

SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY

1 Peter 2:13-25

Introduction:

At the time that the Apostle Peter wrote his letter to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor, believers were living in very perilous times. Their world was under the control of Rome, and they found themselves in an increasingly difficult predicament. Trying to live as Christians in a pagan, very non-Christian world became increasingly perilous. The Roman government was becoming more and more corrupt, self-indulgent, and hedonistic.

The emperor at that time was Nero, one of the most notorious rulers of all time. He was a pleasure-seeking, self-indulgent and debauched individual who had no use for Christians and Christianity. He did not only want to kill Christians, he wanted to make them suffer first. He was known for finding new ways to torture and abuse Christians, making a whole sport and entertainment industry out of the torture and killing of Christians.

We may not be in that kind of desperate situation, yet the social and cultural conditions in our nation and world today are very similar. Our culture is becoming more and more like Peter's day with a smorgasbord of religions and belief systems and an ever-increasing animosity toward Christianity and Biblical beliefs. The problem they struggled with and we may be struggling with today is, as a Christian how do we live with those in authority over us when they don't share our values?

Peter has some important instructions for us regarding our response to authority. In our text today, he offers some valuable advice in a couple of different areas. First, he deals with the political and legal realm, then he broaches the subject of servants and how they ought to conduct themselves in the workplace, even when dealing with difficult employers. He ends the passage with some critical thinking regarding our attitude toward suffering and leaves us with the example of Jesus himself as a guide to our approach to affliction. (*Won't finish today*)

Submission to the Political and Legal Authorities

In the midst of oppressive and tyrannical domination by a pagan and vicious leader, Peter tells the believers of his day... *read v. 13-14.*

"Be subject..." – the NIV and NKJV say, "Submit yourselves..." This goes against the very grain of our human nature. Very few of us like to be told what to do. I think most of us would like to say, with Frank Sinatra, "I did it my way." No one is going to tell me what to do. Most of all the government authorities.

This becomes even more difficult when you have authorities who have no respect for the principles that God has laid out for good and right conduct. We look at the laws and ordinances being forced upon our society today and feel that we are being overrun by evil. But I am not sure it is any worse than it was in Peter's day. Roman society, by this time, was a mess of wicked, corrupt and depraved behaviour. Sexual perversion of every kind and degenerate self-indulgence were rampant.

Another factor in all of this is that Rome had become increasingly displeased with Jews and Judaism, and the Jews were persistently resisting Roman control. There were groups of Jews like the Zealots, who fought even to the point of death to try to drive out the Roman occupation of the land. Since Rome viewed Judaism and Christianity as closely related, the church could easily be falsely accused of opposing Rome. And church history indicates that Rome did eventually begin to accuse the church of crimes against the state.

So, Peter was concerned that the church, the believers, conduct themselves in a manner that would show that any such charges against them are false. He says... *read v. 13-14 again and comment...*

In v. 15 he gives us the rationale for his instruction. The reason for this kind of subjection is simple – it is God's will. *Read v. 15...* It is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people. How? By doing good, doing what is right.

➔ *Illust. CROWN HIM LORD OF ALL!*

Quite a number of years ago, Jack Eckerd, founder of the Eckerd drugstore chain, committed his life to Christ. Shortly

afterward as he walked through one of his stores, he noticed the magazine racks with their glossy copies of Playboy and Penthouse. Although Eckerd was retired from active management, he called the president of the company and urged him to get rid of those pornographic magazines. The president protested because substantial profits were gained from their sales. Being the largest stockholder, Eckerd himself stood to lose a lot of money by such a decision. But he remained firm in his objection, and he prevailed. The offensive magazines were removed from all 1700 drugstores. When he was asked what motivated him to take this action, Eckerd replied, "God wouldn't let me off the hook!"

There is an old country song which says, "It's a little too late to do the right thing now." For the Christian it is never too late to do the right thing. We are called upon to do what is right, to do good, which means living in submission to every authority that is placed over us, because, in doing so, we silence the critics.

Verse 16 sounds like a contradiction to verse 13. Submit yourselves (be subject) – Live as people who are free.

Even within v. 16 there seems to be a contradiction. Live as people who are free ... live as servants (slaves) of God. But what he wants us to see is the true meaning of freedom.

Compare to 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."*

➔ *Illust. THE TYRANNIES OF FREEDOM*

Phillip Hook travelled in Eastern Europe before the Berlin Wall came down and the borders opened up. He met some followers of Christ over there and later made these observations: "I sat with some Eastern European young people and was thinking how fortunate I was to be an American and free. As I watched them and learned from them, I realized that they were more free than I. I was seeing freedom as being free to travel, to own, to say; while they had given up the hopes that the world offers materially, and had become free to be God's people. I discovered that in reality they were far freer than I."

The most important freedom is spiritual, not political. It is freedom from obsession with sensual pleasures. It is freedom to know Christ. It is freedom to love God and others in the strength of His Spirit.

Last week we spoke about the subject of slavery and redemption. When God redeems us by the blood of Jesus Christ and sets us free from slavery to sin and Satan, we become slaves of God and righteousness. That sounds like a contradiction, but in truth the greatest freedom is found in serving God with a whole heart. And that is what Peter is calling us to—living as slaves, bondservants of God.

Verse 17 summarizes this call to subjection to authority with four concise commands – *read v. 17. NIV - "Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king."*

Notes regarding the translation of this verse: Honor – same word used in the first and fourth phrases – show respect...

Also note the arrangement of these instructions:

- Honour all ... Love the brotherhood (fellow believers)

One writer put it this way: Submission has a universal dimension which includes all of mankind, without exception. All men are to be honoured and respected. The brotherhood of believers is to be loved. There is a greater degree of intimacy and contact, and relationship, between one believer and other saints. Thus, in Scripture, the believer has a higher level of obligation to believers than to unbelievers.

"So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."
(Galatians 6:10).

- Fear God ... honour the king, emperor

The king is to receive honour as the ultimate human authority over men. He is to be honoured as a man, the "head man" we might say. But there is a limit to the "honour" he receives. He is only to be honoured as a man and never to be worshipped as a god. This is where early Christians faced conflict – the Roman emperors demanding to be worshipped as God. But Peter distinguishes between the "honour" the king is to be given and the "fear" God alone is to receive from the saints.

Conclusion:

The people of Peter's day faced many issues related to the ruling authorities and how they would respond to them. Many of the same dangers present at the time of Peter's writing exist today in a slightly different form. Increasingly, Christians are looked upon with suspicion as those opposed to civil authority. This is partly due to some Christians who are becoming increasingly militant and apparently more willing to break the laws of our land. At the same time, we face increasing pressure to bend to laws and requirements that violate the laws and standards God has set out in His Word. When believers stand against those unrighteous expectations and beliefs, they are vilified and accused as law-breakers.

When biblical truth and those who believe it are mocked and ridiculed by those in government and by the authorities, we realize that we are living in a world that is very foreign to the truth by which we function.

And we see just how vitally important the Christian's relationship to civil government is. The Bible makes it clear that we are "aliens and strangers" on this earth; our citizenship is in heaven. But this does not mean we are somehow less obligated to obey the laws of the land.

Peter makes it clear that we have the same obligation to obey our government as do unbelievers living in this nation, but the Christian has an even higher obligation than unbelievers. That is because we do it "for the Lord's sake." And because of that, there may come a time, just as it was for the Christians of Peter's world, when we have to stand against the laws of the land for the sake of the truth of God's Word.

Application – Two questions:

- How submissive are we to the government authorities?
- How willing are we, if necessary, to stand against them for the sake of the truth?