

THE CHURCH AND ME - TOGETHER FOR A PURPOSE

FIRST PETER 2:11-20

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TWIN ROCKS FRIENDS CAMP

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.PPT 1 ...

I want to begin our time together this morning by inviting each of us to examine if there are parts of our lives, parts of ourselves that we've made off limit from God. A young woman named Amena Brown has a short video called "Your Words" that brings us to God and to this question of how much of our hearts, our lives, ourselves, we've offered to God in the way that Paul spoke of in **ROMANS 12** when he told us that God wants us to give ourselves over to God as **living sacrifices**. Watch, and listen.

ILLUSTRATION ... MPG VIDEO ... AMENA BROWN | "YOUR WORDS" ...

This morning God's words are more than likely going to meddle in our lives, in our ideologies, in our commitments, and in our social agendas. And that's a good thing, not a bad thing. They say that at most gatherings you should never bring up **religion**, **politics**, or **sex**. Well this morning we're going to talk about two out of three of these topics ... because Peter talks about them. I'll let you guess which two.

They say that one of the roles of a pastor is to **"COMFORT THE DISTURBED, AND TO DISTURB THE COMFORTABLE."** Well this morning, if you're **comfortable** in your politics or **comfortable** in how you've living out your faith, then get ready to be **disturbed** by Peter's words to us. Please take out your Bibles and turn with me to **FIRST PETER 1:11-20**.

.PPT 2 ... FIRST PETER 2:11-12 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

¹² Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

aliens and strangers ... "DUH DUH DUH DUH / DUH DUH DUH DUH" (hum the tune of *The Twilight Zone*). That's not the kind of **"aliens"** Peter is talking about.

Have you ever pulled into a town where you couldn't find your way around and didn't know where anything was? As followers of Jesus Christ, we shouldn't always just *fit into our culture*. But the more comfortable we get with the holiness of God inside us, the more we'll begin to feel at home in God and the more excited we'll become about being called out into the world as His representatives as **the church scattered**.

To be an **alien** or a **sojourner** is to live in the place that isn't our **natural, or permanent home**. The challenge of many people who move to a new country, is how

to keep their children from *forgetting or denying who they really are, and how to not get completely sucked into the culture in which they're living.*

.PPT 3 ...

AND AS CHRIST-FOLLOWERS, WE NEED TO LEARN HOW TO VIEW OURSELVES AS PILGRIMS AND SOJOURNERS. HEAVEN IS OUR HOME. GOD IS OUR KING. AND WE ARE HIS PEOPLE. And so our lives have got to reflect Him more than they reflect the culture and the priorities of this world.

And the only way for this to begin to happen is for us to take on more and more of the character of Jesus Christ - so that His **THOUGHTS**, His **WORDS**, His **PRIORITIES**, and His **ACTIONS** begin to become our **THOUGHTS**, our **WORDS**, our **PRIORITIES**, and our **ACTIONS**. Because only then will we be equipped and emboldened to begin to live out the will of God in ways that are real and practical, and that grow and deepen the Kingdom of God in our midst.

v. 11 ... abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul ... abstain means **“to go without”**. Peter’s words echo back to what he’s said earlier in this chapter ...

Remember, dear friends ... as you begin to grow and mature into who you’ve been called to be in Jesus Christ, as you take what you believe and live it out, both as the **CHURCH GATHERED IN AUTHENTIC WORSHIP**, and as the **CHURCH SCATTERED OUT IN AUTHENTIC MINISTRY** ... Do me, God, yourselves and everybody else a favor and **abstain or put aside**, living for your sinful lusts, so that you can begin living for Jesus Christ most fully as possible.

Let’s listen and watch Amena Brown once again ...

ILLUSTRATION ... MPG VIDEO ... AMENA BROWN | “YOUR WORDS” ...

Why does God ask us to make “nothing off limits to Him”? Two reasons come to mind.

.PPT 4 ...

- **FIRST**, God longs to see congruity between what we say we believe, who we know our identity to be, and how we actually live. And God knows we long for this congruity too. God sees the destructive weight of us having divided hearts and minds ... and He wants us to be set free from that conflict.
- **SECOND**, God knows the world is watching His followers for an understanding of Who He is, what He cares about, and what His priorities are.

