

Submission To The State

1 Peter 2:13-17

Pastor John Miller

I want to read the text, 1 Peter 2:13-17, and then we're going to set the context as well. Follow with me in your Bible. Peter says, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man"—there's the theme right off the bat—"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; 14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. 15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: 16 As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. 17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king."

In this section of Peter, we're going to be doing kind of a deep dive for several weeks on the subject of submission. It starts right there in verse 13, "Submit yourselves." Peter moves from the subject of standing in your salvation to living a life of submission.

What was the context, since we've been away for so many weeks, of what Peter was talking about? Back up two verses to verse 11. Peter was pleading with us to live blamelessly in front of an unbelieving world. Verse 11, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims," that concept segues us right into the idea that we're to be submitted to the governmental authorities that be because we are " . . . strangers and pilgrims," we have a citizenship which is in heaven, but we also live upon the earth. So, " . . . as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12 Having your conversation 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."

In verse 12, Peter's pleading with us to have a lifestyle...the word "conversation" in my King James translation means the way you live. It's not how you talk, it's how you walk. Let it be " . . . honest." The word "honest" carries with it the idea of beautiful or lovely or charming to behold. So, we're to be living beautiful lives, " . . . among the Gentiles," verse 12, is a reference to the unbelieving world. They're watching us. " . . . whereas they speak against you,"—and they may attack us—"they may by your good works,"—that's what carries over into verses 13-17—"which they shall behold,"—we will—"glorify God in the day of visitation."

Go back with me to verse 13. Now, as far as submission goes, we're going to see in verses 21-25 that Jesus is always our example. Amen? When He was being crucified, they were reviling Him, He reviled not back. He didn't curse back or yell back or holler back at them. He committed Himself to the Father and He just trusted the Father to take care of Him on the cross, and He was our example. Look with me real quick, rather than try to relate it, verse 21. He says, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us"—here's the point—"an example, that ye should follow his steps: 22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: 23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: 24 Who his own self bare

our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. 25 For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.” We get to that in our next study, but Jesus is always our example as we walk before a watching world.

As far as submission goes, tonight in this text we’re going to learn that we are to submit to the state or to the nation; secondly, we are to be submissive in the workplace, verse 18 he talks about slaves and masters; thirdly, we’re to be submissive in our homes, 1 Peter 3:1-7, and we’re going to look at that section on marriage in a few weeks where the wives are to be subject to their husbands, and husbands are to love their wives “ . . . giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.” Fourthly, 1 Peter 3:8-12, we are to be submissive in the church. God has established leadership in the church, and we are to be submissive to their leadership. As they follow Christ, we should follow the Word of God given to us by our leaders.

Tonight we’re looking at submission to the state. Again, it’s not a subject we enjoy. We are not favorable sometimes to our government, but God has established government “ . . . for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.” Notice first of all the call. If you’re taking notes, we are called. This statement in verse 13 is actually an imperative, so it’s not an option, it is a command; and it is in the present tense, so it means ongoingly, habitually, continually we are to be submitting. Look at verse 13, “Submit yourselves.” This, as I said, is a command in the present tense, and it’s in what’s called the passive voice. That means that you are to surrender and yield to the Spirit, and He produces humility in your heart and in your life as you submit.

Notice that the word “submission” means, in its etymology or origin, literally to rank under. Actually, in the Bible it sounds kind of radical but it’s a military term. It means to rank under. If you’ve been in the military—I have not—but if you have been in the military, you know how important it is that you follow orders - right?- that you submit, that you obey your superiors, that you submit under for the sake of order and function. That’s the concept there. It means to rank yourself under, to submit yourselves.

Notice the statement. It says, “Submit yourselves,” so it’s a voluntary act. You’re not to be forced or coerced or pressured by others, you’re to voluntarily, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit being obedient to God in His Word, submit yourselves. It’s a voluntary act. Notice as well, when we study this subject in the New Testament that this submission is not just for wives. We’re so used to hearing, “Wives, submit to your husbands,” and we only think in those terms of a wife has to submit to her husband, but you know, all through the Scripture there is call for us to submit as believers in Jesus Christ. We are to be submitting voluntarily, habitually, willingly to the governments that be. It’s submission to the commands of God.

Look real quick with me at 1 Peter 5:5-6. This is a call to submission to all of us. “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves”—very same statement, very same concept, very same phrase —“unto the elder.” It’s talking not about spiritual elders per se, it’s literally talking about older

people, showing respect to older people. So, “. . . submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another”—notice that—“all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility”—why?—“for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” Verse 6 says, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” That’s one of the classic passages found right there in Peter about “. . . all of you be subject one to another,” and that we should “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” It does not mean that the person submitting is inferior, it just means for the sake of function and order. It’s not because God loves men more than women that wives have to submit to them or that God places authority over us and they are superior to us, but it’s all for the sake of purpose of function and order.

