



Embrace the White Flag

Date: May 21, 2023
Series: Acts of Paul (Pt 1)
Passage: Acts 16
Speaker: Steve Howell (Associate Minister)

Do You Yield?

If you've spent any time around our Kid's Ministry (or even in some of our services), you'll know how to complete the following statements:

The Bible is.... "GOD'S WORD!"

and God's Word is... "THE TRUTH!"

I hope you realize how **"out there"** those two statements are in our culture. Fewer and **fewer people agree** with those simple but profound declarations about the Bible. We at Tonganoxie Christian Church have **embraced the Bible as God's Word**. In fact, we even include this following statement as one of our **Core Values**, *"The Bible is our final authority."* But step outside the walls of our church and you'll find a **culture that rejects our submission** to the Word.



Just this week, I came across an **example** of this rejection in an article from the Christian Post. Let me read you a small sample:

PETA Sells Vegan-Friendly AI Bible Rewrite Where Abraham Skips Sacrificing Isaac, Befriends a Lamb Instead

*Produced as a digital download with a virtual "vegan leather" cover, **The Book: PETA's Version of the Creation Story** is billed as a "first-of-its-kind AI-generated vegan interpretation of the book of Genesis."*

According to PETA, "The message in Genesis is that God created every sentient being, He saw that they were good, and He gave them greens for sustenance."

Among the changes made by PETA to the Word of God includes referring to animals as "beings" rather than "beasts" or "creatures." Another deviation is the use of plant fibers like hemp and bamboo as clothing rather than animal skins, a significant change from the narrative in Genesis 3 in which God made "garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21).

PETA's book also goes on to completely transform what most scholars consider to be an Old Testament foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary in the account of Abram offering up his only son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah.

"Among other new interpretations, in Genesis Chapter 22, Abraham travels to the land of Moriah and befriends a gentle lamb to show his reverence and respect for God's creation, rather than slaughtering a ram to demonstrate his faith — much as human sacrifice, once a reality, is now outlawed all over the world," the product description reads.

(...and on it goes...)

My initial reaction was to **scoff** at the **absurdity** of such changes... but then it was followed by **gut-wrenching horror** at the **irreverence** shown. I'm not shocked, but I'm sickened as PETA desecrates the Bible. They are actually **living out** some other words I read this week, words we find in **the prophet Jeremiah**.

"How can you say, 'We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us'? But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie. The wise men shall be put to shame; they shall be dismayed and taken; behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord, so what wisdom is in them? (Jeremiah 8:8–9)

Jeremiah's words continue to be **relevant** for our time as they describe the **twisting** of divine revelation. PETA may be the **latest example**, but it is far from the only one. In fact, the **cultural landscape is filled** with groups and people that see themselves as being on **equal footing with God**.

Our culture is pressuring each and every one of us to choose *our own path* instead of *submitting* ourselves to God.

Submission is, in the eyes of many, **wrong**. Yet for the Christian, **submission is the one and only viable path of faith**. A relationship with God **requires** anyone who bears the name "Christian" to wave the white flag and **yield** to Him. Submission isn't just a nice **suggestion**; it is **foundational to our faith**.

Submission Defined

What do we **mean** by submission? I think it's always helpful to **define** terms as we discuss them. One definition states it as follows:

SUBMISSION: *Voluntary placement of oneself under the authority and leadership of another...*

I think the **key word** in that definition is "**voluntary**." It may be possible to *force* someone to submit, but "*force*" overshadows the important sense of the word we're discussing. Submission **involves a choice**.

Jeremiah 8:8-9
They say they are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us; then behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie. The wise men shall be put to shame; they shall be dismayed and taken; behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord, so what wisdom is in them?"

Our Own Path vs. Submitting to God

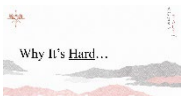
Submission Defined

SUBMISSION:
Voluntary placement of oneself under the authority and leadership of another...

- You can choose to submit to a **doctor's** recommendations when she suggests lifestyle changes to fight a disease.
- You can choose to submit to a **coach's** instructions when he lays out a formation for your soccer team.
- You can choose to submit to a **supervisor's** priorities when you are assigned hours for an upcoming shift.

