

## Series Slide

Last week, we covered rhetorical that question that the prophet Isaiah asked- "Who has known the mind of the LORD"- to which he expected the answer to be "no one". Yet, in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus- the Apostle Paul answers it "We have the Mind of Christ".

And that's what we're aiming at in this short series of messages. Learning how to think like Jesus thinks- and to re-think the way we think through the lens of the Mind of Christ.

Last week we talked about Individualism. This week-lets talk about freedom.

Let's start with some voices from history before we get to the Bible. Here's Plato from his classic work "The Republic"

**"The excess of liberty... seems only to pass into excess of slavery. And so tyranny naturally arises out of democracy, and the most aggravated form of tyranny and slavery out of the most extreme form of liberty.- Plato, *The Republic*"**

Plato says that the more freedom you have, the closer you are to slavery.

**"A good man, though a slave, is free; but a wicked man, though a king is a slave. For he serves, not one man alone, but, what is worse, as many masters as he has vices."- St. Augustine, *City of God***

Augustine here relates freedom not to a social condition, or an economic condition, or even a political condition. Rather, he relates freedom to a moral condition. The more vices, or sins you have, the more masters you have.

**"Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon the will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters."- Edmund Burke, *Letter to a***

### **Member of the National Assembly of France, 1791**

Edmund Burke says this just after the French Revolution. He's trying to correct the idea that Freedom means a lack of restraints. In fact, he says you have to have some sort of ability to tell yourself "no"- if you are truly going to be free. In other words- you aren't really free if you are doing whatever you want. Your passions, your desires actually become chains to you.

**"The first condition of freedom is its limitation.**

**Make it absolute and it dies in chaos."- Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History***

And then the great historians Will and Ariel Durant summarize that idea by saying, True Freedom is BUILT on limitations. Restraints. Without limitation, you will be subject to chaos.

There is a common theme in all of these quotes from ridiculously smart and observant people through history.

**"Freedom" can enslave you.**

And limitations...a controlling power on the will ... can actually set you free.

That's the freedom paradox.

That the first condition of true freedom is that it has limitations.

Ok, so here's my definition.

**Freedom is choosing the restrictions that most agree with our humanity.**

Let me give you an example.

You go to your doctor for an annual visit.

He tells you, "Unless you stop eating all these fatty foods, you are going to die in a year. So here's a strict diet you need to abide by in order to live."

You reply, "Don't limit my freedom! This is tyranny! I don't have the freedom to act! You are imposing all these restrictions on me from the outside!"

That Dr. is going to say, "Well, actually, you are restricted either way. You can have unlimited eating now...and then you'll be restricted to a hospital bed...or a coffin later."

Or, you can restrict your food intake now, and have the freedom to go about your life." So you have the freedom to choose how you are going to be restricted.

In other words, You need to figure out the restrictions that allow you to live as you were intended to live. In God's Image. A human being.

You have to bring your body in line with the way that God built you. And that means restricting what and how much you eat.

Because being alive is more human than being dead.

### **Title Slide- "The Freedom Paradox: How Submission & Suffering Liberates" 1 Peter 2:11-25**

Today, we're going to look at a passage that is so chocked full of the paradox of freedom...its downright controversial.

What I hope you'll find is that your instincts about freedom, the definition you've given the word...probably comes from an idea that the less restrictions you have in your life, the more free you are.

The question is, are you willing not simply to listen to Plato and Augustine and Burke...

...who tell you something COMPLETELY different about freedom...

But are you willing to listen to God...who himself created you and knows how

what it truly means to be a human being. Because he invented the idea.

**1 Peter 2:11-25 (CSB)**

**11 Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul. 12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.**

**13 Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority 14 or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. 15 For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. 16 Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as God's slaves. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor.**

**18 Household slaves, submit to your masters with all reverence not only to the good and gentle ones but also to the cruel. 19 For it brings favor if, because of a consciousness of God, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is there if when you do wrong and are beaten, you endure it? But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God.**

**21 For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth; 23 when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.**

TRANSITION: There are 2 words that come up in the text we just read, that

are probably as far away from our definitions of Freedom as the East is from the West.

