great desire is to set the record straight, to dispel the rumors, to have their day in court and to let everyone know what really happened.

The felt need is to chase every insult, every misrepresentation, and every error of fact to chastise the teller and correctly inform the hearers.

We want our reputation back.

But it will not happen in that way.

It is unusual for the facts to have much impact after an impression is given.

Only observation over time will change people's perceptions.

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

Galatians 5:19-23 "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious (whether from those who slander us or ours in reaction): ...hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition... But (we are called to something higher) the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control."

Let me attempt to illustrate this from an on-going situation.

Mike became a Christian in his late teens.

He loved his family and wanted them to know the Jesus who had saved him.

His mother and sisters weren't hostile but they were indifferent to the gospel.

Mike finished college, moved to Colorado and married my daughter Kimberly.

Mike has good contact with his family and they have visited back and forth.

Even though Mike and Kim have been very careful about what they say, over the years there has been a growing sense that his family resents Mike's Christianity.

In a recent conversation that resentment was revealed.

Mike's mother said that one of Mike's sisters feels judged by Mike for her lifestyle even though Mike loves her, is proud of her in every other way, and has spent much time with her never discussing her lifestyle.

It was reported to Mike that his brother-in-law has no desire to visit Mike and Kim in Colorado because Christianity pervades every part of Mike and Kim's lives.

In his family's mind Evangelical Christianity, represented in their words by the Ted Haggards and Jimmy Swaggarts of this world, is religion at its worst – worse, they say, than Islam or Buddhism.

When Mike and Kim ask if they have ever said or done anything that expresses judgment or superiority, the answer is “no.”

When asked if while vacationing, playing and being together Mike has obnoxiously brought up Christianity, the answer was “no, but we know you are one of **those Christians!**”

What do you do with that?

They are guilty by association; their motives are misrepresented, their actions are misjudged and nothing they say can dissuade.

If they didn't love their family, they'd be tempted to walk away.

What does God say, 1 Peter 2:15 “For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone...”

As I said earlier, this verse and verse 12 don't guarantee that our good conduct toward others will yield fruit as soon as we'd like, but it does say it is the way of Christ.

We **don't** give up, we don't walk away, we keep reaching out, not with words but with lives that do good to them.

And this “good” is not just private morality but is active good toward those who least expect it.

It is very difficult to reach out to those who don't reciprocate or worse yet to those who misjudge us.

But it seems to me that is where "submitting...for the Lord's sake" comes in.

Or as Peter otherwise said it, "live as servants of God."

A very simple question to be asked in each planned or unplanned encounter: What is God's loving interest in this person right now?

What can I do to show that love to him or her right now?

Oswald Chambers wrote that God tells us to "Identify ourselves with God's interest in other people, don't try to identify God with our interest (or disinterest) in other people."

I want to end where I began with the issue of our own self-centeredness.

To put others first, to submit or defer to the interests of others means I must, to use the words of the Bible, "put to death" my own self-love.

Listen to the prayer of John Wesley in this regard.

Maybe make it your own as you think of submitting to others.

"Above all, deliver me, O my God, from all idolatrous self-love. I know, O God, that this is the root of all evil. I know you made me to serve not my will but yours. I know that the very essence of the devil is having a will contrary to yours. Help me against this most dangerous of all idols. Enable me to feel the full evil of my sin and sinfulness and then let me be fully content when all others think of me as I do of myself.

"O Lamb of God, who both by your example and teaching instructed us to be humble, give me grace this day and throughout my whole life, in every thought, word and action, to imitate your humble ways. Help me understand that I am nothing and have nothing and that I deserve nothing but misery and punishment. Grant it Lord that I may look for nothing and claim nothing and that I may go through life not seeking my own glory but only yours.

“Let me never speak any word that may tend to my own praise unless the good of my neighbor requires it; and even then let me beware, lest to heal another I wound my own soul. Let my ears and my heart be shut to the praise that comes from others. Give me a dread of applause in whatever form and from whatever tongue it comes.

“O Jesus, who was despised and rejected by men, when I am slighted by my friends, disdained by my superiors, ridiculed by my peers or contemptuously treated by my inferiors, let me know that it is only then that I begin to be your disciple, following in your steps. Let me thankfully accept, and faithfully use such occasions for the improving of a humble attitude.” John Wesley (A Collection of Forms of Prayer 1733)

1 Peter 2:13-17 “Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.”