

1 Peter 2:13-17 | “Submit For the Lord’s Sake”

Preached on April 11, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 2, and we will be in verses 13 through 17 today.

After taking a brief break for Easter, we are back at it studying through the book of 1 Peter.

[pause]

Peter’s letter has started out speaking a lot about our salvation and identity so far.

It’s only because we have been chosen, born again, and ransomed from our futile ways by the blood of Jesus that Peter can now continue talking about the imperatives of a Christian’s life.

[pause]

Peter will begin to tell us how we ought to be living as Christians in regards to certain relationships that we have with others.

He will tell us how to relate to the government, how slaves ought to relate to their masters, and how husbands and wives relate. *[pause]*

Our passage deals with the first one that I just stated: how we are to relate to government.

LET’S READ THE PASSAGE. *[pause]*

In different periods of time, the situations of life require Christians to think harder about certain Biblical truths.

What I mean by that is this...

In the early church years, there were those attacking the Trinity, so the Christians of that time had to really study what the Bible reveals concerning the Trinity.

In the more recent past, the battle was over the inerrancy of the Word of God, so Christians of that time had to really focus on what the Bible says about inerrancy.

In our day, we don’t have to defend those truths as much as they did, but we have our own topics to articulate well. *[pause]*

In the past, they didn’t have the deal much with the homosexuality issue or transgender issue, but we do.

And in the past in America, they didn’t have to deal as much as we do with the topic that we will discuss today: the Christian’s relationship to government. *[pauseeee]*

I agree that as Christians, we are responsible to understand and preach the whole counsel of God...

...But there are periods of time that you really need to defend or be extra clear about certain doctrines because of what's happening in the world.

And something that this past year has revealed is that we need a more clear understanding of the Christian's relationship to government. *[pause]*

The Covid crisis with all its mandates and orders, as well as the vaccine has really made many Christians start thinking through this topic even more.

But if you think about it, it's not just the Covid crisis that has brought this to the forefront of our minds.

The reality of having a nation that is pushing to pass laws that oppose Biblical truth is also making us do some deeper, Biblical thinking about this topic. *[pause]*

The sad fact is that the Christian's relationship to the government has become a heated debate among Christians as of late, and I believe it will only get more intense as time goes on. *[pause]*

As our nation becomes more hostile, it's even more critical for us as Christians and a church to know what God requires of us in regards to the state.

And thankfully, God is not silent on the issue.

For our passage before us is one of the handful of Scripture passages in the Bible that clearly defines our role when it comes to the governing authorities. *[pauseeee]*

Although I just stated that our day causes us to need to think deeper about our relationship to the government, this topic has always been needed to understand to some degree.

Even in a nation that is friendly to Christians, you need a correct understanding of what the Bible says in order to not go against what God demands. *[pauseeee]*

Our grasp of what God says about our relationship to the government really does make a huge difference.

Think about the following questions, as some Christians have actually taken some of these positions over the years...

Should we use the sword to overtake the kingdoms of this world because we belong to another kingdom?

Should we seclude ourselves into our own community and revolt against the government over us?

Should we ignore their edicts and go about our lives how we want?

Should we blindly obey every single command of the government, no matter what?

You see, it does make a huge difference on where you come down on this matter. *[pause]*

This is always an interesting and somewhat controversial topic, but I want each of us to be open and ready to learn from what God tells us. *[pauseeee]*

But before we jump into seeing what it says, let's first understand Peter's flow of thought.

Peter has just told us that as Christians we are God's chosen nation, who are sojourners and temporary residents in this world.

But what does that mean for the earthly nations that we live in?

What is our responsibility towards them considering we belong to another world, another King, another nation and we have different values and mindsets?

How should we then live?

He tells us in this passage that we should first...

I. Submit to the government for the Lord's sake. (13-14)

If you think about it, this message of submitting to the government was revolutionary in this day.

The Jews were used to the Old Testament time period where Israel was used by God to conquer other nations.

They were at this time dominated by Rome, and wanted out from under their rule.

In fact, the Jews had a history of revolting against their oppressors. *[pause]*

Before Christ came, there was what was called the Maccabean revolt, where the Jews revolted against the Seleucid Empire and regained control of Jerusalem.