Yet, according to Peter here, they go hand in hand WITH Freedom.

Those 2 words are Submission and Suffering.

So, what exactly is Peter saying. And how in the world can he say what he says here about "Slaves submitting to masters" and "Xians honoring an evil emperor."

First, I want to hammer home this philosophical idea of Freedom.

**1) Freedom is not infinite choice or removing authority. It is commitment to the right authority.**

- At the heart of this text is what Peter says in v 16
- **V 16**
- Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a cover up for evil, but as God's slaves.
- BTW, some of your translations may say "Live as free people". Which is not wrong...but its unfortunate because that verb "LIVE is actually not there. In fact, in the original Greek, there is not even a verb there. Its just "As Free people..." The verb that is assumed goes back to v 13...and that verb is "Submit". So in case there is confusion there, this passage is definitely a working out of the idea of submission.
- So lets address 2 common assumptions about Freedom in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.
- The first assumption is that Freedom is defined negatively.
- In other words, Freedom is the LACK of something. Instead of the PRESENCE of something.
- If you look up freedom in the dictionary- it gives a negative

definition.

- Freedom is NOT BEING SUBJECT TO ANYONE.
- Freedom is NOT HAVING RESTRAINTS.
- Freedom is NOT BEING ENSLAVED.
  
- But that's not the way the Bible puts it.
- In fact, that's not even the reality of your life.
  
- You will always be enslaved, or subject to something or someone.
- There will always be something that is ruling your life.
  
- So, you always want to be free...in order to submit yourself to something.
- In order to SERVE something...that will restrict you.

### **Back to 1)**

- College students, let's say when you were in High School, you wanted to be free of your parents' rules about drinking alcohol.
- You wanted to shake off their restraints...SO THAT you could do what you wanted to do with alcohol.
  
- SO you get to college and you make some free choices.
- But to do that, you have to dedicate the money you spend to alcohol. You have to limit yourself to a particular group of friends who will drink with you...you have to say no to hanging going to class on Friday or breakfast with friends on Saturday morning or church on Sunday morning because you are hung over.
- Eventually, Alcohol starts making choices for you.
- You need it earlier in the day. You need it more frequently.
- So you go to class less. You spend less time awake in productive hours. So you lose your scholarship. You don't can't keep a job. And you end up back in the same bedroom you were in in high school
  
- Now, you tell me. Were you ever free from all restraints?
- No. Alcohol was making all your choices for you.

- See, there is no negative freedom. Freedom is not HAVING NO MASTERS. It can't be. Because you always...ALWAYS are serving something.
- Money, career, whatever you picture as "THIS IS LIVING"...that right there...that is what you will be enslaved to.
- The second false assumption we often make is this.
- That the less I commit to something, the more free I am.
- Just give me infinite options- then I'll be happy.
- Take marriage for example.
- Or kids.
- Or, church.
- I don't want to commit myself to marriage, because I want to leave my options open.
- I want to experience the best that relationships have to offer, by being able to date and have sex with anybody at any time.
- Well, you have just committed yourself to an idea that KEEPS you from experiencing intimacy. It keeps you from the deepest experience of love, which is sacrificial commitment.
- In fact, if you look at recent studies of happiness in relationships from a generation that has now grown up with online dating or Tinder- you'll find they are less happy than the generation before with their choices of who to date or marry. Because the infinite options of swiping left or right are always out there haunting them. Reminding them they are a few easy online steps away from finding a person that is better for them than the person they are with currently. It makes commitment THAT much harder.
- Its like standing in the Cereal, or Chip aisle at the Grocery store. There are SO MANY Options- it feels impossible to be really happy with the choice you make- without wondering what could have been- if you just would have tried the Flaming Dill Pickle- or the Habenero BBQ Lime Kettle Cooked instead of the Sour Cream and

Onion bag you picked up.

