

Introduction

- What do you think this sermon is going to be about?
 - about who is in charge?
 - v.13, "submit to every authority", v.18 "slaves, submit yourselves to your masters", v.1 "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands", and then the imbalanced v.7, "Husbands... way be considerate"
 - certainly looks that way at first glance!!
- And the church, and the Christian faith, has a reputation for being concerned with who is in charge!
 - certainly the accusation from many campaigners for equality for women over the years has been about a "patriarchy", a male dominated, male run, power obsessed faith
 - likewise campaigners for the abolition of slavery, and for the equality of races, have often complained of resistance to their pleas from "Christians" who justify slavery or discrimination on what they say is the Bible's condoning of the practise
 - and there are not just historical arguments here - these issues come up again and again in discussions of marriage, of domestic abuse and violence, of dictatorships and oppression!
 - should we submit unconditionally to every "authority" over us?

Freedom

- Let me suggest that this passage is not about submission but about freedom of choice!"
 - look first at v.16: *Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.*
 - live as free men...
 - Peter is writing to people who have a choice about how they live, and Peter is prompting them to exercise that freedom in a particular, he will argue Godly, direction

Take the slave example in vs.18ff:

- the choice is in the attitude the slave adopts
- they are bound in slavery, they have no choice about obeying their masters - except to risk punishment and ultimately death if they disobey!
- but their choice is about attitude
- "given that this is in the situation you are currently in, how should you treat your master? With respect"
- not only when that is easy - considerate masters - but also when that is tough - harsh master
- the choice is about the attitude, not the action

Similarly, in marriage: 3:1-7

- culturally, married women were their husband's property, to be dealt with as the man saw fit
 - obedience was expected, and was enforced by cultural pressures, shame and sometimes beatings and physical violence
 - the choice for a Christian woman in that particular context was the attitude she would adopt to her husband
 - unquestioning obedience and degradation? **NO!**
 - self-conscious holiness of life, a gentle and quiet spirit
- And indeed for the Christian husband: v.7
 - his choice, in the cultural context, was to love, to love with the same self-giving love Jesus demonstrated, to respect, and not dominate or command

Our example

- Our example in this is Jesus himself:
 - vs.21-25
 - the core of his example is **not the suffering** - that is a consequence
 - the core of Jesus' example is his **sinless obedience** - v.22
 - he lived for God, no matter what the pressures around him were, not seeking his own safety, his own comfort, his own fulfilment, his own relaxation
- So many of the arguments I've ever been involved in, when I worked in an office, or even ones at home, have been down to self-interest:
 - I want my way, my interests, my comfort, my fulfilment, my sleep, my TV program, my convenience....
 - and you want yours... **so we argue**

Conclusion

- Do we live for ourselves, or for God in self-giving respect for those around us?
 - particularly those closest to us?
 - work place situations...
 - home situations...
- We are free, free to choose how we live
- The cultural chains are different today:
 - we don't need to give in to the advertisers power, we are free to choose to live not for our own comfort but for the well-being of others
 - workplace rather than slavery!
 - the cultural accretions round marriage have changed
 - Will we choose to live, in each of these situations, not for ourselves but for the Lord, with respect for those around us?
- And do not use freedom as a cover for evil:
 - we are not just the victims here!
 - v.16 - freedom not a cover for doing evil, for treating others with a lack of respect
- **Its your choice!**
 - how will you live?