

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- 1 Peter 2:13-25
Sunday, May 7, 2017

Submission

1. When I was in college, I was a volunteer youth leader at a Presbyterian Church with a very large youth group. I had a small group, that started as seventh graders, but that I walked with all the way through their graduation. I developed very strong relationships with three boys- Randy, Paul, and Phil.
2. Every Monday for several years they would come to my house and we would watch wrestling. My mom would cook a 90-bag of Totino's pizza rolls, we would drink a twelve pack of Surge, and we would eat a big round carton of gummy worms. Every Monday would end with four stomachaches, and the plan to do the same the next week.
3. We each had our favorite wrestlers with our favorite moves, etc. Two of my favorites were Bret Hart and his Sharpshooter submission hold, and Lex Luger and his Torture Rack hold. Countless Mondays, stomach sloshing and churning the ambrosial mixture of Surge and gummy worms, saw at least one of those youths falling prey to such a submission move one the floor of my parents' basement.
4. Sadly, that is the imagery most people have when they hear the term "submission." The word brings together ideas of being dominated, subjugated, or forced, against one's will, into doing things they hate.
5. At its worst, this view of submission can certainly be true. Thus, the phrase, "Beat into submission." I don't believe this is the way God intends us to understand the concept. At its best, submission is a natural part of all relationships that involve authority. This includes marriages, our relationships to our children, our bosses at work, and our relationship to the governing authorities. It also includes the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity.
 - a. There are three persons within the one God. There is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are co-equal and co-eternal. Yet there is an authority structure in the relationship. The Son and the Spirit are submissive to the will of the Father. They share a will. There is no fighting between them. But Jesus tells us plainly that he does what the Father has told him. Likewise, he tells us that the Father will send the Holy Spirit after his own ascension to heaven. The Son and the Spirit go and do what the Father wills. The Father does not go and do what the Son or the Spirit will.
6. So, let that be the example of what submission looks like within a relationship. It is obedience, and it is often a joyful, if difficult, fulfillment of what one in authority over us wills.
7. The phrase we have here in 1 Peter 2 is "be subject to." This is just another way of saying to submit. Be subject to every human institution. Peter says that it is the will of God that we be in submission to such authorities, and that we use our freedom to be servants- those in submission to God.
8. This is certainly a challenge. We are called to submit to the authorities, and Peter even included the Emperor, who was not a good or godly man. So what is this about?

Holiness

1. It is about holiness. One of the major problems we have as Americans- and really as post-Enlightenment Westerners- is an inflated sense of self. So much of the bible is about dying to self, giving up self, submitting, putting others first, making yourself last. Yet the American way has become, "Look out for number 1." This started as looking out for country, looking out for family, but quickly became looking out for self. The divorce rate and the existence of websites that help you cheat on your spouse attest to the fact that we have become consumed with self.
2. Of course, the pursuit of self is the opposite of the call of the scriptures. It is idolatry. But our first instinct when we hear that we must submit to our government is to think about all of the political policies we disagree with. When wives hear that they should submit to their husbands, they hear that they are second class citizens. When people within the Church hear that they are to submit to the authority within the Church, they start thinking about church-hopping, or question why they need to be a part of a church at all.
3. The Christian life is about the giving up of self. How much clearer could it be than the call to be submissive to the Emperor- the same one who ended up killing both of the Apostles who gave that command in the scriptures?
4. However, the call is to holiness. Submission has its limits. We are to submit, first and foremost, to God. What do we do if the government to whom we are called to submit demands ungodliness from us? We submit to the higher authority, which is God. We know this from the scriptures as well.
 - a. Peter wrote this letter. Peter is the one telling us to submit to the authorities above us. This same Peter, when commanded by the religious leaders to stop preaching about Jesus, appealed to the higher authority of God, and told them that he would listen to God, not man.
 - b. Christians of the first few centuries understood this to be the case, which is why they went to their deaths instead of obeying the command of their Emperor to bow and worship his image. While they were to obey him, they were not to obey him when it conflicted with obedience to God.
5. The same holds true in other relationships. I am to submit to my bishop, even if I disagree with him, unless he is commanding something that goes against God- as was happening in the Episcopal Church. My wife is to submit to me as the authority in our marriage- not as an authoritarian, but as the head, who in turn, is called to be in submission to God. If I decide to become a Muslim and demand that my family follow suit, my wife has the right- even the responsibility- to be obedient to the higher authority, which is God.
6. In the perfect world, relationships have healthy authority/submission standards- as modeled by the persons of the Trinity. But this isn't always the case. That is why Peter has to tell us to be submissive, because it often goes against our very nature. However, our holiness is at stake. It is important for us to let go of our personal rights so that we can allow the Spirit of God to work within us a personal righteousness. That will only begin when we die to self and submit to God.