When his own Orange County Republicans (and in fact, most of the world), heard Richard Nixon’s *White House Tapes* ... when they heard with their own ears his madly profane words spoken behind the closed doors of the Oval Office (but recorded none-the-less), they realized Nixon wasn’t who he’d publicly portrayed himself to be. They saw the incongruity of his life and words. They saw his lack of integrity. And they

turned against him. And of course, this was one of the shoes that when finally dropped, led to Nixon's resignation as President.

And the same thing can be said about fallen Christian leaders in the past many years ... from Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, to Jimmy Swaggart, to Ted Haggard, and sadly, so many others. **But for the grace of God ...**

But when we say we *believe in Jesus* and *love Jesus* and are *committed to learning to be His chosen people, His priests, and citizen of His nation ... when we say that we belong to God alone*, and then when we *live and talk another way ...* we bring reproach onto the name of Jesus Christ. And the people who are watching us to see God's plan for the world will probably not only turn against us, but they'll often turn against God as well.

But hey, no pressure! "We can't be *perfect*, right?" Right. But what we can learn to be is *consistent*. We can be people who are *changing, growing, maturing, and transforming* in ways that reflect the character of Jesus Christ and the will of God.

.PPT 5 ... FIRST PETER 2:12 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹² Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Look with me at **v. 12** ... The cool thing is that when we run into people who used to know the old us and they say, "**Man, I remember you ... you were really a world-class sinner!**" ... the good news is that when we're living lives of *congruity, honesty* and *consistency*, we can reply ...

"Ya, I know. I'm so glad I met Jesus. He's really turning my life around. He's putting the pieces of my life back together. I'm not *perfect*, but God has *forgiven me*. I'm in a relationship with God, and it's the desire of my heart to live out *His plans* in the day-to-day stuff of my life ... and to have *His thoughts in my mind* throughout the day. It's the desire of my heart to *speak His words*. It's the desire of my heart that my *way of living would reflect Jesus Christ's way of living*."

.PPT 6-7-8 ... FIRST PETER 2:13-20 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹³ 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.

¹⁸ Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

¹⁹ For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

²⁰ For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.

I'm sure you've seen a *tapestry*. It's a big weaving that usually portrays some grand scene, or historical event. It's like a rug, in that it has a sturdy piece of backing material, and then lots of thread, intricately woven together to form a textile mural on the front side.

In these eight verses of **FIRST PETER 2** Peter shares God's heart with us about Who's really in charge of things ... where our allegiance is to be given ... and how we're to view the hierarchical relationships we so often find ourselves in with our workplaces and in our land. It's awesome how the WORD of God speaks into different areas of our lives.

SECOND PETER 1:3 says that **through God's WORD we're given everything we need for life and godliness. Everything we need to know** about how to live life for God in the *natural things of life* and in the *spiritual things of life* - in fact God actually wants to bring these two areas together (the *natural* and the *spiritual*) and show us how, in His plans, they not only overlap, but how they're intentionally and intimately interwoven every day and in every way.

We'll look a little closer at these eight verses in a little bit ... because they're like the yarn in a tapestry ... they're what's up front and visible ... but first, I want to begin by focusing on the truths that make up the back of this *tapestry of words* Peter is weaving for us.

Have you ever notices how easy it is to take on the attitude of **"The world revolves around me. I'm in charge. Don't tell me what to do."** And yet, at the heart of Peter's words to us this morning is a plea for us to ***lay down our rights, to submit our agendas to God ... and to be honoring toward all people.***

**ILLUSTRATION ... ME AT THE GFU LIBRARY ... ARE YOU IN CHARGE?
DO YOU KIND OF WANNA BE?**

We all want to be in charge. Even those who say they don't want to be in charge, usually really do. It's how we're wired. We all want to be out in front, leading the band. In one of his most famous speeches, entitled ***"The Drum Major Instinct"***, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. talked with passion and clarity about this tendency within each of us. Yes, many times these tendencies and these urges can come from God as He calls us out into positions of leadership. But I'm talking here about a fleshly instinct, not a God-instinct.