The idea is that you **decide** or **choose** to **follow someone else's** ideas **instead of your own**. You place yourself under their decisions and authority. You set your own priorities aside and pursue those of another.

That is the **definition** of submission. But like most definitions, this one is **easy to state** but **difficult to live**.



Why It's Hard

"*You can't tell me what to do!*" is the **mindset** of our age. No one wants to be told what to do. We are **affronted** when someone claims authority over our lives and asks/demands submission from us. We **rebel against**:

- Politicians
- Road Signs
- Instruction Manuals
- Principals
- Referees and Umpires
- ...and of course, your spouse!!! (Amen?!)

Submission is **hard** because **we** want to make the decision on things that matter to us! **We** want to choose. **We** want to be in charge of what happens to **us**.

I used to struggle working at my **bookstore** job in college because my boss (Rex Miller) did NOT see things my way! I was in charge of cleaning up and organizing the shelves, returning overstocked books so we had room for new merchandise. Rex was notorious for having lots and lots of inventory. And just when I had an overstuffed section pared down to where it looked pleasantly full, Rex would order boxes and boxes of material to fill it to the point of overflowing. The mess drove me crazy! But the fact that **I had no say in it** drove me even crazier!



Why It's Necessary

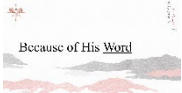
Submission is **hard**...but it is **necessary** and **right** when it comes to God. The **path to God** is **always one of humility and submission**.

Remember the definition we gave? Submission is "*voluntary placement of oneself under the authority and leadership of another.*"

If we are to follow God, we must place ourselves under HIS authority and leadership...not our own.

He cannot be called **Lord** if we are not willing to choose **His ways above our own!** We cannot be called **followers** (aka “disciples”) if we **follow ourselves** instead!

There are **many good reasons** to submit to God, but let me share the **three most obvious** ones.



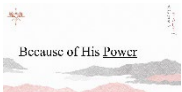
Because of His Word

We know we should submit to His authority because **Scripture explicitly tells us so!**

- *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (James 4:10)*
- *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)*

A PhD in Biblical studies isn't necessary to understand these verses. They are **straightforward** statements of submission. We must adopt a **posture of humility**, and we must submit to Our Lord...because the **Bible says** to do so!

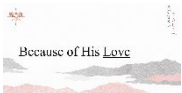
Even without these direct statements, though, we would still have good reasons to submit to God.



Because of His Power

One reason is because of **God's infinite qualities**. An all-powerful, all-present, and all-knowing God **could make me do** anything He wanted. Thankfully, God doesn't use **brute force** to intimidate us into submission. He is much too good for that.

But common sense tells us that a God who **knows more** than us, who can **do more** than us, and who is **infinitely better** than us *deserves* our surrender. He deserves every ounce of respect we can muster, and we are wise to submit to His ways.



Because of His Love

Power is not the only quality that makes us submit to God. His **godness** and **love** also make us **want to follow** Him.

Have you ever had a coach or teacher who really cared about you? Who wanted you to succeed? Ask yourself, weren't you more motivated to do assignments and push yourself for that person? Weren't you more willing to do whatever they asked of you?

We are **encouraged** when we know that someone has **our best interests** in mind. We **gladly** follow their lead. We are willing to **endure temporary struggles** with them when we know it's **not against us** but instead **for us!**

Since God loves us more than we could ever know, we can submit to His plans and **not worry** that we are being exploited or abused.

Instead, we can **joyfully set aside** the responsibility of determining our own path and **humbly submit** to a God who lovingly *can* and *will* lead us in the best possible direction...for now and for eternity!

Those are just a few reasons that submission is the only logical and viable path of faith. But you and I tend **not to be swayed** just by **principles** and **logic**. Usually, we need a **good example** to follow.



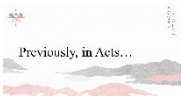
Examples of Submission

***Disclaimer:** Arguing from examples is shaky (ex: like taking hairstyle tips from Samson), so you need to have the Biblical principle in place before following a person. But once the principle is in place and you know the person's motivation, you can learn from their actions!*

Since we have some **principles** of submission established, let's look at some biblical **examples** to see it in action. It just so happens that the **next chapter** in our current sermon series on the book of Acts is filled with great examples of Biblical submission!

