



Good morning everyone. I'm McKenna Mitchell and I am the Preteen Director here at CPCN and I have the privilege of being with you this morning.

Sameh is one of my close friends and I thought it was important for us to hear at least a snippet of his story because his story is what our passage this morning is all about [*faithstory video of Sameh shown at beginning of service*]. He has experienced more persecution because of his love for Jesus than most of us probably ever will, and his experiences in prison show us the value of **submission**.

Today we are going to talk about the "S" word. Now, this word makes some of us very uncomfortable, both as Americans and as Christians. When we hear or think about this "S" word, we cringe a little bit because in our heads this word has definitions we don't like: oppression, complacency, weakness, being a doormat, or dehumanization. For that reason, the word **submit** carries with it a lot of baggage. Because of this tainted understanding a lot of us have, when we come to passages like the one we are going to look at in 1 Peter, we tend to skim over them because they make us uncomfortable. And like Sameh, when he first became a follower of Jesus, the message can leave us intimidated and sometimes even angry because it rubs so strongly against our pride.

But what if we've got the word submit all wrong? What if the kind of submission Peter is going to challenge us with today has nothing to do with the baggage we have accumulated? I am going to challenge us to spread out our tainted understanding of submission before Jesus and let him inform a new definition. Because the kind of submission Peter is talking about here is not what we think it is. It is not what the world has told us it is. It's not even what some Christians have told us it is. Just like everything related to the good news of Jesus, submission isn't just about our behavior; it's about the posture of our hearts. As God's children, as exiles in this world, we are to have a heart posture of submission. Today, we are going to talk about who we are supposed to submit to, what that looks like, and why it's so important. Let's look at 1 Peter 2:13–14.

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, 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.

The word submit in the original language of the NT was actually a military term. It had to do with troops "coming under" the authority of a commander of their regiment or army. Good soldiers fall in line under those leading them. And Peter says we are to fall in line under or submit to all human authority. Let's remember for a second who Peter was writing to here. The Christians receiving this letter who were living under the reign of Nero would have started to see the signs that persecution was coming, and it was coming fast. Not only that, but the accusations that were flying around about Christians at the time made them look not only insane, but also immoral. I mean, drinking the blood and eating the body of a dead man (what we call the Lord's Supper)? That's cannibalism. Calling your spouse your brother or sister in Christ? That's incest. The rich dining and communing with the poor? That could destroy social customs. Fidelity in marriage? Men weren't made that way. Christians were not popular and spreading false understanding about who they were was easy.

But in the midst of this fear of persecution and slander, Peter still says, submit under all human authority. To those first receiving this letter, that looked like submitting to their governors and their emperor—which was a tall order considering Nero, an egomaniac, was their emperor. Peter knew that those reading his letter would end up having to submit to authority they didn't agree with and who did not have their best interest in mind. But he wanted his readers to know the way we interact with those in authority over us matters.

Why? Because not one person in authority over us is in their position outside of God's complete, sovereign control. Your boss who seems to always undercut you, your professor who you are convinced hates you, your supervisor who seems to be afraid you are going to take their job, the board of the school district that makes decisions that never seem to benefit the school your kid goes to, even the President of the United States, former or current who you don't agree with... we are called to submit out of our honor for their position which was allowed by the hand of God. Children of God live with a heart posture of submission and submit to all human authority.

Some of you—maybe all of you—are cringing in your seats right now and I love it! If you're like me, you are asking a million questions. You're asking questions like, What about civil disobedience? What about when the people in authority over us are just plain evil? What about rulers like Hitler or Bin Laden or Stalin?

What about when our bosses ask us to do something like cook the books or lie to customers? What about when we don't agree with the laws and statements and religions and lifestyles of those who have authority over us? What then, Peter? Submission isn't just hard. In these instances it sounds like it stands completely opposed to everything that Jesus stood for!

