



Over the past several months our nation has been immersed in an emotionally charged political situation. We have a new administration in Washington unlike anything we've ever seen. The emotions, tensions, and opinions surrounding our new president will continue for the next four or even eight years. I have no doubt the opinions in this room are widely diverse, and we could get into a heated debate within minutes.

So I want to ask the question: How should we relate to this new President and his administration? What's our responsibility as Christ-followers towards government and laws in general? And how do we relate to people who differ from us on these issues? Amazingly, as if by God's providence, this is the topic we encounter today in our study of 1 Peter.

If you were here last week you'll recall in 2:11–12 Peter laid down a general principle for how we as believers should relate to the world around us. He said as foreigners and exiles here on planet earth we're to abstain from sinful desires and live such good lives among the pagans that even though they may accuse us of doing wrong they'll see our good deeds and glorify God. The early Christians were accused of all sorts of vile things, mostly because people didn't understand them. So Peter says live your lives in such a way that people can see what you're really all about. Even non-Christians appreciate what's good and right, and so let those qualities shine in you. Don't try to escape from this world, and don't live in constant protest against it, but rather stay in the world and show them through your winsomeness, compassion, humility and integrity what being a Christ-follower is all about. As Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Mt. 5:16).

Then Peter goes on and applies this principle to different realms or relationships we as Christians live in. He starts by talking about our relationship to governing authorities, then he moves on to what this means for slaves and masters, and finally he addresses what this means for wives and husbands.

These texts raise some definite challenges. The social structure of the first century was quite different from today. In America we have a voice and a vote, which wasn't true for believers in the Roman Empire. Not only that, we abolished slavery many years ago, so how does that teaching apply to us? And the marriage relationship was quite different then from what it is today. Women were considered the property of their husbands. So how do we

apply these teachings to our culture? Do we carry them straight across as if living in America is the same as living under Roman rule? These are tough questions to answer but we'll try because we believe the word of God is as relevant today as it was then.

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor (1 Peter 2:13–17).

We can divide this text into four sections. First, Peter gives us the command in verses 13–14. Next he gives us the reason for the command in v. 15. Then he gives us the condition under which the command is to be carried out. And finally he gives us the practical application as it relates to four different relationships.

The Command: Believers are to Submit to the Governing Authorities

Let's look first at the command. Peter says, submit yourselves to every human authority. No one likes to be told to submit. When we think of submission we think of weakness; we think of passivity; we think of doormats; we think of the abuse of power; we think, "Why should I have to submit to anyone?" As Americans we value self-sovereignty; we're free to call the shots in our own life. No one tells us what to do or think. Submission is about the most un-American thing we could be told to do!

The word Peter uses for "submission" here literally means "to place yourself under." It was often used in a military context when someone of lower rank recognized the higher rank of a fellow officer and chose on that basis to fall in line under them. It's something we choose to do more than something we're forced to do. We recognize a divine ordering or ranking. By the way, in order to truly submit we have to do what Peter just got done talking about in verses 11–12, which is to "abstain from sinful desires." You see, the last thing our sinful desires compel to do is submit. I know my sinful desires want to fight back. **My** sinful desires insist I be treated the way I deserve. **My** sinful desires prefer to claim my rights rather than submit.

But who do we submit to? In this case we're told to submit to "every human authority." Within every society there are social institutions that are necessary for that society to function in a healthy way. One of those institutions, of course, is human government. That's what Peter is referring to here. That's why he goes on and points to the emperor and to governors who are sent by him, which was the case in the provinces of Asia Minor, where Peter's readers were located. He says the function of these authorities is to "punish those who do wrong and commend those who do right." That's how government is supposed to operate, that's why God created it in the first place. But we all know it doesn't always work that way. Sometimes the government punishes those who do right and commends those who do wrong.

That's why we have focus on those four little words: "for the Lord's sake." When we talk about submission we must make the Lord part of the equation. Ultimately, when we do this we're really submitting to the Lord. We're trusting the Lord will take care of us and even fight for us, if need be. Not only that, as we do this, we remember Jesus himself submitted. Later in verse 23 it says, "*When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly*" (1 Pt 2:23). That is a model for us. If our Lord submitted to unfair treatment, why can't I?

What does this mean for today? Well, it means for the Lord's sake we should respect our governing authorities and obey the law. We pay our taxes, stop at red lights, and respect other people's property. By the way, as a church we're very careful to obey the laws that govern non-profit organizations. It's not always easy; there are times we'd like to do it our own way or take short cuts, but we don't.

But what about a situation when the state stands for what is wrong or tells us to do things that are wrong? Jesus said give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. We mustn't give to Caesar what only belongs to God, which is our worship and our ultimate allegiance. If the state asks us for that, which we owe only to God, then our responsibility is to the Lord, despite the consequences. In Nazi Germany, faithful Christians spoke against the state church which had begun to integrate Nazi teaching into their official doctrine. The Nazis actually denied church membership to anyone of non-Aryan race. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others refused to conform to that and formed what was called the Confessing Church. As a result Bonhoeffer was first imprisoned and then hung from his neck. The religious intolerance of 17th century England led to the witness and writings of the Puritans, which led Puritans like John Bunyan who wrote *Pilgrims Progress* to be imprisoned.

