

Submission To The State

1 Peter 2:13-17

Pastor John Miller

We're going to back up two verses to our text last Sunday, verses 11 and 12, because they introduce us to the topic of verse 13 down to verse 17. Back to verse 11 as I read. "Dearly beloved..."—Peter says—"...I beg you..."—"I beseech you"—"...as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." I want you to "have your manner of living honest among the Gentiles, that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

Now notice verse 12. We're living before the unbelieving world, the Gentiles or the non-Christians. And he exhorts us to honest living, which is beautiful living, and that we do good works, verse 12, and they will "behold" them and "glorify God in the day of visitation," verse 13. So I want you to "submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king, as supreme, or as unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; as free, not using your liberty as a cloak of maliciousness or your liberty as a cover for sinful behavior, but as the servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear..."—or "reverence"—"...God. Honor the king."

I went back and wanted to read verses 11 and 12 because Peter, there, called us, as God's people, to live blamelessly or beautifully. My King James translation translates that as "honestly," but the idea is a lovely life or a beautiful life. What is an honest life or a beautiful life or a lovely life? I believe very clearly today from our text that that beautiful life is a life of submission. Yes, I said submission. I often thought that if we had a marquee in front of the church where we advertise my sermon topics and I were to put the topic of "Submission to the State," people wouldn't be flocking to get in here to hear this sermon.

So I am not preaching this message today because it's going to make you feel good. I'm not preaching this message today because it's popular and what you want to hear. I'm preaching this message today because it's in the Bible. It's in God's Word. And I want to be faithful to preach the "whole counsel of God" and not water it down or skip over it or avoid it. It is a controversial subject. It is a very sensitive subject. Just the word "submit" makes the hair stand up on the back of your neck. "Don't tell me to submit. Don't tell me to obey. Don't tell me to honor. Don't tell me to respect. I can do whatever I want. No one's going to tell me what to do."

Well, obviously that's not the attitude a Christian should have. A Christian should have an attitude of submission to God, and an attitude of submission to authority that God has established in government, in the church and in the home. Jesus Christ, our prime example—we'll get it next Sunday, verse 21 down to verse 23. The Jesus, Who suffered, reviled not back, but He entrusted Himself to His Father, Who would judge righteously. So Jesus is our example. Submission is Christ like. But of all the instructions we are given as Christians in the New

Testament in living this beautiful life, I think one of the most difficult is the doctrine of submission.

Now where do we submit? Well, we submit in the nation that we live in. To the government, verse 13—we get that today—; we submit in the workplace—next Sunday we'll look at that, verse 18—; we submit in the home, chapter 3, verses 1 to 7; and we submit in the church that God has established.

Now I want to bring out four things from our text, verse 13 down to verse 17. If you're taking notes, I want you to write them down. Number one, I want you to see the call or literally the command or the duty of submission. Look at it in verse 13. Peter says, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king, as supreme." Now the first point I want to make is that we are commanded to submit. Notice it's "submit yourselves." Now the word "submit" comes from the military realm, and it means to "rank under." That's all it means. It means to rank under. Can you imagine in the military if there was no ranking, if there was no respect for authority, if there was no immediate obedience to the chain of command, what chaos would exist? Same thing would exist in government. Same thing would exist in our homes. Same thing would exist in the church. So God has established government—We're going to see that very clearly—and we are to submit to our government or civil authority. But it means to submit under.

Now the words "submit yourselves" indicates that it's a voluntary act. And by the way, it's an imperative in the present tense. What does that mean? It means it's commanded; it's not optional. It means it's in the present tense. What does that mean? It means it's ongoing, continually. That we are to submit ourselves to obedience to God and to the government authorities that we live in the nation of. So we're to submit or surrender.