- Social sciences have long revealed that more options do not make us more free- they actually end up shackling us with regret- and an inability to enjoy what we have.
- Same thing happens with church.
- I don't really want to commit myself to a church, because I want to come and go as I please with no accountability. I want to be able to hear this guy's preaching over here, and then take my kids to that youth ministry over there.
- Or as soon as people start to know my junk at a church, I'm outta here. Off to somewhere I can be anonymous and people will leave me alone.

• **Did I mention today is the last day to sign up for the weekender?**

- Don't you see? in your lack of commitment, you are actually being restricted from the deepest and most important connection that there is to church.
- It's the love that happens when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death with people.
- It's the beauty that happens when people know you at your worst, and still look you in the eye and say "I love you."
- It's knowing that you have people that are committed to your well being and maturity.
- But you lose all of that. You restrict yourself from it, when you try to "keep your options open"
- Human beings basically need 3 higher level things to be happy- fulfilled. So lower level things are like food, water, shelter, sleep.
- **Humans need Freedom, Purpose, & Relationships.**
- Think about these as three buckets. And you only have so much water to pour into each one. My diagnosis of the current condition



of the Western world- is that we have dumped nearly all everything we have into the Freedom bucket- to the point its overflowing. And we only a few drops to commit to pupose- making our lives ABOUT something- and relationships- making our lives WITH people.

- Because listen- Purpose and Relationships REQUIRE you to lose some of your freedom. If my purpose is to get a PhD- or to be a Pacifist. I lose the freedom of making choices that act counter to that- like watching a lot of TV on the weekends- or becoming an MMA fighter.
- And you all know how relationships work. Just being in any sort of relationship requires you to think about someone else. If you want to eat at any restaurant you want everytime you go out- there's only one way to do that- always go alone. Because being in any sort of relationship always demands some sort of compromise- doing something you don't WANT to do in order to do something that someone else does.

### **Back to 1)**

- On a bigger level- think politically.
- Both the left and the right have versions of freedom as merely a negative idea.
- On the Right- there is Digital Capitalism. Everything is for sale. the Free Market will save us. Keep government restrictions away and we'll be happier. The more the government pokes their nose in our affairs- the less happy we'll be.
- On the Left- there is Cultural Deconstruction. Undo traditions, and authorities and structures. Its all oppressive. We need to deconstruct the family, and the government, and everything that was passed down to us. Carpet bomb the whole thing. All that authority is just keeping me from being the real ME.

The thing is- yeah- you can find some truth in each of those approaches- but what ends up happening is it becomes a lot easier to

throw off, tear down, criticize...than it does to commit, build up, and encourage.

And so- that's what we most of us associate with politics. Tearing down, biting back, fighting...and throwing off everyone who is trying to keep you down.

Most of us don't think about our politicians as keepers of promises that build relationship and act from purpose, but as critics that point out what is holding us back.

- Freedom is NOT merely throwing off restraints. Its actually finding the RIGHT RESTRAINTS.
- The ones that allow you to be who God created you to be, and do what God created you to do.
- Image him. Honor him. Show him off. Love him. And love other people. Full of purpose. Full of relationship.
- So the question to ask is- what "sets us free" to COMMIT to those things.

**TRANSITION:** And the truth is, Restriction and Commitment ACTUALLY allow us to show God off. You can't love deeply without restriction and commitment. You can't honor God without restriction and commitment. And that means...

## **2) True freedom allows you to love & serve others through submission and suffering, because you are freed from serving yourself.**

- **EXODUS: "Let my People Go...So that they can worship me."**
- Peter is writing to churches in Asia Minor.
- They are being persecuted because they are no longer participating in the pagan practices of their neighbors. Like worshipping idols in the pantheon of Roman gods....or participating in their neighborhood orgies.