One thing we thankfully have in our society is a voice and a vote. Those in Peter's day, living under Roman rule, didn't have that.

In fact, women didn't have the right to vote in America before 1920. But freedom of speech and peaceful protest in our country drove the women's suffrage movement, resulting in the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving women the right to vote. We recently celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day, remembering the courage of many who brought about needed change through non-violent means. Today we talk about laws governing gun control, health care, marijuana, gay marriage, and use of bathrooms. Living in this country is complex. We have the right to kneel at the playing of the national anthem. We can vote. They couldn't do any of that in Peter's day.

Even when we do object to the policies and practices of our leaders, there's a place for giving them the respect due to their office, recognizing God himself has placed them there. When we were in Israel we had the chance to visit En Gedi, which is a large oasis with a fresh water spring along the western shore of the Dead Sea. The caves at En Gedi served as one of the main places of refuge for David as he fled from Saul. Remember Saul was the King of Israel. He was crazy and irrational, and he was greatly threatened by young David. One day Saul brought 3,000 men to En Gedi searching for David. Scripture says Saul went into a cave to relieve himself (that's right—kings do that too!). But as Saul disrobed he didn't know David and his men were hiding deeper in that same cave. David's men said to him, "Now is your chance! The Lord has given Saul into your hands." But, instead of killing Saul, David just snuck up behind him and cut off a little piece of his robe as proof he meant Saul no harm. But then it says David's conscience was stricken for doing that, and he said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord."

What an amazing statement! Saul is a crazy man. God has already rejected him and stated his intention to make David the next King. Saul has no business leading that nation, yet David can't even cut off a corner of his robe without being convicted. Regardless of Saul's fitness for the job, David still calls him the "Lord's anointed." That's abstaining from sinful desires; that's submission to authority, even when it doesn't make sense. And, most importantly, that is trusting God.

The Reason: God's Will is by Doing Good You'll Silence Your Critics

Now Peter goes on and gives the reason or purpose for this submission in v. 15. He says, "*For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.*" Not only is submission to human authority God's will, but it's God's will that by doing good we silence our critics. Notice he calls them "foolish people" who engage in "ignorant talk." These are strong words, but sometimes we need to call a spade a spade. Peter's readers were being slandered and bullied. They were being

publicly shamed because they rejected emperor worship and excused themselves from family gatherings at pagan temples. I'm sure this felt like social suicide to them. At times it was these believers who felt like ignorant fools. But Peter reminds these believers these people are ignorant and foolish; they don't know what they're talking about.

But how do we fight back? How do we overcome the negative stereotypes? Submission is the passive side of our response, but here we see there's an active side—doing good. We live in a country where we can hold our own opinions and speak them freely. It's great to have opinions, especially good opinions but Peter isn't asking us to have opinions about what is good here. He's telling us to **do** good. We live in an age where Facebook and Twitter practically hand us megaphones to shout our opinions, hoping our voice will be louder than all the other megaphones competing for attention. But adding to the noise with our words isn't going to change people's opinions or hearts. Doing good is what makes a difference.

You know, there are a lot of negative things said about followers of Christ these days. We're labeled as narrow and intolerant, compassionless, hateful, hypocritical, archaic in our beliefs. And sometimes those accusations are accurate. But, I have to tell you, I think most of the time they are flat out wrong. I think of the many ways the people of this church are doing good.

WBS just put together "bags of love" for women in unintended pregnancies. A man in our body collects jackets for the homeless, brings them to the city and passes them out to those in need. Another man leads a ministry to homeless veterans who need help getting back on their feet. A woman leads a ministry at an elementary school in Redwood City helping Hispanic children learn how to read in English. A Community Group serves at Shelter Network bringing food and birthday celebrations to those living at the shelter. CPCers are feeding and providing bible study for day laborers at a Worker Resource Center where immigrants go to wait and look for work for the day. This church is delivering practical help to impoverished families suffering in Ukraine, to women trying to escape the sex trade in Thailand, and to orphans in Honduras.

Can we do more? Can we do better? Of course we can. But those are the kinds of things people notice; those are the kinds of things that silence critics — not talking, not tweeting, but **doing!** That's what Peter is talking about. Let your Christ-like lives in the community earn favor and silence your critics. That's how we make a difference, not just through our words but through doing good.

The Condition: Believers are Free and Should Use that Freedom to be God's Slaves

Now in v. 16 Peter says something that will shift our perspective a bit. From what he's said thus far, it might seem as if we're just glorified slaves of other people's opinions and wishes. Many of

us are what we call "people pleasers." Submission isn't that hard for us because deep down we want to be accepted. So we go around and cow-tow to everyone's expectations. And while this may look like submission, this isn't what Peter's talking about. Why? Because it's based entirely on what people think of us and not on what we know to be true about who we are in Christ. So Peter says, "Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves."