And then even in Jesus' day, there were people who were called "Zealots", who fought as guerrillas and terrorists against the Romans.

And then in 70AD, a few years after this book was written, the Jews revolted once more and the Temple was destroyed by the Romans. *[pause]*

This is all not to mention the fact that the Jews were under Emperor Nero at the time of Peter's letter, and he was an extremely evil emperor.

Nero had his stepbrother, mother, and first wife all killed.

And then in 64AD, he blamed the fire of Rome on the Christians, which led to widespread persecution of Christians.

And get this: that's not the only corrupt and evil ruler that Peter knew in his life.

He had heard of Herod the Great, who killed all the babies in Bethlehem when Jesus was born.

He was under Herod Antipas, who killed John the Baptist.

And then he lived under many of the emperors of Rome, who could be extremely corrupt, ungodly, and brutal leaders.

And yet American Christians think that their government rulers are bad! *[pauseeee]*

In the midst of all of those corrupt and evil leaders, and a government that wasn't friendly to them, God says to the Christians, "Be subject to every human institution."

That's crazy! That's hard!

God is saying, "I want you to be law-abiding citizens even amid an ungodly government over you." *[pauseeee]*

But I'm getting a little ahead of myself, so let's return back to the basic command here - "be subject."

What does that actually mean?

To be subject is to be submissive.

It means that you place yourself under the authority of another. *[pause]*

God has a divine ordering in life, where there are different roles with differing authority.

And so submission is to place yourself in your proper role according to God's divine ordering.

It is to be inclined and willing to submit to the authority of another. *[pause]*

I like the definition given by the *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* as it says...

"Subjection is made up of an obedient spirit, kindness of heart, respect, and willingness to serve."¹

So it's not begrudgingly listening to the authority of another, but doing it with an attitude of a willingness to do it and with respect. *[pause]*

This means that if the government makes an order, then we are supposed to do it, since we are called to submit to them.

The opposite of submitting to the government would be to resist, defy, refuse to listen to, disobey, or ignore the government. *[pause]*

¹ Spicq, C., & Ernest, J. D. (1994). *Theological lexicon of the New Testament* (Vol. 3, pp. 425–426). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

So revolting against the government and ignoring the government's commands are out of the question.

Now I'll get to the exceptions later, but for now, we must understand the basic command.

[pause]

So to summarize - we are called to place ourselves under the authority of our governmental leaders and obey them as commanded by God. *[pauseee]*

As Peter continues, he explains that this is both to the supreme leader of your government as well as those under him.

He says, "whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him." *[pause]*

You don't get to pick and choose which authorities to submit to, but to all the authorities over you.

Not just the emperor, but even those he sends.

Not just to those he sends, but to the emperor himself. *[pause]*

This could be applied for us in this way - we don't *only* submit to our President, but also to our governor, mayor, and anyone commissioned by the government over us like the police. *[pauseee]*

In verse 14, we see the purpose of God allowing governments to be over us, "[they are] sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good."

This is why God has instituted governments of the world, in order to maintain orderly societies.

They punish the evildoer and praise the good-doer.

This is how they are supposed to function.

I know there are exceptions out there, but generally, governments do this.

They create laws and have punishments for those who break those laws.

The murderer gets a punishment for his crime, and the one who does good for others in the community is praised.

This is why sometimes you will see people in our community praised for some sort of community action that they took to benefit the community as a whole.

Maybe it was donating money for a park, or using their time and effort to build something.

They are praised for doing good. *[pauseee]*

This is the role of our governing authorities, to deter and punish evil and to promote and praise good.

This is the way that God has created in order to provide orderly societies. *[pauseeee]*

We should be thankful that God has done this because you do not want to live in a country in anarchy. *[pause]*

So God is showing us that the government is his servant, serving a specific purpose in nations and we would do well to submit to them. *[pause]*

But the question is why? It says, “For the Lord’s sake.”

This is *huge* for Peter’s argument.

We obey the government for God’s sake.