- **V11-12**

- That's why Peter says they are "Strangers and Exiles".
- Outsiders. Weirdos.
- He tells them to ABSTAIN from desires to lash out and mistreat their neighbors.
- Peter tells them to conduct themselves HONORABLY...to do good to their neighbors...
- ..because this is the way their neighbors will recognize that Jesus is the only REAL God and they will start worshipping him.
- That language is CHOCK full of restraint and discipline.

- **V 13-14**

- Then he has the audacity to tell them to submit to human authorities...in fact he even talks about the emperor, the very emperor who has put in place all these pagan practices and has a hand in persecuting them.

- **V17**

- In fact, he says, "Honor Everyone. Love your Xian brothers and sisters...and HONOR the EMPEROR."
- Now, there are 2 things happening in v 17.
- One is explicit. Peter is telling them, seriously. Honor the emperor.
- God has put this government in place to bring some outer restraint on people. If you think its chaotic right now, what if all of sudden all governing authorities disappeared and everyone just did what was right in their own eyes. It would be utter chaos. People would think they were free, but they'd all just kill each other.
- So be thankful for a government (as bad and evil as it is) that actually still punishes evil.
- In that way, you can find in the emperor and his something to be grateful for and respect.
- That's what is EXPLICIT.

- BUT then there is something implicit.
- Notice, that Peter says "Honor everyone. And then Honor the Emperor."
- In other words, this is a sort of backhanded compliment.
- Peter is undermining the idea that the emperor is god-like.
- Which is what the emperor, and the Romans, believed.
- They talked about the emperor as the "son of God", as some sort of deity.
- And Peter says, "Hey, honor everybody...and the emperor is included in EVERYBODY."
- In one statement he exalts all their neighbors, and humbles the emperor.
- "Oh, he's godlike", Peter is saying, "But so is the little handicap girl nextdoor." Because they are both created in the image of GOD.
- So honor them equally. Love each other...and honor that little neighbor girl the same way you honor the emperor.
- As my precious creations.
- As humans.

### • **V 18-19**

- Ok, let's talk about Peter's command to that household slaves submit to their masters.
- First, let me be absolutely CLEAR about this.
- Historical attempts from 16, 17, and 1800's to force the Scripture into being OK with slavery are absolutely 100% wrong.
- In fact, Paul, who was used along with Peter from the NT as an endorsement of slavery, comes RIGHT OUT and condemns kidnapping people into forced slavery in 1 Timothy chapter 1
- A couple of brief things to help us focus on what this text actually means.
- First of all, 1<sup>st</sup> century slavery is ABSOLUTELY NOT what 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>

century American slavery is.

- Its not based on ethnicity.
- It did not prevent people from owning property, or even owning a business.
- And it is not about abducting people to force them into servitude.
- Now, that doesn't mean that it was a system that God or his church were OK with.
- It wasn't.
- You see here that there was often cruelty involved.
- It was corrupt.
- And you have a NT (and OT) btw, that over time seeks to undermine it.
- You should read Philemon, which is Paul's letter to a slave owner, that tells him that when his runaway slave, Onesimus returns to him, he should set him free, because he is a brother in Christ, and not Philemon's property.
- There's more I could say about this, but you need to know that Peter's goal here is NOT to address the taking down of an entire corrupt system.
- If that was the case, he probably wouldn't say "Honor the emperor".
- Rather, he is instructing these persecuted Christians how to get up in the morning and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Telling them about how to take down a corrupt system here is simply NOT what Peter, or these Christians, are trying to do.
- They are trying to figure out what to do after breakfast.
- How should they live AS SLAVES.
- How should they live AS SERVANTS.
- And Peter says, Don't rebel. Submit.
- But why?

- Well, he says, if your masters...your employers...if they see that you are submitting to them, NOT because you have to. Or because you are absolutely dependent on them...but because you have a conviction...a mindfulness, a consciousness of the presence of God...and THAT is how you are enduring injustice... well, it will bring favor with God...and will be what he uses to convince OR condemn your masters.