We're not slaves of Caesar or anyone else. We're free! Caesar or anyone in authority over us does not define us. Who we are in Christ defines us. First and foremost, Jesus has set us free from guilt and condemnation. Sometimes we're our own worst enemies as we constantly beat ourselves up for not living up to our ideals. But he's set us free from having to live up the law in order to be accepted. We're accepted as the beloved sons and daughters of the King! And ultimately, we're **his** subjects—beholden to him and him alone!

But, Peter says, don't use that freedom as an excuse for doing evil. I've seen believers who take their new identity and freedom in Christ and abuse it. Like, "I don't have to do what anyone tells me to do; I answer to God." It's kind of an in-your-face mentality that in fact is a cover up for evil. The bottom line is, they want to do what they want to do. But Peter says, as free people, "live as God's slaves." Choose to submit to authorities not because you want to please them but because it pleases your true Master!

We have nothing to fear when it comes to any authority in our life. Why? Because God is their authority just as he is ours. Ultimately, that's why we don't cheat on our taxes, not because we're afraid of being audited, but because God says to. We submit in freedom, because we love our Master and want to please him, not in fear or because we want to please people.

I have a little dog named Daisy. We got her from a Poodle rescue organization about six years ago, but she's more terrier than poodle. When we first got her she would often escape and we'd have to form a search and rescue operation to find her. And even when we found her, she'd run away from us, like it was a game. But here we are six years later and honestly she's a different dog. She still has a lot of energy, but she chooses to stay very close to us and to our home. We can now leave the door wide open and she'll just stand inside at the door and look out, unless of course she know she's going with us. At first I thought it was kind of weird, but in fact it makes life a lot easier. The bottom line is she's free, but she has no desire to run off and leave us. In her freedom she chooses to stay close to us.

You see, Jesus is the only master who doesn't bind us to him by force. He opens the door wide and gives us a choice. And sometimes we run off, chasing pride, money, addictions, and causes—things that seem powerful and alluring. But the longer we stay with **him**, the more we get to know **him**, the more we realize we

don't want to go anywhere else. Being his slave is the greatest privilege in the world and that defines us.

The Application: Use Your Freedom to be a Slave of God in All Contexts

Finally, in v. 17 Peter applies this to four different relationships. What does submission look like in the various realms in which we live? First he gives a general command to "show proper respect (honor) to everyone." That's not always easy. I prefer to show respect to those I think deserve it; to those who act in a respectable way; to those I agree with. But Peter says every human being deserves to be treated with respect. It doesn't matter if you agree with their behavior, life style, or politics. Why? Because they're all made in the image of God and Jesus died for them.

Then he says, "love the family of believers." Not that we don't love all people, but there's a special love between members of our family, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Sometimes we forget we're family. Many of us who have close nuclear families tend to forget that the most. But there are brothers and sisters around you who don't have that; this is their family. As we planned for Christmas at CPC last year there were some who wanted us to cancel church because Christmas fell on a Sunday, and people wanted to be with their families, and many churches did just that. But what about those for whom this is their family? So we had church—for the whole family! Loving the family of believers means we include everyone; we think of their needs and not just our own.

Next Peter says, "fear God." Don't fear the emperor. Don't fear what other people can do to you. Fear God. Only God gets that from us. Now we know, "Perfect love casts out fear," so we don't fear God like a cowering slave fearing punishment. We fear God in the sense that we revere him; we're in awe of him; we recognize him as the One we answer to. I loved what Sameh said in the video about the moment the prison guards said they were going to kill him if he didn't submit to them. God had told him otherwise. Would he choose to fear that man and his threats, or would he fear God? He said, "Absolutely, I will listen to my God." He knew his Master and rather than fear and listen to a man, he feared and listened to God.

Finally, Peter says, "honor the emperor." I'm not sure why he puts that last, but it's interesting he uses the same verb as when he said to "show proper respect" to everyone. It's like the emperor is put on the same level as everyone else. He, too, is made in the image of God. He, too, deserves our respect. But you don't have to fear him like you fear God, and you don't have to love him the way you love the family of believers.

I started by asking the question, How should we relate to this new President and his administration? What's our responsibility as Christ-followers towards government and laws in general? And how do we relate to people who differ from us on these issues?

The answer is we should have hearts that are postured in submission for the Lord's sake. We seek to do good. We pay proper respect to everyone. This is God's will. And really, when it comes right down to it, the most compelling reason for this is Jesus. He washed the feet of the men he led, even the feet of the one who betrayed him. He submitted to the authorities and people who cried out, "Crucify him!" He prayed for the forgiveness of those who drove the nails through his hands and feet. On the cross, he could have called down legions of angels but he didn't.

And part of what motivates us is we know this Jesus is Lord of all. He was raised up from the dead, he ascended into heaven and was seated at the right hand of God the Father, and one day he'll come back, riding a white horse, claiming victory, to judge the living and the dead. He'll make a laughing stock out of all the supposed authorities of this world and establish his righteous kingdom forever. So we can live a Christ-like life now that might look like weakness and failure, just as it did for Jesus on the cross, knowing he'll return in victory and vindicate his people.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1427-7FC