I'm talking about the reality that most of the time we don't like it when the Bible uses the word **"submit"** because for most of us, laying down our will so that we can

fully live into the will of another, is the hardest thing in the world to do. But the truth is that God is in charge and to be growing toward becoming His fully devoted followers, we have to *let Him set the pace ... and let Him make the rules ... and let Him plan out the agenda of our lives.*

God not only wants to teach us new ways to live ... He also wants to teach us new ways to shape our priorities. And this morning, I believe that part of what God wants to get through to us from His WORD is that He wants to challenge us to look at those whose political ideologies that are different from ours with new eyes and with new hearts.

It's sad, but true that, to a large extent, *our political views define us, and describe us, and divide us, and sometimes even unite us.* It's the American way. Black and white. Cut and dry. We put labels onto ourselves and onto others in order to maintain *sanity* in the hive.

In 1972 the US Presidential Primaries decided that Richard Nixon would run against George McGovern.

ILLUSTRATION ... 1974 GEORGE McGOVERN ... RALPH AND KEN BEEBE ...

Most of us, out of a desire "to reside" in the same camp with other like-minded folks, find out where they feel most at home, most comfortable, most at ease, and the least rubbed-the-wrong-way ... and then we stay there. You know what I'm talking about.

BILL O'RILEY, LAURA INGRAM, GLEN BECK, AND RUSH LIMBAUGH

OR

AL FRANKEN, RANDI RHODES, KEITH OLBERMANN, AND CHRIS MATTHEWS

But occasionally we meet people who seem to be *God-led* in their political ideologies, even if they might be different than ours. Occasionally we cross paths with someone like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. whose "*I HAVE A DREAM*" speech electrified the American public, solidified support for the American Civil Rights Movement, and helped to literally change America, and Western society. And where did Dr. King's ideas come from?

The social reforms Dr. King called our country to were part of a Biblically-based vendetta against injustice, and a call for us to come back, not only to our senses, but more importantly, back to God. As Dr. King stood up against the many ways our nation and its leaders had defiled the *US Constitution*, which guaranteed equal rights to all, he acted, both *BIBLICALLY* (saying "NO" to violence) and *COUNTER-CULTURALLY* ... while seeking to offer and establish Biblical values in society.

Or, occasionally we run into people like Mother Teresa, the diminutive Albanian nun who through her work for 43 years with the dying poor in Calcutta, India, called each of us to *intentionally make all of our lives* ... everything we *think*, everything we *say*, and everything we *do* flow only out of the two great commandments Jesus gave in *MATTHEW 22:37-39* ... that as His followers, we're to "*love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind. And to love our neighbors as ourselves*" ... instead of

labeling others and loving them (or not loving them) based on their political allegiances or agendas.

Or occasionally we meet people like Jim Wallace, the Christian American author whose 2004 book *The Politics of God* shook up the “norms of Western Evangelical Christianity” - calling us back to an understanding of government and allegiance that’s based on the **GOSPEL IMPERATIVES** Jesus spoke of at the very beginning of His ministry.

Do you remember what those **GOSPEL IMPERATIVES** are? We should ... because without understanding them, you and I, and the rest of the people who make up the church of Jesus Christ will all too easily give our hearts, our minds, our priorities, our money, our time, and our passions to the wrong things.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **LUKE 4**. I believe understanding Jesus’ words here will help us understand Peter’s words about the kind of people God has it on His heart for us to become.

Gang ... Peter isn’t just talking here about “**praying before we vote ... pray before paying our taxes on time ... and don’t bad-mouth your leaders.**” He’s talking about choosing to have an *attitude* and a *posture* in our life here on earth that’s totally different than anything the world and the culture of this world calls us to embrace. Peter is talking about you and me giving our allegiance first and foremost to God, trusting Him with our lives, and obeying Him step-by-step.

In **LUKE 3** Jesus had just been baptized in the River Jordan by His cousin John the Baptist. And then in **LUKE 4** Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit to go out into the wilderness. And then beginning in **LUKE 4:14** ... we read the following words ... which could be called **THE MAGNA CARTA OF JESUS CHRIST**, or **THE CONSTITUTION OF JESUS CHRIST** ... they’re the foundation of what His *priorities*, His *words*, and His *actions* would be for the next three years during His earthly ministry. And they tell you and me what our priorities, words, and actions have got to center on as His followers. Regardless of whether we’re *Republicans*, *Democrats*, *Independents* or some other ilk.