Notice, secondly, in verses 13-14, to whom are we to submit? It’s in verse 13, “. . . to every ordinance of man.” This is where it hurts—to every ordinance of man? I sometimes get irritated by speed limit signs. They’re not for me, they’re for other people. Now, when you leave tonight and you’re driving home, remember this statement, “. . . every ordinance of man.” “Boy, this speed limit should be a lot faster! That’s too slow.” The other day I was consciously driving the speed limit, and I thought I was going to get run over on the highway. No one’s driving the speed limit. I thought, If I could get this Christian bumper sticker off my car right now, I could drive a little faster. But it tells us here that we are to obey “. . . every ordinance of man.” That is a reference to governmental authority.

Notice in verse 13 it says, “. . . whether it be to the king, as supreme.” You say, “They weren’t living under the government we had,” or “They didn’t have the President we have.” Think again. They were living under Roman rule, and guess who was the Caesar? Nero. Caesar Nero, one of the most vicious persecutors and haters of Christians. Caesar used to put Christians on tiki torches—human tiki torches—set them on fire to illuminate his garden as he ran through the garden at night. He was a wicked, vicious persecutor of Christians, yet we are told here in 1 Peter, “. . . every ordinance of man,” the commandments, and notice he says in verse 13, “. . . to the king, as supreme.” Verse 13, “. . . to every ordinance of man . . . to the king, as supreme,” and then verse 14, “Or unto governors.” Living in California, that pains me to read that. That was written before Gavin Newsom became governor of California. May God have mercy on us. That’s what it says there, so you have the king, who in Peter’s day was Nero, the Roman emperor, and you have governors under him who do his bidding. So, life under the Roman government for Christians was not very easy by any stretch of the imagination.

There are three divinely ordained institutions. I want you to write this down. The first is marriage and the family. That is first because it’s ordained of God for the good of society. If we tweak marriage or twist marriage or change God’s definition of marriage, it’ll be to the detriment of our society. We cannot survive if we change or rearrange or redefine marriage. As goes marriage, so goes the home and so goes the nation. A nation is only as strong as its families, and families are only as strong as they are based on God’s design.

Write down Genesis 2 where God actually designed, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave”—or be glued—“unto his wife: and they shall be”—the man

and his wife, Jesus said the words 'male and female' in Matthew 19—"one flesh." And they were told to be fruitful and multiply. God has ordained marriage and family, so we as believers should hold to the sanctity of marriage and the importance of a family where you're raising your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

The second divinely ordained institution is the Church; the third is government. That's our topic tonight. Write down Romans 13:1-2. Paul says, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." I know that in light of Covid a couple years ago and in light of the radical separation between the liberal left and the right conservatives and the liberals and the climate and the tension in the political tension in the nation today, this is a very sensitive subject; but it's foundational in the Scriptures, and as a general rule, and we'll talk about some exceptions, we are to be law abiding. We're to be obeying the laws that be. We may not like them, we may not favor them, we live in a free nation where we can vote, we can institute new laws. We live in a republic. We have a democratic system of being able to vote for those who represent us and so forth, but basically the principle that God has established government for, we're going to see, is " . . . for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well," as the Scriptures will declare in this text.

Romans 13, I encourage you to read all the first seven verses. Take that section and, before you go to bed tonight, just read it real quickly and meditate on that—that we should be submitted to the powers that be. They " . . . are ordained of God. 2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the ordinance of God." So, we as Christians are to submit and to obey the powers that be. Jesus never practiced civil disobedience, and He did not command us to do civil disobedience. "Peter, put up your sword," He said in the Garden of Gethsemane. Remember when they came to arrest Jesus? Jesus didn't say, "Grab your swords. Let's fight." Peter took out his sword and tried to take Malchus' ear off...he tried to take his head off and took just his ear off. Jesus had to pick it up, and in my imagination He's wiping the dirt off or blowing the dirt off and slapping it back on his head and had to patch up Peter's blunder. He said, "Put up your sword," put away your sword.