If this was the only verse we had from this letter, that would seem true. Submission would seem almost robotic. We'd have this, "put your head down and get it done" mentality about life. But Jesus didn't save us to tame us. No, mindlessly submitting to our authorities is not what Peter is asking; it's a choice we get to make for the Lord. We choose to submit to authorities and Peter lays out what that looks like in verses 15–16.

For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.

What does a heart postured in submission look like? Peter tells us three things.

A Heart Postured in Submission Does Good

Peter says our submission should look like doing good. Not speaking, not clicking, not typing, but doing good. We live in a country where we are beyond blessed to be able to not only have our own opinions, but to be able to speak them freely. It's great to have opinions, it's even better to have opinions rooted in the truth and person of Jesus. But Peter isn't asking us to have opinions about what is good here. He is asking us to **do** good. We live in an age where Facebook and Twitter, blogs and news articles, petitions and protests practically hand us bullhorns to shout our opinions hoping somehow our voice will be louder than all the other bullhorns competing for attention. I don't know that adding to the noise with our words is going to change anyone's opinion, and I really don't think that our words change hearts the way we think they do. It doesn't take long on social media for well-intentioned words to become cyber shouting matches—especially between Christians—and we end up looking more like the foolish ones spouting ignorant talk than followers of Jesus.

Submission the way Peter is talking here looks like talking less and doing more. We need to put ourselves in places where we are uncomfortable, where we have opportunities to love people who look and act and think and believe differently than we do because Jesus loves them too. I think it's really easy when we start to believe we are exiles in this world to also start believing we are somehow above the rest of the world, not set apart, but set above. That is not the way of Jesus. Sometimes loving well means being brave enough to submit our "right" opinions and instead show someone the Gospel by our actions.

I was talking to a high school student recently who is having a hard time with church and wrestling with her faith in Jesus. We

were talking about justice, and some of the issues that are on the forefront of everyone's minds right now came up and I said something like, "Jesus cares about injustice because God is the author of justice." You know what she said to me? She said, "Well then, McKenna, where are the Christians?" My heart broke. I know that there are Christians who are quietly and faithfully showing up where they are called and doing tremendous good, and the world doesn't notice because they don't ask for bullhorns to shout their opinions. But all I could say in that moment was, "I am so sorry it seems like Christians don't care."

Not only are there not many followers of Jesus in the Bay Area, people think we are hypocrites, we are hateful, and we are all talk. And much like the Christians Peter was writing to, where all kinds of misunderstanding influenced the way people thought about Christians, we have the same problem. Christians are always going to be misunderstood; we just have to do our best to not give the world reason to believe the things they say about us! We defend ourselves way too quickly. Right now, I think the U.S. has a picture of Jesus that is painted by our absence and our defensive words.

But what if we painted a different picture? What if the picture of our church the community had was made up of individuals that not only practiced what they preached, but who let their practice preach? What if a mayor we don't agree with got respected, appreciated and listened to so well by followers of Jesus that the community noticed? What if our bosses heard us speaking well of them even after they embarrassed us in a meeting? What if we partnered with local government officials on opposite sides of our political aisle to help with projects where we had common ground? What if we submit to those in authority over us not because we agreed with them but because they too are made in the image of God? What if we did so much good people who would have normally scoffed at us actually realized they needed us... and maybe that they really needed Jesus? A heart postured in submission looks like that. It does so much good the world notices.

A Heart Postured in Submission is Free

A couple of years ago I was at the Westfield Mall with a friend in that epic food court they have below Bloomingdales. I had just finished eating lunch and the tremendous task of throwing away my garbage came up. Has anyone besides me noticed that now there are a zillion different garbage containers to put things in? You have your compost and your garbage (which is labeled litter and it makes you feel so bad if you have to put anything in that) and recycling, and then there are things that get reused. I just get confused and then I think people are watching me mess up the cans and judging me from a distance as "that girl" who doesn't care about the environment and is going to kill future generations because she put her spoon that looked plastic but was actually made of potato in the recycling instead of the compost!