Not for their sake, but the Lord’s sake. *[pause]*

We submit because we are ultimately doing it *for God!*

We are submitting because God wants us to - we do it for the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

I would like to bring out some implications of this truth now.

First, the fact that we are called to submit to the government for the Lord’s sake implies that to not submit to the government *is* to disobey God.

That is, since God has commanded us to submit and we ought to do it for his sake, then to disregard this verse is to disobey Him.

We must do it, as God requires it.

Any Christian who says we are allowed to resist and not submit to government at all is going against God’s Word. *[pause]*

That’s one implication of this truth, but let me give another one.

Since we submit to human authorities for the Lord’s sake, then to obey the human authorities by doing something against God’s commands is to disobey the ultimate authority.

We will see this later, too, as Peter tells us that we are to submit as free people, but we submit as servants of God.

This is where the exceptions come into play. *[pause]*

I typically hear the common refrain that we should obey government except when the government requires Christians to do something God has forbidden.

But that statement can be misleading because it sounds like it's saying that they only have to tell us to *do* something forbidden.

But that's only part of the truth, for we also do not obey the government if they *prevent* us from doing what God commands. *[pause]*

This is exactly what happened with Peter and John in Acts 5:27-29, where the leaders restate that they told them not to preach in Jesus' name.

And Peter and the apostles respond by saying, "We must obey God rather than men." *[pause]*

The leaders were trying to prevent them from obeying God, but they had to obey God over man.

So there is a place for not submitting to the government *if* anything they require either makes you sin or prevents you from obeying God. *[pause]*

This is so very important.

We must obey God rather than man.

We can't say, "But we must submit!" if they are requiring us to disobey the ultimate authority.

We obey the ultimate authority over all and obey the lower authorities as long as their edicts don't contradict the ultimate authority. *[pause]*

The key is to always keep the ultimate authority in mind. *[pauseeee]*

We submit to the human institutions of our nation for the Lord's sake.

We are doing it for Him, that's our motivation and reason for submitting. *[pause]*

Peter will expand upon this idea a little later, so I'll talk more about this, but let's look at what verse 15 says.

"For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people."

Point number 2 is this...you are to...

II. Submit to the government so that your goodness silences slander. (15)

I believe that the will of God statement there is actually pointing back to the submitting to the human institutions statement.

So it would go like this...

God's will is that we would submit and by doing this good of submitting, we silence the slander of others.

This is God's will, it's His desire, this is what he wants from us. *[pause]*

You want to know what a part of God's will is? Submit to the human institutions over you.

This is not to be taken lightly.

This is not to be disregarded, for he wants his people to live in such a way that we reflect His goodness and follow his design in the world. *[pauseeee]*

Christians are not to be problematic revolutionaries, but honorable citizens.

We are to do good, not always be looking for a way to defy the authorities.

For what's the result of this kind of submission? It silences ignorance. *[pause]*

This is a general truth, meaning, there will be exceptions, so don't keep trying to think of the exceptions to this truth, but simply think of it as a general truth.

God's way of stopping slander against Christians is by the good conduct of submitting to our leaders. *[pause]*

God understood that as Christians, there would be ignorant claims made about us.

In fact, in the early church there were numerous false statements made about them.

Commentator Edmund Clowney says, "Christians were often charged with subversion of the established order.

*They were accused of spreading disloyalty against the government, of disrupting trade, and of all manner of shocking practices, including cannibalism and incest."*² *[pause]*

God knew that our living according to His kingdom would bring with it false accusations.

And so he tells us that our continual good citizenship will actually silence that ignorant talk because it's continual evidence to the contrary. *[pause]*

Let's say that someone claimed that Christians were anarchists.

But the truth is that we just kept submitting to the government, as law-abiding citizens.

Over time, people are confronted with the truth of our good submission and the slander is revealed to be an outright lie.

*What else can they say when our goodness shows the complete opposite? *[pauseeee]**

² Clowney, E. P. (1988). *The message of 1 Peter: the way of the cross* (p. 110). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

So also, submission to the government minimizes slanderous attacks, by revealing that they have no basis.

These statements are ignorance because they lack the backing of knowledge and truth.

And they are rooted in foolishness because foolish people speak without knowledge. *[pauseeee]*

Christian, you will be slandered for your faith.