Turn in your Bibles to **Acts 16**.

As we **skim** through these examples, pay attention to their **motives** and the **challenges** they overcome as they submit.



Previously, in Acts...

To get you up to speed, recently we've been preaching through chapters 13-15.



Acts 13-14. Paul's 1st Missionary Journey, spreading the **good news** of Jesus to new places (with Barnabas; to Cyprus, Asia Minor and back)

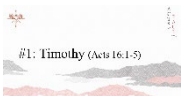
Acts 15. Jerusalem Council, clarifying **instructions** for Christians who were not Jewish (a lively discussion, a decision, plus a letter with instructions)

Summary: Don't do the things that would put up a huge cultural barrier between Gentiles/Jews (not out of legalism, but out of love)



Acts 15:36. Paul and Barnabas propose a **second trip**, saying "Let's do it again!" A conflict ends up with the two of them parting ways and taking two separate trips (Barnabas/Mark to Cyprus; Paul/Silas to Syria & Cilicia)

As chapter 16 begins, we follow Paul and Silas as their **journey gets underway**.



Example #1: Timothy (Acts 16:1-5)

The first **example** we come to is a young man named **Timothy**.

Acts 16:1–5

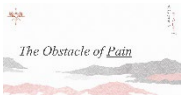
Acts 16:1-5
Paul went down to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

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Timothy would go on to become one of Paul's **most important co-workers** in the ministry. He enjoyed a close relationship with Paul, and he was trusted with important tasks. But it all started here.

Note his **heritage**. With a **mother** who was **Jewish**, **Timothy** was also **Jewish**. And this made him a **perfect companion** for Paul. Remember Paul's **pattern**? Go to a big city, find a synagogue, and preach to the Jewish population first (since they had the Biblical background to make sense of the idea that Jesus was the Messiah).

If Paul wanted Timothy to work with them, **Timothy would need access** to the places Paul went. And since he would go to **synagogues**, Timothy needed to be in **good standing** with his Jewish community...which required a certain **ceremony** that Timothy's parents had neglected. Blame his dad, but now Timothy had to make a choice - **would he submit** to this request? Would he submit to following God through this **surgical procedure**, even though it would be **painful**?



The Obstacle of Pain

If you don't get the "pain" implied in these verses, ask a friend. **Pain** can be a real **hindrance** to submission. No one likes to **do things that hurt**, whether the "hurt" comes as **physical**, or **emotional**, or **mental**, or **spiritual** pain.

We would like to think that **following Jesus** would be **painless** (somehow ignoring his "take up your cross and follow me" statement in Matthew 16:24-26)...yet pain is often **necessary** for **growth**.

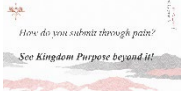
Physical therapists cause pain all the time as they facilitate healing through a range of appropriate movements. **Personal trainers** cause pain all the time as they facilitate strength by challenging new and as yet undiscovered muscles. **Counselors** cause pain all the time as they dredge up emotional baggage on the path to recovery.

We **trust** these kinds of people to help us navigate pain and arrive at a better place. Surely the pain that **Jesus** allows us to endure is similar! If we trust both his **power** and his **goodness**, then we can trust that whatever pain he allows is **part of His plan** for **growing us**.

So how do we handle moments when God invites us to go through pain? How do we submit?

I think about **Timothy's example** in this passage, and about **people in our own congregation** who have served and shown faithfulness through their own physical pain:

(ex: **Mr. Ted** caring for our preschoolers on his rolling chair, because it's painful to stand; or **Laura Hensley** still encouraging others while battling an extremely painful cancer).

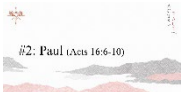


How do they submit to God through pain?

I think the answer comes from seeing the **big picture**! It comes from knowing that **pain relief** isn't the only objective, but instead seeing a **Kingdom purpose beyond the pain**. Timothy was able to see the goal of **evangelism**, and he took a huge personal step to ensure that he could share Jesus with as many people as possible.

When we face pain, we can submit to God if we **trust** that He **has a plan beyond** the pain...a plan that might even use the pain for the benefit of others.