Well, on this day I was with my friend and the struggle I was having figuring out where to put all of my waste showed. Almost flippantly she said, "Oh gosh McKenna, everything makes you feel so guilty." I laughed for a second but on the inside I realized someone who didn't know Jesus had just pointed out to me a bigger problem. I think a lot of us live our lives trying to submit to those in authority over us the way I was trying to sort my garbage. We make moves based on what we think is right but the struggle and the guilt that comes along with every move plagues us and that actually keeps us from Jesus. For a lot of us, doing what other people want isn't that hard because if it makes people happy, it's almost a guarantee it will make us happy too.

That's me. I'm a recovering people-pleaser. People-pleasing can mask itself as kindness or strength of character. People-pleasers sometimes are even willing to disobey God if they think it's going to make people happy. And while this looks like submission to the untrained eye, this is **not** the kind of submission Peter is asking for from believers. Why? Because it's based entirely on what people think of us and not on what we know to be true about who God is. Again, we're not robots to those in authority over us.

Choosing submission looks like freedom and never like guilt. We have freedom from other's expectations, freedom from our own disappointment with ourselves, freedom from guilt. We don't have to run around terrified something we do is going to step on their toes. We choose to submit to authorities not because we want to please them but because we want to please God!

We have nothing to fear when it comes to our bosses, our teachers, our governors, our presidents, our dictators... why? Because God is their authority just like he is ours. That's why we are honest with our taxes, not because we are afraid we're going to get audited, but because God is our authority and we give to Caesar what is Caesar's. That's why we obey the speed limit (preaching to myself right here), not because we are afraid of tickets, but because God is sovereign over our time. That's why we hire people legally and pay fair wages, not because we are afraid our companies will suffer if we don't, but because we believe in the dignity of every human because God made each person and loves them infinitely. We submit in freedom, not in fear or because we want to people-please. We submit in freedom because we have the God of all strength empowering us at every moment to live a life that is honoring to him. A heart postured in submission is free.

Peter goes on in verse 16 and says we are not to let this freedom that we have make us think we can do whatever we want because we are to live as God's slaves. A heart postured in submission knows its master. The word slave is about as popular as the word submit but what I love about this image of enslaving ourselves to God is the way Peter is suggesting it happens.

There is choice. God never forces his hand on us. He doesn't cage us. We choose every day for him to be our master. When I lived in Santa Barbara there was this man who walked around all the time with a parrot on his shoulder. I always thought the bird either had its wings clipped or there was some string connecting him to the man. But no, neither was true. The bird just stayed with him. I always thought it was weird. What kept the bird on this guy's shoulder? There were tons of other great shoulders in Santa Barbara and if I was that man, I'd be afraid the bird was going to pick someone else to go perch on! There were even flocks of wild parrots his friend could have flown off to join. But even though the parrot had a choice to leave at any time, it knew its master. It knew its master's hand and provision and chose him.

The truth is, every human is enslaved to something and we all get to choose what masters us. The people who think they live without anyone or anything enslaving them are the most deceived of all. Jesus is the only master who doesn't bind us to him by force. We always have a choice. Things like pride, money, vanity, addictions, ideologies, rulers of all kinds—things that seem powerful—claim authority over our minds and our hearts even when we want out, but God in his authority loves us enough to always give us the choice. And the longer we stay with him, the more we realize we don't want to go anywhere else.

I love what Sameh had to say in the video about the moment when the prison guards, those in authority over him, said they were going to kill him if he didn't submit to their wishes. The respectful way he responded to the prison guard really showed his heart posture. Would he choose to listen to the prison attendant and his threats of death, or would he choose to listen to God? Sameh said, "Absolutely I will listen to my God." Sameh knew his master and rather than let himself be enslaved to fear he chose to submit to the one who was really in authority over him. He was willing to accept the consequences from his earthly authorities because his heart was postured in submission to God, the true authority.