Now before I leave this point, I want to make it very clear that this submission does not convey an inferiority. When the Bible says, "Wives, submit to your husbands," does that mean the husband is smarter than the wife? All the ladies go, "Noooo." Does that mean the husband is better than the wife? "Noooo." You know, when a police officer turns on the red light and pulls you over, does that mean the police officer is a better person morally than you or has a higher IQ? No. It means he has a position of authority. He has a position of authority. When you go to work and your boss tells you to do something, does that mean he's smarter than you? No. It means he has a position of authority over you. So you need to rank yourself under for the sake of function and order. So we are called or commanded to submit ourselves.

And submission is not just for wives. It's not just for children. It's not just for servants. We're all to submit one to another. We're going to get there in several weeks, but jump forward to chapter 5 of 1 Peter and peek at it with me in verse 5. Chapter 5, verse 5. Peter says, "Likewise, you younger, submit yourselves to the older." And then notice what he says. "All of you be subject one to another, be clothed with humility..."—why?—"...for God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble." Notice verse 6. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may..."—what?—"...exalt you..."—or "lift you up"—"...in His due

time.” But I wanted you to see that phrase “All of you be subject one to another.” There needs to be a mutual submission.

Even in chapter 3, when he comes to the husbands, and he uses the word “likewise.” Submit to the government, submit on the job, wives to their husbands and “likewise,” husbands to their wives. Give honor unto your wife; she’s the weaker vessel. You are heirs together of the grace of life, and if you don’t do that, your prayers are going to be hindered. One of the direct statements in the New Testament to hindered prayer is a husband not honoring his wife. God’s going to hinder your prayers. He’s not going to answer your prayers. You can’t be wrong in your marriage and right with God. If you want God to answer your prayers, then you need to be right in your marriage and be submitted to God and to His Word.

The second thing I want to point out in verses 13 and 14 is to whom we are called to submit. To whom or what are we called to submit? Verse 13, “Every ordinance of man.” We are to submit to every ordinance of man. Now I gotta be careful; I went too long first service. And I don’t want to cut you guys short, but I gotta be quick and to the point or else we’ll be here a long time. What does he mean by “every ordinance of man”? Simply, governmental authority. Oh, that hurts. It doesn’t say you like them. It doesn’t say you agree with them. It says you submit to them. You go, “I don’t like this sermon today.” You want to be obedient to God’s Word? You believe the Bible is the Word of God and “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” and is “profitable”? Then you want to listen to what God says here. God says that He wants you and I, as Christians, to submit to the powers that be.

Now you say, “Peter was writing a long time ago. He didn’t have Barak Obama as the president.” I’m not saying that’s good or bad; I’m just mentioning him, okay, because he is the sitting president. I didn’t do that first service or the second. I’m probably in trouble already. But guess who was the Caesar of Rome, who ruled the world, under which Peter was subject? Who was the sitting Caesar? Nero. Caesar Nero. And Caesar Nero was viscous, hater of Christians. He used to put Christians up as Tiki torches. He would actually cover them in pitch, ignite them, put them on poles to illuminate his gardens at night. He would throw them to the wild beasts and watch them as they were torn apart. He was the first real formal governmental persecutor against Christians, and while Peter’s writing these words—and by the way, I didn’t mention this first service, but only a few years after Peter wrote this under Caesar Nero and the Roman government, Peter would be crucified upside down for his faith. Not being a Roman citizen, he would be crucified. Roman citizens were beheaded, as Paul was. By the same king he tells us that we are to submit to. Notice in verse 13, “to the king, as supreme.” That’s Nero. And verse 14, “unto governors.” It would be the governor of California or the governor of a different state.

I’m telling you, this is a hard sermon. I’d like to skip these verses. I would understand it better if it said, “If you don’t like your government, protest. March. Scream. Yell.” And we live under a democratic culture today where we can have open protest. We have free speech. But as a Christian, it must be done lawfully. It must be done legally. Nowhere in the Bible are we told we can engage in civil disobedience unless that disobedience to man’s government is because we

are being obedient to God's Word. And I'll talk about that in just a moment. So under the Roman government, we are to obey. Under any government, even if we don't agree with them.

