

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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Christian Freedom

1 Peter 2:13-17

2:13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution,
whether it be to the emperor as supreme,

2:14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to
praise those who do good.

2:15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to
silence the ignorance of foolish people.

2:16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-
up for evil, but living as servants of God.

2:17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the
emperor.

We are studying from 1 Peter chapter 2 that the believers in Jesus
Christ is the people of God, and how the people of God should live in
the world. In today's reading, the people of God is called as
"freedman," saying, "Live as people who are free." (verse 16) What is
the freedom given to the people of God? How can we receive it? And,
how should we use it? Let's learn these things.

1. Freedom of God's People

First, let learn that the God's people is called "freedman." In the
ancient era, there are two social status. One is "freedman," and other
is "slave." The people of the victorious country became "freedman,"
and the people of defeated country became "slave." Even they were
royal family or the nobility, the status was taken from the people of

the defeated country.

In the New Testament era, the gospel of Jesus Christ was preached all over the Roman empire. Both freedmen and slaves believed in Jesus Christ. There are freedmen and slaves in Church, but the Scripture calls all of Christians “freedman.” Why? Because all of Christians are the free people of God in spite of their status. 1 Corinthians 7:22 says, “For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ.” Those who in Jesus Christ is free in spirit and the way of life, not bound by the status, though they are slave. And those who believe that Jesus Christ is the Lord of all and pledge their royalty and obedience to the Lord is the slave of Jesus Christ.

When God made Israel His people in the Old Testament era, Israel was the slave to Egypt. God did not want His people to be slaves, He punished Egypt with His mighty power and released Israel from slavery, and made them free. Like Israel was, the people of God in the New Testament era was released from the slavery of sin and became free by the salvation of Jesus Christ. To be saved means to be released from bondage and have freedom. Those who believe in Jesus Christ are freed from sin and have freedom. To become God’s people means to become freedman.

2. Freedom by Faith

So, how are we able to gain this freedom? The first thing we have to recognize is the fact that people are the slaves of sin and we cannot escape from sin by ourselves.

Lord Jesus told the people of Judea, in John 8:32, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Then the people criticized Lord Jesus, and said in 8:33, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" In fact, however, the offspring of Abraham were the slaves of Egyptians at the time. Moreover, after the offspring saved from Egypt and built up their own country, Assyria and Babylon ruined them and they became the exile again. Later on, people of Judea were brought under control of Persia and Syria, and when Jesus came to this world, Judea was the province of Rome. Their counterargument against Jesus was totally not the truth. They did not want to see the true figure of themselves, and distorted their own history.

Jesus answered the people maintaining they have not been enslaved, in John 8:34, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." Most people, even Christian people, attempt to avoid from recognizing their own sin, that being taught in the Bible. Yet if you keep running away from your true figure of a sinner, you may not experience the true salvation. It would cast away the sacrifice of the Son of God, who gave up Himself for setting us free from "enslaved to sin" status.

"Enslaved to sin" doesn't imply that you are terrorists or addicted to illegal drugs. Even though you are good citizens, or engaged to social responsibilities, you may sometimes commit outrageous crimes. People have the nature of sin inside, and the power is active; so the sinful nature sometimes appears out, or defeats you, and it brings that crimes. "Sin" being taught in the Bible is not only the social crimes. If

it's not committed, or doesn't come out of your mouth, behavior, or direct actions, it is sin in fact. Bible calls the nature of sin inside of people's heart "sin," in the integrated manner.

For example, Paul didn't have any problems morally or religiously. When the shine of the truth enlightened him, however, he noticed his sin and said, in Romans 7:15, 18-19, and 24, "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" If you were the ones listening to God's verses, and knowing the Holy God, you would understand his conflict. If you don't, you may not be clear about your sin. If you don't see it yet, you may continuously commit it. If you unconsciously commit Biblical sin, you cannot repent, and out of nowhere you would be "enslaved" to sins.

Lots of people don't think themselves "powerless," even though they don't think they were perfect. If they improve their bad temper, or acceptance, they think they could survive. They may even think that faith is only to redeem your lack and correct them. That means, they will be able to improve most of your lack, and if you still need some help, they may ask God. Yet no one was saved and freed from sin, until now. God's glory is not placed somewhere people can easily reach out with a little effort. People cannot save themselves, or set themselves free. They need Savior, and the Savior is Jesus Christ. You have to recognize your sin and powerless figure, and totally trust Jesus

Christ, and then you will gain the true freedom, the freedom from sin.

3. Freedom to Serve

Lastly, let's learn how believers should use freedom. In our long history, freedom had been often mistaken for doing whatever we like. Probably it is most true in the present society. America was created by the people who sought for freedom. However, freedom that the founding fathers sought for was not selfish freedom. It was the freedom that the Bible taught. The Bible says in Galatians 5:13, "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." Needless to say, the freedom given to God's people is "freedom from sins" and not "freedom to commit sins". Freedom given to God's people is to leave sins and go toward God. Freedom given to believers is freedom to call Christ as Lord and follow Him, and serve for Him. Christians should give a testimony of true freedom Christ has given to us by utilizing the freedom in a correct manner.

Those who believe in Jesus Christ are citizens of Heaven and travelers in this world. However, even if we are travelers, we cannot live a life in embarrassment. Christian's freedom is not such freedom. Christians follow the nation's authority and fulfill their responsibilities unless they are against God. They do love their country and pray for it just as we listened today's scripture versus 13-14, "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good."

This is applicable to our current society. The teachings and contents

of worship should be determined by God and should not allow interference of politics or legislation. However, church building has to meet with a building code and church accounting has to be maintained according to the state law. Moreover, churches have to have an insurance policy and follow the intellectual property rules. We cannot say, “it’s a church, it does not have to follow the rules”. Because it is a church, we have to follow the legitimate rules.

I used to work as an interim pastor in Tokyo because the resident pastor suddenly quit the job. Right after we moved into the church, a neighbor lady living next door stormed into the church and complained about the border. She has been asking the church to solve the long-standing border problem, but she had never received a sincere answer from the church. She told that there were other complaints that had been held over 15 years. When the neighbor came to the church, I was out. So my wife took care of her and listened to her stories and apologized for any inconvenience that caused her. Since then, neighbor lady and my wife became a friend and started to have afternoon tea together. The lady started to be very nice to us and when they moved, they told us to take any piece of furniture that we liked and we got a living room furniture for church office. Our neighbor could resolve the misunderstandings with church before they moved out. We were glad for it more than anything.

This is just a small testimony, but we experienced the same thing wherever we went. To believe God and live a life as a citizen of God’s kingdom means to live a life as a good citizen and love the non-Christian neighbors and build a good relationship with them. In this way, believers pleased God as well as the people, and through this, we

can spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

Verses 16 and 17 say, “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.” The Scripture this morning teaches very simple thing to us. You may already put the teaching into action. But you cannot practice this Scripture by yourselves. We need power of the salvation from Jesus Christ, which set people free from sins. “Live as servants of God.” The word, “servant,” in this command, means “slave” in the original language. We should rely on God and become servants of God. Don’t forget that we can be free people by becoming a servant of God.

(Prayer)

Dear Lord God, we were once a slave to sins but you saved us through Jesus Christ and welcomed us as your people and your children. I thank you for allowing us to come near you and blessings of love that you poured to us. Please teach us the way to use this freedom in a right way. Please help us fulfill responsibility as God’s people. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.