

I PETER

True Freedom In Servitude To God

March 03, 2013

- I. Be Holy In All Your Behavior With A Holiness Like God's Holiness
 - A. **I Peter 2:13-17** . . . Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, [14] or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. [15] For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. [16] Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. [17] Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.
 - B. Pray
- II. Keeping Our Behavior Excellent – True freedom and humble submission
 - A. **I Peter 2:16** . . . Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.
 - B. **Act as free people** is a simple enough statement, but what do you suppose it really means?
 - 1. To help us discern what God is telling us, I think we should begin by putting this statement in its context. God says to act as free people within the context of His exhortation to humbly submit to every human institution, which is made within the larger context of keeping our behavior excellent before unbelievers in order to influence them toward glorifying God, which is made within the overall context of being holy in all our behavior just as God is holy.
 - a. In other words, acting as free people is a part of humbly submitting to every human institution for the purpose of influencing unbelievers toward glorifying God because of our godly behavior.
 - b. This means humble submission – which doesn't sound like freedom, and acting as free people are not in opposition to each other or a contradiction of each other. Rather, they are two equal manifestations of godly behavior in front of unbelievers.
 - 2. Now that we have the context, I think the next important thing is to discern what God means when He uses the word "**act**," because understanding how it is being used will help us make good progress in understanding what God is telling us.

- a. One of the meanings of the word “**act**” is **behaving in a certain way**. Used in this way it means that since we are free, we are to behave as free people.
 - b. A second meaning of the word “**act**” is to **play a role**, like an actor or actress. When used in this way, it means we are to act different from what we are. In other words, we are to act **as if** we are free even though we are not free.
- C. So which is it? Are we to behave according to the freedom we have as children of God, or are we to act as if we are free people? I believe the answer is both. Let me explain by showing you how both definitions of this word “**act**” are included in the way God uses it here.
1. **First**, it is true that as Christians we are free when it comes to earthly authority. Of course, this freedom does not mean we are no longer required to humbly submit to those in authority over us, because the requirement to submit comes from God – who is our supreme authority.
 - a. So yes, in relation to human government, we are free to obey or disobey. And yet we are not free to disobey earthly authority when God requires us to obey.
 - b. The point here is that as Christians, no earthly authority holds absolute dominion, or even a priority dominion over us such that we must obey them on pain of losing our life – which is the ultimate punishment.
 - c. Now you may be thinking that governments have been putting their citizens to death for centuries.
 - (1) Yes, that is true, but no earthly authority has the power to take away your eternal life. Only God can do that!
 - (2) Jesus made this very clearly when He said to His disciples: “I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. [5] But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed [the earthly body], has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him” (**Luke 12:4-5**).
 - (3) The point here is that only God has absolute power of life and death – eternally speaking. Therefore, what earthly governments can take from us is insignificant in comparison with the profound value of eternal life.
 - d. Now as Christians, God is our supreme authority. Therefore, **whoever we submit to other than God, we submit to**

because of God. In other words, we are free people in regard to all earthly authority and every human institution.

- e. Therefore, God is exhorting us **to behave like the free people we are.** As free people, we are not to fear earthly authority in any way that prevents us from doing what God says is right. As free people, we are not to give allegiance to any other authority in any way that compromises or transcends our allegiance to God. As free people, we owe earthly authority nothing more than what God and godly love requires of us.

2. The **second** definition of “**act**” acknowledges that we have a form of freedom, but in reality, no one is totally or absolutely free, and neither are Christians.

- a. For example, whatever freedom Christians have in relation to earthly government, we are still restrained by the rule of God over us. After all, God is the one commanding us to humbly submit to every human institution. And in **Romans 13:8**, God commands us to pay our debt of love to all people everywhere.
 - (1) In other words, our freedom as Christians is only a form of freedom, it is not absolute freedom.
 - (2) Therefore, though we have the freedom and the right to disobey an earthly authority, we do not have the freedom or the right to disobey God. Therefore, we can only disobey earthly authority where God gives us the right to disobey.
- b. However, the reality is, no one has absolute freedom. Some may have more freedom than others, but even the most powerful dictator or the wealthiest person on the earth must answer to God, and probably to other human beings as well. Therefore, his is but a form of freedom, even though it may appear like total freedom when compared to the restraints most of us endure.
- c. And expanding that example a little more, the reality is, we are either slaves of Satan and sin, or we are slaves of God and righteousness. Either way, we are not free to do as we please. Those who have taken steps to put away a sinful habit know how tenacious the devil is in working to keep your old, sinful habit alive. And those who have made changes for God’s sake and then returned to old ways know the discipline of the Lord in calling us back to our senses or judging us if we remain disobedient.

- d. And it does not end there. Whether you are a child or a husband or a wife or a parent or a worker or a business owner or a free spirit bucking the system, you are not totally free to do as you please.
 - e. So what is my point? The word “**act**” is not only used to describe how we ought to behave based on the freedom we have, but it also takes on the meaning of acting as if you had freedom, because no one is absolutely free.
 3. Putting the two meanings together, I believe God is telling us to **behave like** free people we are not afraid of what any earthly authority may threaten to do to us, while at the same time **acting as if we are free** while remembering we are slaves of God and His righteousness.
- D. Returning to verse 16, we read: “Act as free men, **and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.**”
1. Just in case some of us take these words about freedom too far, God adds this limitation. And the limitation is simply this, though we are free of having to give allegiance to earthly governments, we are never free to step outside God’s larger boundaries of right and wrong in our dealings with human institutions – even when we disobey them.
 2. The way Paul says this may add clarity to Peter’s words. **Galatians 5:13-14** . . . For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. [14] For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statements, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
 3. Therefore, whatever freedom God gives us is never to be used to show disrespect, unkindness, ill-will, speak abusively, become hostile, express ungodly anger, take revenge, or anything like that. All our dealings with any authority are to remain within the boundaries of humility and love.
- E. **I Peter 2:17** . . . Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.
1. **Honor all people** –
 - a. The little word “**ALL**” is as important as the word “**HONOR**,” for it sets the boundaries for who we are to honor.