Now there are three divine institutions that God has ordained. And they are marriage and family, the church and government. In the Bible these are the three institutions that are God ordained. And guess what the first is? And guess what the building block of our society is? Marriage and family. Marriage is a divine institution. And if we as a nation do not uphold God's design for marriage, it's the end of our nation. We cannot redefine marriage as God ordained it to be and expect to thrive as a society or as a culture or as a nation. How does God describe marriage? A man and a woman united together in the covenant of marriage for life, having children and raising those children "in the fear and admonition of the Lord." That's the building block of society.

Now what is legal is not necessarily right. Don't forget that. Just because something is legal doesn't mean it's right. But it doesn't give us a license to disobey the law, even though the government may be oppressive. Even though our taxes may be used for things we don't agree with, the Bible is clear that we are to be submitted and obedient to the government.

Write this down. Romans 13:1-7. And I want you to read that for homework today. And Paul makes it clear that we are to submit to government. But he says this in Romans 13:1-2. "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there are no powers but of God. And the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." So we as Christians are to submit to and obey the powers that be.

Do you know that Jesus never practiced or commanded us to practice civil disobedience? You know, when He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, He wasn't doing anything wrong. He had done nothing wrong. He was arrested unjustly. And even Peter rises up, pulls out his sword and goes out to protect Jesus, cuts off the ear of one of the servants, Malchus. And Jesus has to pick up the ear, put it back on the guy's head—blow the dirt off first. It's not in the text; I just imagined that. "Peter, what are you doing!" [Blowing] Sticks it back on. And then what did Jesus tell him to do? "Put away your swords." "Put away your swords." Now I know that some people have a conviction that we should blow up abortion clinics and that we should kill abortion doctors. "Put away your swords." If you pick up the sword, you'll "die by the sword." God has ordained government for the punishment of evil men. If you break the law, then you have to suffer the consequences of the law—be willing to do that. "Peter, put away your sword. Shall I not submit to the plan My Father has for me?" God had ordained, under Roman government, for Jesus to be arrested and tried and to be crucified on the cross for man's sin.

God, rather than not allow evil to exist, chose to bring good out of evil. And I tell myself that all the time. No matter how corrupt the government gets, God still sits on the throne in heaven. And He rules in the affairs of men. And God puts up kings, and God takes down kings. And no one can be in that place of authority but God, who is sovereign, is in control. And our faith is in God; it's not in human government.

But Jesus paid taxes. Why shouldn't I? I can't believe the people who came up to me after first service with tax problems. And I understand the IRS can be a real bummer. Years ago they gave me money that wasn't mine. I tried to give it back. That was a blessing. They kept sending it back to me saying, "It's your money." "It's not my money." Finally my tax guy said, "Just put it in the bank. Sit on it for a while then use it." Praise God! They get their wires crossed. So they're asking for money that really doesn't belong to them.

But they came to Peter, the writer of this book, and said, "Does your master pay taxes?" And Peter says, "I don't know. Let me go ask Him." So he went, "Jesus. Do we pay taxes?" And Jesus said, "Go down and take your hook into the Galilee and drop your hook and you're going to catch a fish. When you catch that fish, pull it up. And the first fish you catch, take out of its mouth a coin—there's going to be a coin—and you go pay taxes for me and for you." Isn't that cool? Every tax season I go fishing. "Come on, Lord! Come on, Jesus!" I'm kidding. "Lord, pay my taxes! Pay my taxes!" He pulls this fish out, and there's a coin inside. "Yah, we pay taxes! Put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

And then they actually came to Jesus and said, "Is it okay to pay tribute unto Caesar or not?" Now the Jews hated the Roman government. And they hated to pay taxes. It's like us. But Jesus said, "Show me a coin." They handed Him what's called the denarius, a day's wage. And he held up this denarius and said, "Whose picture is on this coin?" They said, "That's Caesar's." He took the coin and flipped it back to them and said, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God." And they were, like, dumbfounded. They thought He'd say, "Yes" or "No" and they'd trap Him and report Him and get Him arrested. But "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar." That means pay your taxes. Paul said so, as well, in Romans 13, but "Give to God what belongs to God." Now we are no longer to be disobedient but obedient to man's laws and God's laws.