But what's your response to it?

Notice how Peter doesn't say to fight back or to slander them in return - No.

Peter says, "Just keep doing good, keep doing good, no matter what, do good, it will silence the slander."

And the more the slander is silenced, the more it will open up the way for more people to believe. *[pause]*

So we submit to the government for the Lord's sake, and we submit so that it silences slander, but thirdly, we...

III. Submit to the government as free people since God is your Master. (16-17)

Do you understand what that verse 16 actually means?

He says, "Live as people who are free."

God has freed us from bondage to any master other than Himself.

We have been ransomed by Christ's blood out of the futile way of life - we are free! *[pause]*

What that means when it comes to our passage is this - the government is not your master.

You are not a slave or servant of the United States government, for God has set you free.

We do not obey the laws of the land because we are enslaved to them.

We don't even obey the laws of the U.S. because we are forced to do it.

We don't obey the laws because there are punishments if we don't, and we are fearful of the punishments.

We don't obey because we are coerced by our leaders or because we are in fear of the government.

We are actually free; we are not their slaves, saying, "I must obey the government, my master." *[pause]*

And you know what, this would be 100% the same truth if we lived in a dictatorship or a communist country.

Those Christians living in a dictatorship are not slaves of the government, they are free, as well. [pause]

So then does that mean that we can disobey whatever our government says because we are free?

No, because look what Peter says, “not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.” [pause]

We don't disobey the government in order to do evil and say, “But I'm free!”

No, because that's evil hidden behind freedom.

Instead, we serve God. [pause]

Here's the idea: we are actually slaves of God alone.

He is our only Master.

We are technically free in regards to anything that's not him.

So the government, not our master. Sin, not our master.

Your boss, not your master. Your husband, not your master.

Only God is your Master, and everything that's not Him is not your master. [pause]

So then where does submission come in?

We serve the Lord by submitting to the government.

Since God has told us to submit to this lower authority, then we obey our Master, God, by submitting to someone who is not our master. [pause]

Let me give you an illustration.

Let's say that you are a 6 year old and you have an older brother who is 16.

Your parents were leaving for the afternoon, and so they temporarily put your older brother in charge.

They told you, “I want you to listen to what your older brother says until we get back.”

On a normal day, you are technically not required to listen to your older brother because he is not your parent, right?

You are actually on the same level as your brother as you are both children of your parents.

But your parents decided to place your older brother in authority over you, not taking their place, but under their ultimate authority.

So by listening to your older brother on this day, you are actually obeying your parents.

You are not doing it because your brother told you to listen to him, but because your parents told you to listen to him.

You see the point?

We submit to our rulers as free men and women; we freely submit out of devotion to our Lord.

When you submit to the human authorities, you are doing it for the Lord! *[pause]*

John Piper said it well when he said that when we do it for the Lord it's actually worship!³

I submit to my leaders not because I'm forced to by my leaders, but because I love, obey, and serve my Lord!

I'm doing it for the Lord's sake! *[pause]*

Freedom doesn't mean we can disobey the government but obey them because God wants us to. *[pause]*

I also don't resist the government because I want to do my own thing because that's being in bondage to your cravings. *[pause]*

Get this: we actually aren't supposed to pay taxes only because we are fearful that we will get in trouble, but we pay taxes because we love and want to serve God by submitting to the government.

Joel B. Green said, "Subordination is thus an expression of freedom, not of coercion."⁴ *[pause]*

We don't submit as slaves to the government, or in fear of our government, but in glad obedience to our true and only Master, God Almighty.

We submit in freedom for God's sake. *[pause]*

There is a huge difference between thinking, "I must obey my master, the government," and, "I will obey the government because I want to obey God."

Our ultimate authority is God, not government. *[pauseeee]*

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/submit-to-laws-for-the-lords-sake>

⁴ Green, Joel B. (2007). 1 Peter (p. 75). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Our lives should revolve around serving the Lord because he is our all in all, and our good and gracious Master, who redeemed us with Christ's blood. *[pauseeee]*

Freedom in Christ is always freedom from sin to do good.