.PPT 9-10-11 ... LUKE 4:14-22 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

14 And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district.

15 And He *began* teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all.

16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.

17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

18 “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR, HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,

19 TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.” (cf., ISAIAH 61:1-2)

20 And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

21 And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

22 And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, “Is this not Joseph’s son?”

So whether we’re *Republicans* or *Democrats*, *union* or *non-union*, *labor* or *management*, *business owners* or *working for the owners of businesses* ... the call to all of us is the same ... to take on the perspective, the attitude, the passion, and the mission of Jesus Christ, and to let our political views flow out of the ideologies of Jesus Christ. Let’s look a little bit closer at what Jesus is calling us to here, beginning in LUKE 4:18 (which is a quote out of ISAIAH 61:1-2) ...

- **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,”** Jesus said in Nazareth that day, and He says to us today **“Choose to live a life that is *informed and empowered* by the Holy Spirit instead of by your egos, your fears, or your pet-agendas.”**
- **“He anointed Me to preach the gospel ...”** Jesus said in Nazareth that day, and He says to us today, **“Seek the *anointing*, and the *direct guidance* of God as you live out the Gospel, the *Message*, the *Good News of Jesus Christ*.”** Or as St. Francis is often quoted as saying, **“Preach the gospel wherever you go, using words when necessary.”**
- **“He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor ...”** Jesus said in Nazareth that day, and he says to us today, **“Have a heart for the poor among you ... ask God how He wants you to use the resources *He has allowed* and *enabled* you to earn, or inherit, to help those who are trapped in cycles of poverty.”**
- **“He sent Me to proclaim release to the captives ... and to set free those who are oppressed,”** Jesus said in Nazareth that day, and He says to us today, **“Have a heart for the captive and oppressed ... both *spiritually* and *physically*. Have a heart for those whose lives are held captive by the brokenness of their own choices, and the brokenness caused by the fact that we live in a sin-soaked world. Have a heart for those who are in jail or in prison.”**
- **“He has sent Me to proclaim recovery of sight to the blind”** Jesus said in Nazareth that day, and He says to us today, **“Have a heart for those who are hurting *physically* ... who need *medical* and/or *emotional* attention. Reach out to the hospitals, to the treatment centers, and the retirement homes in your neighborhoods.”** Jesus has a heart for hurting people and He calls us to join Him in meeting the visible needs around us.

Now that we've spent some time looking *TOPICALLY* at the backside of the tapestry ... at the foundation of what **FIRST PETER 2:13-20** calls us to ... let's turn the tapestry back over and look at these eight verses.

.PPT 12-13 ... FIRST PETER 2:13-17 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹³ 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.

In **FIRST PETER 2:11-12** Peter tells us that as Christians, we're like "**aliens and strangers**" in the world, and that no matter how hard we try to fit in and feel perfectly at peace in this world, that if we're following Jesus Christ as closely as He wants us to follow Him, that we'll never really feel at home in this world.

Peter wrote this letter in the days of the Roman Empire, which was certainly no **democracy**, and no special friend to Christians. And yet Peter, like Jesus in His day, recognized the legitimate authority of the Roman government and insists that *leaders* are sent by God for the punishment of evildoers and for the recognition of those who do good.

In other words, Peter is saying that God wants to use governing authorities as a check on mankind's sinful desires and tendencies. Look at what the Apostle Paul writes about this same thing in **ROMANS 12:21-13:2** ...