Now here's my question: "If obeying man's law means breaking God's law, what should I do?" Break man's law. So I believe that there is a situation—you need to be very careful here; okay? There is a time and a situation when it is necessary and right to break the law. When the government says you cannot pray, what do we do? We pray and we break the law. When the government says you cannot preach the Gospel anymore, what do we do? We preach the Gospel and we go to jail. There've been times when the laws have been changed even in my preaching, that I've had my pastor friends call me and say, "You ready to go to jail?" Because if we keep preaching the Word, we're going to end up in jail. It's going to be considered hate speech, to say certain things and to take certain positions. You ready to go to jail for the Gospel's sake? For Jesus' sake?

But you need to make sure that by obeying God, it's necessary to break man's law. Let me give you a couple of examples of this. Exodus 1, when the Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh, who was the king supreme, and told them to throw the male babies into the Nile River, they disobeyed his edict and kept them alive.

In Daniel 3, the three Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—when they were told to

bow down and worship the image that the king had erected. And instead of bowing down, they stood strong, and because of that, they were thrown into a fiery furnace, so hot that the men who threw them in got consumed by the fire. And they fell, bound in rope, into the fire. They said, "King, know this; that we will not bow to or worship your image, which you have set up. Our God is able to deliver us, but if not, be it known that we will not worship your god." And they are thrown into the fire.

I often wonder if I'd be willing to be thrown into a fire for obedience to God. You know that you have a Bible today, because at a point in time in church history Christians died, gave their lives, for you to have an English Bible, for you to have a translation of Scripture? You know the Protestant Reformation was birthed in the blood of reformers so that we could be free today to read the Word and study the Word and live a Christian life? They paid a price.

They fell bound into this fiery furnace. And you know the story; it's so cool. The king comes running in there, and he looks at them and he goes, "Hey, how many guys did we throw in?" They said, "Three." He said, "I see four. And the fourth one looks like the Son of God!" And he had to actually holler to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, "Come out!" He had to tell them to come out? The minute I landed in that furnace and my robes were on fire, I'd go, "Wow!" I'm outta there! I don't need no king to ask me to come out!" But the reason they hung out was because Jesus was with them. I believe that Christ appeared in the fiery furnace. And I believe whatever God calls us to go through by way of persecution out of obedience to God, God will be with you. Amen? And God will strengthen you.

In the book of Acts, they told Peter, our human author here, and John to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. Stop preaching in this man's name. Acts 5:29, Peter said, "We must obey God rather than man." "We must obey God rather than man."

Years ago I had the privilege of smuggling Bibles into China. I went to Hong Kong to speak at a mission base there, and while we were there, they said, "Hey, John, would you like to smuggle Bibles across the Chinese border into the city of Canton? And we're going to take Bibles in, and would you like to do that?" I go, "Ahhhh, okay. Let's do it!" Scariest thing I've ever done. And all the time, I'm thinking, "Man, I sure hope I'm in the will of God here." If not, I've got jail ministry. Not only jail ministry but jail ministry in China. There were four of us, and we each had two bags and in each bag were 50 Bibles. We were taking hundreds of Bibles into China. And thank God we got right through. And man, that was an adrenaline rush. But the Lord got us through, and along the way, we dropped them off. And the people gave us such an awesome experience. But what we were doing was illegal.

So is it okay to break the law and smuggle Bibles into China, which their government says is against the law? Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel." "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." It's not only okay, it's commanded us. And whenever God commands me to do something and it runs counter to man's law, I must obey God rather than man.