- **V 20**

- In other words, if you lash out, if you try to hurt and kill...if you repay evil for evil...then you give your masters an excuse. "Of course I beat my worthless employee. Look what he did to me."
- BUT, he says, if you suffer and still do what is right and good according to the LORD...this is what I'm going to change the world with.

- So Trevor, where do we put things like the American Revolution.
- Or Civil Rights?
- Doesn't this just sound like the "sit down and shut up" brand of monarchy that squelched religious freedom in the 18<sup>th</sup> century?
- Isn't this the moderate white pastors that said, "Be Patient" to the Freedom Riders and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the 1960s?

- Well, I would argue, no.
- First, if you study the American Revolution, you'll find that the founders of our country were extremely reticent and reluctant to shed blood. They went out of their way, over and over to avoid rebellion.
- That's why we were known as "reluctant revolutionaries"

- Additionally, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., said we have a moral responsibility to obey just laws, and disobey unjust laws. And he referenced Church Fathers like Augustine and Aquinas to understand those definitions.

- And, when he led people to peacefully disobey unjust and racist

- laws, he willingly suffered for it. He went to jail. He didn't resist.
- Because he knew, what Peter says here in v 20.
  - That when you do good and suffer for it, it brings favor with God.
  - It also brought with it a whole host of Civil laws that eventually changed the system.
  - But it didn't come through violent protest. It came through peaceful submission that honored the government where the government was just...and was willing to suffer by abstaining from the sinful things the law required...the things that wage war against the soul.

### **Back to 2)**

- Here's the thing.
- Think for a minute with me.
- When you think of Martin Luther King, Jr., sitting in a Birmingham jail. Arrested, suffering for refusing to obey unjust laws.
- But still speaking with goodness and love and respect...even about the people and the leaders who were inflicting suffering on him...
- ...who do you think is more free?
- Do you think it's the guards outside those doors?
- Do you think it's the governor of Alabama? Or Bull Connor, the elected official who murderously opposed Dr. King and the civil rights movement.
- One is behind bars, the other is in an elected office?
- But who was more FREE?
- I think, hindsight being 20/20, we'd all say Dr. King.
- But why?
- Because we all know now, that Dr. King- by submitting to jail. By suffering for doing good...was enslaved to a higher authority.
- He was, as Peter puts it, enslaved to God.

- He wasn't living for himself.
- He was living for others.
- For a better America.
- For justice.
- He was living for purpose- and for the flourishing of relationships that would not be limited by the color of one's skin. These were convictions that were put there by God.
- He was being imprisoned-losing his outward freedom, suffering, so that people who were outwardly oppressed could be freed.
- And, so that people, like Bull Connor, or the governor of Alabama, or the President of the United States, could be freed from the enslaving idea that one race is superior to another.
- ...and the only way he was able to do it, was by putting himself under the authority of a God who makes it possible to live your life not for yourself, but for him...and for the people he made and loves.

#### • **V 17**

- See, the only way to honor an evil emperor. The only way to suffer at the hands of a cruel authority...is to FEAR GOD, more than you fear them.
- To submit to God's will.
- And, the only way you can do that. Is if you know...if you know for absolute sure...that when you give yourself to him...that he so deeply loves you, that he won't hurt you...but he'll heal you.
- He will bring blessing, not a curse to you.

**Transition:** and you know how he did that?

- He did it by restricting himself, limiting himself, committing to us, and submitting his own will.
- He took his own medicine.
- He submitted and suffered to set us free.

**3) The Freedom Paradox is shown on the cross, ...then vindicated in**



## **the resurrection.**

- Do you know what it means to be vindicated?
- Its "I told you so."
  
- You know, you tell your spouse over and over and over that a particular actor was in that movie you watched a couple of months ago. And they say, "No. No way."
- And then you Google it, and BAM! You were right.
  