- (1) And who are we to honor? Everyone – be they friend or foe, believer or unbeliever, family member, neighbor, co-worker, grocery store worker, table waiter, or total stranger.
 - (2) And what does honoring them mean? It means showing them respect, and not just marginal respect, but treating them with high regard. In other words, treating them with consideration, thoughtfulness, kindness, and helpfulness.
- b. Here again, Paul speaks to this same issue, and he presses us to the edges of the word “**ALL**” when he says: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. . . Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. . . If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. . . If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink” (**Romans 12:14-20**).
 - c. For us Christians, showing respect on this grand scale is one of the practical ways we keep our behavior excellent among unbelievers, which in turn, brings honor to God.

2. **Love the brotherhood –**

- a. To love the brotherhood is to love those who are members of the Body of Christ, here where we meet, in our city, and around the world. And let me remind you that to love someone is to seek their good.
- b. Paul said that this love for the brotherhood should compel us to “be devoted to one another in brotherly love; and to give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, and doing it as service unto the Lord” (**Romans 12:10-11**).
- c. The writer of Hebrews said our love for one another ought to compel us to be on guard so that no one in the church returns to having an evil, unbelieving heart. And so we are to encourage one another toward godly living, day by day (**Hebrews 3:12-13**).
- d. Paul says we love the brotherhood by restoring anyone among us who is caught sinning. He goes on to say that we are to bear one another’s burdens as an act of love (**Galatians 6:1-2**).
- e. Jesus said that this love for one another is a distinguishing mark of belonging to Him that can be seen and understood by unbelievers. (NOTE: **John 13:35** . . . By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.)

- f. The point here is that loving the brotherhood is far reaching in that it includes all Christians everywhere, and far reaching in that it requires regular and honest interaction with those near enough to interact with.

3. **Fear God –**

- a. In our day, the fear of God has fallen on hard times. Where once it was held by God's people to be the beginning of wisdom and a foundation for godly living, it is now deemed by too many in the church to be a distortion of God's true nature – which is love – and to be a cause of psychological dysfunction, a catalyst for emotional upheaval, and a major reason for low self-esteem among struggling Christians. Even worldly psychologists and counselors have spoken against this teaching as damaging to people's mental health.
- b. And yet, scripture says the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (**Psalms 111:10**), the fountain of life (**Proverbs 14:27**), a treasure of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge (**Isaiah 33:6**), the hatred of evil (**Proverbs 8:13**), motivation to say no to sin (**Exodus 20:20**) and a driver behind the pursuit of perfect holiness (**II Corinthians 7:1**).
- c. The fear of the Lord is commanded by God (**Deuteronomy 10:12, 13:4**). It is a recognition of God's holiness (**Revelation 15:4**) and an acknowledgment of His goodness (**I Samuel 12:24**). It is a natural response to studying and applying the scriptures (**Proverbs 2:3-5**). It is an inherent part of worship (**Psalms 5:7**) and it brings the favor (**Psalms 147:11**), compassion (**Psalms 103:13**), and mercy of the Lord (**Psalms 103:17**).
- d. The fear of the Lord goes beyond what I have just said, but for the sake of time, let me put it into an analogy.
 - (1) The wise person fears gravity and packs a parachute when jumping from a plane, whereas the fool thinks he can defy gravity. The wise person fears HIV and takes appropriate precautions, while the fool thinks he is somehow immune to its attack and behaves carelessly. The wise person fears meningitis, and when he finds he has symptoms he seeks its cure immediately. The fool pays no attention to the signs of meningitis and suffers the consequences.
 - (2) So it is with God. The wise person fears God and acts accordingly. It is only the fool who thinks he is somehow

immune to God's presence, power, rule, and judgment, and so it is the fool who behaves as if there is no God.

- e. The fear of God is wise. The fear of man, in any way that neglects or discards the fear of God, is as foolish as laughing in God's face. May we be those who fear God in all areas of life.

4. **Honor the king** –

- a. This is an interesting conclusion to these four statements, because Peter began with "Honor all people." He then moves to loving all Christians and fearing God. In this final statement, he returns to this matter of honor and applies it to those in the highest positions of authority.
- b. In other words, though we owe the debt of love to all people, we are not directed to love the king like we love our brothers and sisters in Christ. And we are not told to fear the king like we are told to fear God.
- c. Rather, we are told to give the king the same respect we are to give all people everywhere – which makes it clear that the king is neither above God nor the brotherhood of believers. In other words, God – whom we are to fear, and the brotherhood of believers – whom we are to love, take precedent over the king and over unbelievers when it comes to allegiance and humble submission
- d. Which brings us full circle to the truth that we are free people, free from owing the king allegiance and submission from a human perspective. Our duty, our allegiance, our obligation is to God, and it is out of this that we humbly submit to every human institution.

III. Conclusion

A. One final truth in relation to freedom

- 1. We are never freer than when we are slaves of God through Jesus Christ. Now you may think this is nonsense since a slave is not free. But think carefully about what I am about to say.
- 2. In Christ, we are free from eternal death, servitude to Satan, bondage to sin, the tyranny of our passions, destabilizing emotional swings, irrational fear, ungodly fears, and overpowering temptation, just to name a few things.

B. Therefore, act as free people – for we owe no allegiance and have no obligation to submit to these things. We belong to God – who has made us free!