We have the issue of abortion. We have the issue of same-sex marriage. We have the issue of gender-neutral bathrooms. We have the issue of military service or fighting in a war. And those are controversial issues, but we can talk about those things. The government commands you to have an abortion, we just obey God. Disobey man and obey God; right? But we don't do acts of civil disobedience, break the law, do evil that good may come. All through the Bible it tells us that we basically obey and that we trust God and we let Him work things out.

Now the purpose of human government is mentioned in verse 14 of our text. It's twofold: It's to punish evildoers and to praise well-doers. Notice it in verse 14. The government is given "for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well." So the government should have laws that punish evildoers. And we should also as a government be actively praising and protecting those who do good.

Now third point I want to make is in verses 15 and 16. And this is the crux of the passage, the reasons we submit. The reasons we submit or why we submit to government. Let me give you five reasons. Write them down. Number one, for the Lord's sake. Go back to verse 13. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man..."—why?—"...for the Lord's sake." Reason number one. We do it as unto the Lord. A wife submits to her husband, because she does it "as unto the Lord." Now what it means is to honor God. Why do I submit to government and the laws of the land? I do it to honor God.

Second reason is in verse 14. To avoid "punishment" and to promote "praise." You know why I should not break the law? You don't even need the Bible to tell you this, because I don't want to go to jail. Now just before I got saved, I was 17 and I got arrested and put into juvenile hall. So your pastor is an ex-con. One night of incarceration changed the direction of my life. One night. Locked me in a cell. And from that day forward, I began to pray. I began to think about God. I began to think about the direction of my life, where I was going and what I was doing. My life turned at that point. My sister gave me a Bible, and I started to read the Bible, and God started to speak to me and I began to realize where I was going was wrong. So God can use that. God's ordained government to punish evil men. God has actually entrusted the government with the sword.

I heard of a pastor who was speeding down the street one day, and a cop pulled him over. The pastor said, "Officer, I'm a servant of God, and I'm on my way to preach." The policeman said to the pastor, "I am also a servant of God, and God told me to go out to the highways and byways and to bring them in. And I'm locking you up and bringing you in." You know that policemen are servants of God? It breaks my heart right now in our nation to see this rebellion against police officers. What kind of a nation have we become if we are—Yes, there are cases of authority being abusive, but when we disregard authority, we're in big trouble. So we are to be submitted to the authorities that we be not punished.

Now number three, because it's God's will. Isn't that very clear in verse 15? "For so is the will of God." All the time people ask me, "Pastor, what's God's will for my life? Pastor, I just want to know the will of God." I can tell you right now. You know what God's will is? Drive the speed

limit. "Thou shalt not steal." "Thou shalt not lie." "Thou shalt not commit adultery." I could give you all that. Don't you hate speed-limit signs? Every time I see a speed-limit sign, "Aw, that's for other people. That ain't for me. That's not for me, especially right now, because I'm late." But we need to be conscious of the fact that I'm to obey the laws of the land. It's like a man who was paying his taxes, and he wrote a letter to the IRS. "I cannot sleep. I have included a check for \$150." He goes, "If I still can't sleep, I'll send you the balance." We're not only to have the action, but we're going to see the honor in verse 17 is the attitude of honoring the king.

And then notice fourthly, we obey government because it "puts to silence...foolish men." The word means "to muzzle foolish men." If we're living beautiful lives, if we're living above reproach, verse 12, when they see our "good works," they'll "glorify God" Who is in heaven. Many of them will come to salvation.

And then write this down. Number five, because we are God's servants. I love that. That's in verse 16. I want you to see that. He says you are "free," but do "not use your liberty..."—your "freedom"—"...as a cover up for maliciousness." But you should use your freedom "as a slave..."—or "servant"—"...of God." What an interesting paradox; you are free, but you don't use your freedom for selfish, self-centered indulgence. You use it for sacrificial service and the idea that we can be free, but we can be slaves because we are servants of God. So our liberty is not to indulge and live as we want but to be sacrificial in our lives and unselfish in our giving.