We aren't free to do what we want, but free to do what He wants.

Christian freedom is the freedom to live as God's slaves. *[pause]*

God has given us the freedom to live for him, so that means nothing should enslave us from obeying Him.

This is why we are allowed to resist a governmental order *if it contradicts what God says because we follow our Master above all.*

We are not compelled to do whatever the government says, no matter what, but everything is placed under the mastery of our sole Master. *[pause]*

If they tell us not to do something that God requires, we are not only *allowed* to resist, but we are *obliged* to resist, saying, "No, I follow my only Master, and he said otherwise." *[pauseeee]*

Going back to that illustration of you with your older brother in charge of you by your parents.

If your parents told you that you must never ride the lawn mower, and yet your brother, who is temporarily in charge of you, says, "I want you to ride the lawn mower."

You follow your ultimate authority over the lower authority. *[pauseeee]*

So here's the truth summarized...

Other than when their orders go against or prevent you from doing God's orders, we should be submitting and have an attitude of submission to the government in obedience to our Master, the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

Verse 17 concludes and summarizes this paragraph by giving succinct commands in regards to different individuals or groups.

It goes from everyone to the brotherhood to God and then finishes out with the emperor. *[pauseeee]*

He says to honor everyone.

That is, every single person should be treated with respect.

Each person is made in the image of God and should be treated as such.

We honor everyone by valuing them and esteeming them highly.

So we don't treat them like dirt or look down on them, but treat them with respect. *[pause]*

Often people dishonor others by the way they talk to them or about them.

Often people dishonor others by the way they think about them in their minds.

But everyone should be honored, no matter who they are, even that person that gets on your nerves. *[pauseeee]*

We are also called to love the brotherhood.

This is pointing to our fellow Christians, pictured as being in the same family.

There's a special love and affection that we show the people of God, our brothers and sisters in Christ. *[pause]*

Thirdly, we ought to fear God.

Notice how for other people, we give only honor and love, but to God, we bow in reverence to Him.

He's the one we fear, no one else.

We don't fear people, we don't fear the government, but we fear God. *[pause]*

And lastly, Peter says to "honor the emperor."

The leader of our government, who for us would be the President, deserves to be honored.

Ouch, this is going to challenge us, isn't it? *[pause]*

President Biden should be honored by you.

He should be treated with respect, rather than disrespected by our words.

We shouldn't be making fun of him, or saying disrespectful or demeaning things about him.

We shouldn't be sharing humiliating pictures or videos of him on Facebook, does that really show honor to him?

He should be valued and esteemed highly.

And no, Peter doesn't say, "Honor the office of the emperor," but he says to "Honor the emperor."

We don't just honor the office, we honor the person in the office. *[pauseeee]*

How do you talk about President Biden, or what about when President Trump was in office, or President Obama, Bush, or Clinton? *[pause]*

Now I know exactly what some of you are thinking.

You are thinking, “But the President promotes and pushes for things that are sinful.”

It is acceptable and right to point out sin and bring forth truth.

We should be standing up for what’s right and for what God says.

But you can disagree with someone and still honor them.

Just because a leader pushes for policies that we deem sinful doesn’t mean they shouldn’t be shown honor.

Don’t you think Christians at this time disagreed with the Roman emperor? Of course they did, yet the command remains the same.

We speak truth and confront error, but do so still showing honor and respect.

There is a way to do it, but many times we would rather not, that’s the issue. *[pause]*

“Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.” *[pauseeee]*

What this passage teaches us is that...

God, our ultimate authority, commands our submission to lower authorities.

God is our Master, who redeemed us out of sin by the precious blood of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus died for our sins, freeing us from slavery to sin, so that we could be slaves of God and live for a new, loving Master.

We placed our faith in Christ and have received so many blessings by His grace.

Have you done that? Have you repented and turned in faith in what Christ did? *[pause]*

It’s really because of his grace that we are His; we belong to Him.

Our whole lives now revolve around our Lord and King.

Every single part of our lives are under His jurisdiction.

He is our ultimate authority, and since he commands us to submit to the lower authorities, then we do so obediently, willingly, and joyfully because we do it *for His sake*.