"It is a genuine evidence of true godliness when, although plunged into the deepest afflictions, we yet cease not to submit ourselves to God." - John Calvin



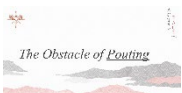
Example #2: Paul (Acts 16:6-10)

A second **example** of submission comes from **Paul** himself.

Acts 16:6-10

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Paul's **travel plans** were **revised** by God...on the fly! Paul had a great **itinerary** planned for their journey. It would have taken him southwest to one of the commercial centers of the region, the city of Ephesus. (He will eventually end up there, but for now the Spirit is at work). The Spirit "**forbids**" one path and "**does not allow**" another.



The Obstacle of Pouting

How could Paul have reacted? He could have **gone** to the forbidden locations anyway, in direct **violation** of the Spirit's guidance. But he also could have just **stopped**. *"I wanted to go here. God won't let me go there. Now I don't know WHERE to go!"*

Have you ever had that kind of mindset? Things don't go your way and you just want to stop?

You know **the word for that**, right? It's called "**pouting**." We normally associate it with little **kids** throwing a fit.

I love seeing some of the online stories parents share about the reason their toddlers pout and throw a fit.

- "My kid threw a screaming tantrum when I wouldn't let her lick the raw meat I was defrosting."
- "My kid cried super hard because the moon was in the sky during the day. He begged me to put it away."
- "My daughter had a tantrum in the car because her sister was looking out 'her' window."
- "My child threw a tantrum because I could not draw a convincing goose so that was my day"

For toddlers, pouting can be a little humorous. As **adults**, pouting is less funny, but **we still struggle** with it! Ours is always for "**good/better**" reasons. We wanted that job, or that girlfriend, or that car. We didn't think we'd still be working when our friends are retiring...or they get to travel but I have to raise my grandkids.

We have an experience we didn't necessarily plan, and now we just shake our head or shake our fist and fixate on what we didn't get.

In other words, **we pout**.

So, how do we submit without pouting?

Paul gives us a great **example**: he **moves on** (literally!). God shut a door that Paul wanted to go through, and rather than get upset, he focuses on **what's next**. Instead of getting mired in **emotions** or being **sad** about what might have been, Paul chooses a **new target** and **trusts God!**

His receptiveness to the Spirit will eventually lead Paul on a new and exciting mission as he heads across the Aegean Sea to Greece, but the example is one we would do well to follow.

Who knows what we might **miss** if we are so focused on what is **behind** us?! Paul knows this, and he **presses on**. Listen to his words from the book of Philippians:

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13–14)

Those **aren't the words** of a **pouter**. Those are the words of one who has **chosen to submit** to Jesus.

Whatever is **behind** you - a broken relationship, a financial mess, a family drama, a body broken by addiction - **forget it! Strain forward** toward the **call** of God in Christ Jesus!





Example #3: The Philippians (Acts 16:11ff)

There's a lot of **chapter 16** left this morning, but I just want to hit some highlights with you. As we get to Acts 16:11ff, the story moves to the city of **Philippi**. The story focuses on **three** people/encounters:

- Paul converts a **Jewish businesswoman** named **Lydia**
- Paul rescues a **demon-possessed slave girl**
- Paul saves a **pagan Jailer** and his household.

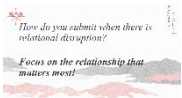
Please **read more** of this chapter **on your own** today (promise?), but allow me to **spoil** an important **detail** about each of these encounters: **submission to Jesus and the Holy Spirit disrupts our relationships!**



The Obstacle of Relational Disruption

- Lydia faced **disruption** with her household and her previous congregation of Jewish women.
- The slave girl faced a **disruption** with her master and her fortune-telling clients
- The jailor faced a **disruption** with the prisoners, his household, and his bosses.
- Even Paul and Silas faced **disruptions** with the city officials and the crowds!

Jesus has a way of **making relationships different**. The difference may be **positive** as a person grows in holiness while the Spirit changes hearts. Or the difference might be **challenging** as a person cuts off sinful behaviors...and old relationships get caught in the crossfire. Either way, relationships have a tendency of getting **disrupted** when one person begins to follow Jesus.



So how do we submit when there is **relational disruption**?

We focus on the **one** relationship that matters. Yes, other relationships demand attention, but our relationship with **Christ** must take **first priority**.