Jesus even paid taxes in the Bible. They came to Jesus and said, "Do you pay taxes?" Actually, Peter came to Jesus Himself, our author here in this letter, and said, "Lord, do we pay taxes?" They came to Peter and asked him, "Do you pay taxes?" He said, "Let me go," and he asked Jesus, "Do we pay taxes?" Remember when Jesus told Peter...I can't wait to preach a sermon on this story. What did He tell Peter to do? "Take a hook and a line, go down to Lake Galilee, drop it in." He would catch a fish, and he would pull the fish out and look inside the fish's mouth and there would be a coin. He would take the coin and go pay his taxes! Is that cool or what? Every tax season I go fishing, "Come on, Lord! Come on, Lord!" He didn't say, "No, we don't pay taxes! That Roman government is corrupt! We don't like what they're using our taxes for. No, let's rebel." No, He said, "You go do that, and you'll have a miracle." What a blessing that was. Jesus pays taxes.

You're not going to really wish you didn't come tonight to hear this study because you're going

to learn that you should obey the law and you should pay your taxes and drive the speed limit. "Why did I go to church?" Remember, we're to live a beautiful life before the watching world, honorable, so that when they revile us, there's nothing that they can say.

Is it ever okay not to obey civil authorities or laws? The answer: yes, if obeying means that keeping the law of man means breaking the law of God. I know that there are a lot of variables there, and this is a challenging subject and I can't touch them all, but again, this is the principle: We keep the laws, but if in keeping a governmental law or manmade law brings me into violation of God's law, then I must obey God rather than man. Let me give you some examples. In Exodus 1, when the Hebrew midwives were told by Pharaoh that they were to throw the male babies into the Nile River. They couldn't obey. They had to obey God rather than man, so they hid the babies instead.

In Daniel 3, I love the three Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. When they were told to bow before the image of Nebuchadnezzar and to worship this image and to bow down before it, they wouldn't do that. They wouldn't bow down, so they were thrown into the fiery furnace. As they landed in the furnace, the ropes were burnt, and it's interesting that they didn't go running out. If I were one of them, the minute I landed in the furnace and I saw my ropes were burnt, "Whoowooooo! I'm outta here!" Like you've seen the cartoons where they're SWOOSH! blow through the wall, "I'm just outta here!" The king actually said, "Hey, how many did we throw into the furnace?" The servant said, "Three." "I see four, and the image of the fourth is like the Son of Man, the Son of God." I believe Jesus showed up with the three Hebrew boys and was with them in the fire. You know, if you're obeying God and you are persecuted, Jesus will come to help you and strengthen and take care of you. You can trust Him. They disobeyed the edict of the king, and they wouldn't bow or worship his golden image.

In Daniel 6, where Daniel himself opened his windows in his upper chamber and prayed three times a day to the God of heaven against the law or edict of the king, which he foolishly signed, and as a result he was thrown - where? - into the lions' den, right? But God spared him again, God watched over him again, and God took care of him again. If obeying man's law brings me into direct conflict with God's law, then I'm free to disobey man's law.

Peter and John were preaching. They were told by the Jewish authorities, Acts 5:29, not to preach anymore in the name of Jesus. Peter said, "We must obey God rather than man. You judge whether it's right to obey or not, but we must obey God rather than men." When Jesus says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel," then we need to go into all the world and preach the gospel.

Years ago I had the privilege and opportunity to smuggle Bibles into China. It was against the law to do that, but we did it anyway. We obeyed God rather than man. It's so very important. We know that we need to be obedient to God. But you need to make sure that you're not just using that as an excuse not to keep some government law.

Notice in verse 14 the purpose of human government, " . . . for the punishment of evildoers," and

that's a thing that's really sad when God has ordained government for that purpose and government doesn't do that. When government protects the bad guys and punishes the good guys, then it's not doing what it's supposed to do. The purpose of the government is to punish evildoers. In Romans 13, it says there, " . . . for he beareth not the sword in vain." Secondly, verse 14, " . . . and for the praise of them that do well," to give commendation to those who do right.

I want you to notice, thirdly, the reason in our text why we submit. I want to give you five reasons from the text why we as Christians should obey our civil authorities in government. First of all, look at verse 13, " . . . for the Lord's sake." In other words, it's in order to honor God, to honor the Lord, " . . . for the Lord's sake."

Secondly, to avoid punishment and to promote praise. We just read that, verse 14. Thirdly, because it is God's will. So, it's to honor the Lord, and it's to do God's will. Verse 15, "For so is the will of God." So, I can actually tell you what God's will is for you—it's to keep and obey the law. Now, I realize that we don't like laws, we can have them changed or vote for changes, but until then we are to be law-abiding citizens. We're not to be law breakers, we're to be living blamelessly before a watching world. We are to be doing God's will.