A Heart Postured in Submission Does Good, is Free and Knows Its Master

Peter goes on to say "show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God" **and** "honor the emperor." A few of those commands seem pretty simple to me. It makes sense to love the family of believers; they're on your side, after all. It might be hard when personalities or theologies collide, but you have to keep your team united! And fearing God? Well, we've already talked about how he is everyone's true authority so if we fear him we don't have to fear anything else. It's not always easy, but it makes sense. It's those two commands sandwiching what seem to be the givens, though—"show respect to everyone" and "honor the emperor"—those are hard, especially when everyone is pitted against you and the emperor (or any authority) doesn't

have anything close to your best interest in mind. Peter knew that, and I think that's why he listed all four of them together; no command in that list is more important than the other.

But that still begs the question, Why? Why should we submit to authority, especially authority pitted against us? The Bible is full of examples of people who showed proper respect to everyone and honored the emperor for the Lord's sake. Joseph honored everyone who was put in authority over him even when they mistreated him and though he suffered, he ended up second to Pharaoh in Egypt and saved the nation from famine (his story is found in the book of Genesis). David, who had been anointed King of Israel, submitted to King Saul even when he had grounds to kill him because power wasn't something David would take by force (you can read about him in the OT book of 1 and 2 Samuel). Daniel submitted to the powers in Babylonian court, but refused to throw out Hebrew food laws or worship idols. God sustained him in ways that ended up changing the hearts of a Babylonian and a Persian King (another OT book with his name on it). Esther submitted to the customs of Persia and was willing to endanger her life in the hopes she could save her people. King Xerxes listened to her and the Jews were saved from a massacre (she too has an OT book with her name on it). There are dozens and dozens of examples throughout scripture that show what God can do with seemingly little acts done from a heart postured in submission.

But you know the real why? You know the real reason why our hearts should be postured in submission? Because Jesus didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped, but instead chose to be born into the world he made so we could be reborn into his family. Jesus chose to live under the laws he wrote and the laws of Rome so we could live free from condemnation. Jesus washed the feet of the men he led—even the feet of the man who betrayed him—so we could live by that example. Jesus chose to submit to the authorities and people that called out unjustly, "Crucify him!" so one day we would know how much he loves us. That is the Gospel. It is a picture of the heart of God submitted to authorities in ways the world doesn't understand. Jesus didn't assert his rights or his dominance or his power. He

gave them up and in doing so he picked up weapons that change hearts and transform nations.

Now, as followers of Jesus, we can too. When we allow God to put our hearts in a posture of submission, our weapons change. We don't have to defend ourselves with slander and gossip, or pick fights for our honor. We don't hate. We don't divide. We don't set ourselves above anyone else. Those are the weapons of the world and we are not people of the world; we are exiles. Instead, when we submit to all human authority, we pick up the vestments of hope, peace, kindness, patience, compassion, gentleness. Those are our new weapons that produce real, lasting and eternal power.

I've been thinking a lot the past week about a story I heard recently. This pastor was walking through the Tate Modern Art Museum in London and as he was walking, he glanced at this painting that was blue and copper, modern art you look at and think, "that's nice" and move on. The group behind him stopped at the blue and copper painting and lingered. He couldn't figure out what they were looking at; they were in awe of this painting. And as he watched the people watching the painting, he got jealous that they could see something he couldn't. What if we were a community of followers of Jesus who were so in awe of him, and had our gaze fixed so directly on him, that the people around us got jealous of what we could see that they couldn't? What if the posture of our hearts reflected the awe we had because of what Jesus did on the cross for us? What if we put down the weapons the world clings to and instead did good, lived free and knew our master?

Submission isn't what the world tells us it is. People will tell us submission is weakness but our submission gives those same people a chance to glance at the greatest power the world will ever know: Love. And love has a name: Jesus Christ.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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