.PPT 14 ... ROMANS 12:21-13:2 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

¹ Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

² Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

I know that you know the tension Peter writes of here. I mean, how were Christians in Nazi Germany supposed to read these words and live them out? And what about the followers of Jesus living in Cambodia during the Pol-Pot regime? Or what about the Believers living in Romania under the insanity of Chaichescu? What are we to do? We're to press into Jesus, and stay in step with Him. Taking our lead from His command, taking our instructions from Him. But here's the deal, like Amena Brown has so powerfully spoken, "**when we give God the keys to every room in our heart, it means that nothing becomes off-limits to God.**"

As Christians, we're called to be in subjection to the governmental authorities God has put in place over us. And sometimes, even here in America, they might infringe on what we see as our civil and religious rights. Sometimes they might promote what is easily labeled *liberalism*, **AND** at other times they might promote what is commonly labeled *conservatism*. They might kick God out of our schools and of our courtrooms, or they might try to get *The Ten Commandments* plastered on the insides and outsides of every courtroom from Portland, Oregon, to Portland, Maine.

But no matter what the agenda, label, or party, until they try to force us to sin, and to take back the ground of our hearts and minds that we've given over to God, then we're called to submit to them. Because by submitting to these *God-ordained* - but much-of-the-time not *God-fearing* authorities, we're doing God's will. And by doing so we silence those who shout, "**CHRISTIANS DISOBEY THE GOVERNMENT, SHOOT ABORTION DOCTORS, BEAT UP HOMOSEXUALS, AND HAVE NO REGARD FOR THE LAWS OF OUR NATION.**"

In Jesus Christ's invitation to follow him found in **MATTHEW 11:28-29**, He calls us to this attitude of *submission*. Do you see it? Remember this invitation ...

.PPT 15 ... MATTHEW 11:28-29 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

²⁸ "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

³⁰ "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Jesus invites us to take **His yoke** upon us. Did you ever notice that *Jesus is wearing a yoke* in these verses? What is **the yoke of Jesus**? It's His own *obedient submission* to *God the Father*. Jesus doesn't ask us to do anything that He hasn't already done. Jesus *submitted* Himself to God the Father's authority, and He asks us to take that **yoke** on ourselves. And He says that it's **easy**. It doesn't seem like it at times ... but it's a lot easier than trying to run life by our own rules!

Peter doesn't come right out and say this, but it's definitely implied here ... and that is that *as followers of Jesus Christ we're to be in submission to the leaders and to the laws of this land, unless they cause us to sin*. In other words, if we have to sin in order to comply with the laws of this land, then that's when it's time to not submit.

Again, that's what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did, and it changed our society. Of course, he also paid the ultimate price for his choices. But that doesn't negate the fact that he made the right choices in the midst of a nation and a culture that had settled for less than God's plan, God's direction, and God's purposes.

In the book of **ACTS**, Peter and John kept preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ, after they'd been arrested and warned not to do it. And Peter, the same guy who wrote **FIRST PETER** says in **ACTS 5:27-32** ...

.PPT 16-17 ... ACTS 5:27-33 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

²⁷ When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them,

²⁸ saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.

³⁰ “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.

³¹ “He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

³² “And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

No, we’re not to be doormats, and let our ideas as followers of Jesus Christ be marginalized, stepped on, spit on, or even ignored. We’re called to stand up, and stand up boldly for what we believe in. But we’re to pray for those who God has allowed to be in places of leadership over us ... we’re to remain respectful and prayerful for our fellow Christ-followers who are hearing Jesus lead them differently than He seems to be leading us, all the while seeking out how we can best and most fully live out our faith in Jesus Christ in the day-to-day stuff of life.

Let’s be **yoked** to Jesus Christ and not to our culture. Let’s **submit** to Jesus Christ and to no one and nothing else. Let’s let the **Manifesto of Jesus Christ** in **LUKE 4:18-19** become the truth that guide us, that we build our priorities on, and that we use as a compass to discern and decide how we’re to spend and invest our money, our time, our spiritual gifts, and our passions.

See what I mean about ***GOD’S WORD COMFORTING THE DISTURBED, AND DISTURBING THE COMFORTABLE?*** I told you. And now, as we close this morning’s session, let’s watch and listen to Amena’s words one more time, and invite the Holy Spirit to seal His truth to our hearts and minds as go about the other adventures of our day.

ILLUSTRATION ... MPG VIDEO ... AMENA BROWN | “YOUR WORDS” ...

Tonight as we look into **FIRST PETER 2:16-25** we’ll see Peter using the word **submit** again, and he’ll give us further instruction about what this word means. So I invite you to come back praying and expecting.