All power structures, ancient or modern, whether political, economic or racial, have the potential to become rivals to Christ, beckoning his followers to submit themselves to them in order to find a fuller security. - N. T. Wright

The same **temptation** goes for families and marriages, fathers and mothers and daughters and sons.

Each person in this story could have **alleviated the problems** if they put **other relationships ahead** of Jesus. **They didn't**. They showed us an **example of submission** that values **Jesus above** conflict, prosperity, comfort, and citizenship.

By doing so, they make the **voluntary choice** to be under the authority of Christ, no matter what. They submit to Him, knowing that the blessings of following Jesus **outweigh the difficulties** of any relationships that get disrupted in the process.



The Ultimate Example

Submission is **all over the place** in Acts 16. But that’s no surprise. It’s **what Christians do**. It’s what we do because **that’s what Christ** did!

Remember the definition we gave? Submission is *“voluntary placement of oneself under the authority and leadership of another.”*

Jesus modeled this throughout his time on earth. He chose **God’s plan above his own**. Even in his most **difficult moments**, leading up to the **cross**, Jesus **submitted**. He knew there would be **pain** from crucifixion. He knew the plan wouldn’t be easy, but he didn’t **pout**. He knew that the cross would scatter his followers and **disrupt relationships**. And yet there He was saying:

... *“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”* (Luke 22:42)

If we are to follow God, we must place ourselves under HIS authority and leadership...not our own.

Follow the **examples** of Timothy, Paul, the Philipppians, and most importantly Jesus. **Embrace the white flag.**

Submit, and follow Him alone.

Prayer

Invitation

Based on today’s topic, I want to invite you during our invitation song to **practice submission** by becoming a **member** of this church.

For some that decision involves **submission to Jesus in baptism**. You need to accept and declare Him as your Savior and your Lord.

For others that decision involves **submission to the church as members**. This goes **against culture** - freely submitting our decisions, our time, our money, our relationships, our *lives* to its members and leaders - but it declares (as Marshall Segal puts it),

“What I’ve found in Jesus is worth more than all the freedom, independence, and self-sovereignty I surrender — and far more....In an age that suspects and even despises



authority, church membership is a loud, arresting statement of our devotion to Christ.”¹

If you are interested in **joining** (even if you **aren't quite sure** about the **process**), please **come forward** and **stand here** by the stage as we sing our song of invitation. We'll sort out the details when the song is done!

(NOTE: IF NO ONE COMES UP, LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN FOR LATER)

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-god-made-you-for-membership>

Title: *Embrace the White Flag*

Passage: *Acts 16*

Preacher: *Steve Howell*

1. Do You Yield?

_____ Defined

Why it's _____

Why it's _____

- Because of His _____
(James 4:10; Matthew 6:10)
- Because of His _____
- Because of His _____

2. Examples of Submission

Example #1: Timothy (Acts 16:1-5)

The obstacle of _____

Example #2: Paul (Acts 16:6-10)

The obstacle of _____

Example #3: The Philippians (Acts 16:11ff)

The obstacle of Relational _____

The Ultimate Example

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Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- Who is one person in your life that gets to tell you what to do? Do you usually obey with grumbling or with gratitude? Explain your answer.

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- What is your reaction to the word “submission”? Do you view submission as a necessary evil, a joyful obligation, or neither? Why?
- What qualities do you need to possess in order to submit well to God? Which qualities come easily to you? Which need the most attention or improvement?
- Read James 4:10. Describe a time when you've seen God do this in your own life or with others.
- Are you more motivated to submit to God because of His power or because of His love? Explain.
- In Acts 16:1-5, Timothy submits to Paul's plan. How would submission to this plan help Timothy be a better evangelist? (Hint: where does Paul go first in a town? Acts 13:5,14; 14:1). What is the most painful change you have made that has helped you share the gospel?
- When things don't go your way, what does your adult “pouting” look like? How do you focus less on the things you didn't get and more on submitting to God's plan?
- In Acts 16, Paul submits both to God and to human authorities. Give an example of each. Are there limits to when we submit to human authorities? Are there limits to when we submit to God's authority? Discuss.
- What is the relationship between church membership and submission to God? How does one impact the other? Do you submit well to church leaders?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Pray for an attitude of humility as you approach the Word of God. Ask God to help you listen and obey in ALL areas, not just the areas that are easy.