Remember that Jesus said we are the "salt of the earth" and we are the "light of the world." He said that "A city set on a hill cannot be..."—what?—"...hidden." So we are to let our light shine. We are to have our influence on our culture. But remember that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but they are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."

Here's what we need to do as a church. We need to pray, and we need to preach and we need to live godly, holy lives. Those are my steps for changing our world. Those are the steps for changing the world. "Let's blow up some clinics! Let's picket! Let's stand for our rights!" Let's pray, let's preach and let's live holy, Godly lives. That's what the Bible tells us to do. And guess who is our example? Jesus. Jesus set the example for us. I don't agree with how my taxes are being spent. I don't agree with some of the government waste. I don't agree with some of the laws they've passed. Some of them are not only immoral, they're insane. Insane! I'll stop right there because I still have verse 17, and we're supposed to be nice. We're supposed to honor the king. Even though we may disagree, we respect the authority and the position.

So we're to pray. I Timothy 2, "I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, giving of thanks, be made for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." The only way to change the world is to change men's hearts. This is why I'm so excited to see what God is doing in our church. He's changing lives through the teaching of the Word of God. He's changing lives through the power of the Word of God. People are being saved. People are being nurtured and disciplined. And God is doing a work

through our lives. And we go out of here to impact our culture and our community and our world for Jesus Christ. What a massive influence we can have as the “salt of the earth” and as the “light of the world.”

One last verse and we'll wrap this up. Verse 17. And we see the scope of our submission. This is a summary verse, where he shows us the overall scope and sphere of where we submit. Notice it in verse 17. “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.” There are four commands, all of them in the present tense. That means that they are commanded, and in the present tense, we continually do. So let me break them down for you.

Number one, we keep on showing respect to every human being, regardless of their race, regardless of their religion, regardless of their political persuasion. We honor and we respect them as being created in the image of God. We don't kill people because they won't convert to Christianity. We love them and we pray for them and we share with them. And we respect all people. And this also means poor people, disenfranchised people. It means that we respect rich people, educated people, uneducated people. Every human being is created in the image of God. If you defame a person and attack a person, you are attacking God, the creator Who made them. We are to love people. We are to love human beings. That's what the Bible tells us in this statement.

Secondly, we are to keep on loving the Christian community. Loving the brotherhood means we have a special love for Christians. Yes, we love the world, because God did, but yes, we also love our fellow Christians. In chapter 1, verse 22; in chapter 3, verse 8; chapter 4, verse 8; chapter 5, verse 14, all from 1 Peter, he tells us to “love the brethren.”

Here's the third thing we need to keep doing. We need to keep on fearing God, verse 17. “Fear God” or reverence God. As believers, we need to have a holy fear and respect or reverential fear of God.

And then fourthly and lastly, we keep on honoring the king. This is the conclusion. Now he starts with this in verse 13. “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man...to the king, as supreme.” And he ends with it, verse 17, “Honor the king.” So verse 13 speaks of our action of obedience. Verse 17 speaks of our attitude of honor. So we actively obey the government, and we honor them with our attitude. It means give them due respect, and respect their authority. As I said, we pray for them, we submit to them and we obey them. This is the scope of our Christian duty.

Now I realize that what we've just covered is not a “feel good” sermon. When you leave here today and someone says, “What was the sermon about today?” “Driving the speed limit and paying your taxes. I wish I'd stayed home.” You're the “light of the world.” You're the “salt of the earth.” “A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” How I pray for this congregation; that we will think Biblically, we will live Biblically, we will love Biblically, we will “love the Lord with all our strength, soul and mind” and we will “love our neighbor as ourselves.” Amen?