Fourthly, if you're taking notes, is to silence foolish men. Look at verse 15, "For so is the will of God, that with well doing"—doing what's right, being obedient—"ye may put to silence"—the word 'silence' is the word muzzle, you may silence or muzzle them—"the ignorance of foolish men," foolish men being unbelievers or non-Christians. The best defense for Christianity is a beautiful, obedient, submissive life. Fifthly, verse 16, is because we are God's servants, "As free, and not using your liberty"—and it's possible that some of the believers that Peter was writing to were thinking, I'm free in Christ. I can live however I want. I don't have to obey governmental authority, and he was trying to say, "Look, you're free in Christ, but you're to use your freedom to be obedient and submissive so that you can glorify God and fulfill His will." So, "As free,"—but—"not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as"—the point is you are—"the servants of God."

That word "servant" means slave—you're God's slaves, God's servants—so you're to be obedient to God, want to honor God, and want to glorify God. Five reasons: the Lord's sake; to punish evildoers and promote praise; because it is God's will, verse 15; to silence foolish men; and because we are God's slaves. Even though we are free, we are to live submissively in a sinful, selfish world. We are to sacrificially serve others.

Remember, Jesus said to the disciples, and it was emphatic, "Ye are the light of the world." "Ye are the salt of the earth." That's us as believers. We are to be salt and light. Salt, a preservative, to keep corruption back; light to evangelistic endeavor preaching the gospel, letting your light shine before a watching world. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God"—through prayer—"to the pulling down of strong holds," but God will use us as we preach His Word and we pray.

Write down 1 Timothy 2:1-4. Paul says, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." So, we pray, we supplicate, we intercede, we give thanks for all men. We pray for kings and for those who are in authority, " . . . that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God and our Saviour; 4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

There is clear teaching that we are to pray for our government leaders and government authorities. Yes, we should be engaged and vote. Yes, we should make our voices heard. But the only way to change men's hearts is through the preaching of the gospel, and God alone can do that. Now, I'm all for passing laws that are moral, good laws, and I think we should be engaged and vote and be active, but the only way that we're going to really change our world is when men's hearts are changed by the power of the gospel.

We need to be careful as Christians that we don't believe that our great hope is that Donald Trump's now going to be back in the White House and everything's going to be hunky dory because our hope is in Jesus Christ. Amen? Our hope is not in man. Our hope is in Christ's returning and He will establish His Kingdom. How important that is.

One last point I want to make in our last verse, verse 17. I want you to see the scope of our submission. He says, "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." Some feel that these are two couplets: "Honour all men," and "Love the brotherhood" being one; "Fear God," and "Honour the king" being two. As far as the structure goes of this passage, they're actually four commands, all of them in the present tense—four imperatives, all in the present tense. First, they are keep on showing respect to everyone. When he says, "Honour all men," I love the rendering in I think it's the NIV, "Keep on showing respect to all men." As Christians, we are to respect everyone.

Secondly, we are to keep on loving the brotherhood. It's interesting in 1 Peter 1:22, we're to love the brotherhood; 1 Peter 3:8, we're to love the brethren; 1 Peter 4:8, we're to love the brethren; 1 Peter 5:14, we're to love the brethren. So, over and over and over Peter tells us and exhorts us to love the brethren.

Here's the summary. By the way, verse 17 is a summary of the paragraph from verses 13-17. So, verses 13-17, that paragraph is summarized in verse 17 about submission. First, we "Honour all men," we don't pick and choose. Secondly, we "Love the brotherhood." If you've been born again, it will be evidenced by a love for the brethren and the sistren. Amen? You're going to want to be in church, want to be in fellowship. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." We're a family. We're brothers and sisters, God is our Father. We're to love one another.

Here's the third, we are to keep on fearing God, verse 17. This is a reverential respect for God, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." What a great summary statement, "Fear

God,” have a reverence and respect for God. All of what is said here in this verse brings harmony and blessing to a society—honoring the king, keeping his commands, loving the brotherhood, showing respect to everyone, fearing God. Lastly, the fourth, keep on honoring the king. In verse 13 it says, “Submit . . . to the king;” verse 17, “Honour the king.” It’s interesting, in verse 13, it opens up with our action of submitting to the king, and then verse 17 it ends with our attitude of honoring the king. So, there’s the action and there’s the attitude—submit to the king and honor the king. That means to give due respect, respect their place of authority. So, we should pray for them, we should submit to them, we should be obedient to them. No one outside the scope of a Christian’s love and submission, “Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear”—respect or reverence—“God,” and “Honour the king.” Amen?