- VINDICATED!
- Vindication is all those mornings that you got up at the crack of dawn, and limited yourself. You wanted to sleep in, but you limited your sleep- what you wanted to do- to work out.
- You self-disciplined. You built those muscles. You kept that waistline to a 32...and all your friends slept in. And it appeared they were winning. After all. They got a second helping of pasta and ate dessert every time you went out.
- It appeared you were bound, and they were free.
- ...and then you showed up at your high school reunion together.
- ...and well...you were vindicated. That submission to an idea that didn't seem to serve you in the moment- turned out to free you up later.
  
- Those are 2 silly, and probably sinful, examples.
- But you get the picture.
- Vindication is that moment where the submission and the sacrifices you made show that you have actually been set free through them.
  
- There will be a day, when all suffering, all submission, that was done in the name of the LORD will pay off.
- The injustices we refused to participate in.
- The times it felt like you were missing out on when you got up at 5:30 am to read your Bible.
  
- The people you sacrificed for that hurt you, or slandered you.
- The time after time after time where you committed yourself to

caring for someone, or discipling someone, or sharing the gospel with someone, only to have them walk away from you.

- The Bible says there will be vindication.
- And to see it, you need to look at Christ, his cross and his resurrection.
- **V 21**
- Peter says, "I know this seems impossible. To honor the emperor that is persecuting you. To submit to your masters who are being cruel to you. BUT, look to Christ.
- His cross is an example of this.
- **V 22-23**
- First of all, he was innocent. He committed no sin.
- And when he was insulted, he didn't insult back.
- When he suffered, violence and rebellion was not the long term solution. Rather, when he suffered he looked to his Father.
- He looked to the God who judges justly.
- That means he trusted that God the Father would make all things right.
- That his suffering would be vindicated.
- That one day he would look at his enemies and say, "I told you so."
- But he knew his enemies were not humans.
- His enemies were not Herod, Pontious Pilate, the Pharisees.
- No, those were people he came to save.
- He knew those people were enslaved to their sin.
- So he looked beyond their authority, to God's mission. God's purpose.
- He loved them, and wanted relationship with them, even as they hated him.
- **V 24**
- And he died on a cross.
- That sinless life. He was giving it to us. The people who have sinned. The guilty ones.

- And he was taking our guilt.
  - Our sin.
  - Our condemnation.
- 
- On the Cross, he looked like the enslaved one...and the Roman guards and Pharisees looked like the free ones.
- 
- But it was opposite.
  - Because in a garden the night before, as those same soldiers and Pharisees came to arrest Jesus, so they could get what they wanted. Jesus was praying to his Father, "Not my will. But thine.", so the Father could get what he wanted.
- 
- The true son of God, who had already limited and restricted himself, by leaving the comfort of heaven, and putting on flesh...was now going to become obedient to the point of death...even death on a cross.
- 
- And in that death, he was making us alive. He was restoring the humanity of all of us who had trashed it with our pursuits of freedom. Which mainly meant a freedom FROM GOD.
- 
- But freedom is not the absence of something. It's the presence of something.
  - Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.
- 
- ...and that's where the Vindication comes in.
  - When Jesus resurrected, it was his vindication.
- 
- It was God's I told you so.
  - You, though, you were free when you killed my son.
  - You thought you were proving that he was like the emperor, just a human.
  - But actually, when you killed him, you gave me the opportunity to show off his deity. Look at his resurrection. As Jesus said, "I and the Father are one."

- But, amazingly, Christ's vindication isn't condemnation, like all our "I told you so's" or the moment you show up at the high school reunion with biceps the size of pythons. Our vindications so often end up as condemnation of someone else.

- **V 25**

- No, Christ's vindication is an invitation.
- Come, trust me. Submit to the just judge.
- Trust yourself to the one who died and was raised.
- He is the real overseer. The true emperor. The one who can set your soul free.
- Christ's vindication is a cosmic I told you so. Yes- to the evil powers as a sort of taunt.
- But even more so, to every human soul, its an invitation to be united to him.
- An invitation to come into his presence.
- An invitation to be forgiven.
- To finally submit to the true King..."Not my will, Lord, but yours be done."

- **LORDS SUPPER**

- Freedom is the presence of God.
- And that's exactly what we get forever.