

Living as Servants of God

SERMON

By

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TEXT: 1 Peter 2:13-17

PROP: Since all authority derives from God we as children of our heavenly father are to live as servants of God, and to submit to authorities over us for the Lord's sake.

1 Peter 2:13-17 (ESV)

13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, **14** or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. **15** For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. **16** Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. **17** Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

We have seen that the new birth, brought about by God in his people, has a profound effect on their world and life view. They are caused to love the only true and living God and their Savior, Jesus, whom they have never seen. Their presuppositions are radically different and the eyes of their understanding are opened to the word of God. The new birth brings about a desire to use the means of grace and measurable spiritual growth is seen. No longer is Jesus a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. Being a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people for God's own possession, we proclaim the excellencies of God our Savior with our lives. The new birth results in personal holiness, reverent fear of God, love for the church of Christ, and as Paul puts it,

Hebrews 12:22-24 (ESV)

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, **23** and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, **24** and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The new birth brings about significant changes to our relationship to the world around us and as we see from our text in 1 Peter 2, we, as new creatures in Christ, submit to authority. Peter commands us to "be subject to every human institution" because we are enabled by conversion to do so. Our obedience to the will of God in this matter is a matter of degree in all those that God is pleased to regenerate but the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit moves us onward to greater love for the law of God and the performance of his will.

Submission to human authority and in particular to the authority of God is something quite unnatural to us. Aaron's rod that budded was kept in the Ark of the Covenant as a symbol of our innate rebellion to the will of God, along with the Ten Commandments written on tablets of stone that symbolized our inability to keep the law of God, and the bowl of Manna that symbolized our refusal to live by everything that comes from the mouth of God. It is not our nature submit to God. Neither is it our nature to submit to human authority. The ungodly pledge their allegiance to the flag of our nation and insist on the phrase "One nation under God," but they despise Yahweh and his gracious law. They promote homosexuality and abortion which are an abomination to God yet they insist that the "under God" phrase should remain in the Pledge and "In God we trust" should be printed on our currency. The patriotism of most, it would seem, is conditioned by the freedom to live by the slogan, "If it feels good, do it."

According to our text we must be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution. We notice immediately that our submission is to be for the Lord's sake. Peter has told us our lives are to proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into God's marvelous light and this means that in all our social relationships we are representatives of Jesus Christ. This is especially true when it comes to our relationship to government and people in authority. The King James Version uses the word "ordinance" to translate a Greek word that simply means creation or institution. It does not refer to the individual laws created by those who in authority over us. Instead it refers to the institutions that make and enforce the laws. Therefore it is possible to submit to the institutions and still disobey their laws.

For example, when Nebuchadnezzar brought Judean captives to Babylon, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were among them. The king chose these four young men to be trained for his special service and required them to eat food that God commanded them not to eat. They refused to eat from the king's table and therefore disobeyed his dietary laws. We read

Daniel 1:8 (ESV)

8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

They were very careful not embarrass the official in charge of their training and they agreed upon a different diet that in the end proved to be better than what the king had required of them. They disobeyed the law yet they glorified God and at the same time submitted to the authority of the king.

Later on king Nebuchadnezzar constructed a 90 foot tall golden image of himself and required by law that everyone had to bow down and worship it. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, whose Babylonian names were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, once again refused to obey the law which required them to worship a false god. Again they submitted to the authority over them by accepting the punishment meted out for their disobedience and God rewarded their faithfulness by keeping them unharmed by the fiery furnace.

Daniel himself was cast into a den of lions because he refused to obey the law of the king which limited all prayer to king Darius alone. He disobeyed the ungodly law which required him to sin against the True and Living God, and yet he submitted to the authority of the king and took his punishment. God spared him and his enemies were punished instead.

Peter and the other Apostles were commanded not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus,

Acts 4:19-20 (ESV)

19 But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, **20** for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

The Apostles did not cause rebellion or riot or in any way question the authority of the Jewish council. They simply refused to obey the council and submitted to whatever punishment the authorities wished to impose on them. They showed respect for those in authority over them even though the authorities opposed preaching the gospel of Christ.

Peter goes on to define the term institution,

1 Peter 2:13-14 (ESV)

13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the **emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him** to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

Perhaps your translation of the Bible uses the word "king" instead of "emperor" but the ruling authority of Peter's day was known as an emperor. History records the many atrocities perpetrated by the Roman Caesars and the tens of thousands of Christians they tortured to death and yet Peter told the church of his day to submit to them. It was a long time ago but I still remember the ranting of Hitler and Mussolini. We associate the Holocaust with the torture and death of Jews but history records that there were many Christians in the death camps as well. We will of course remember the persecution of

millions of Christians at the hands of the communists in China and the Muslims in places like Sudan. Yet we are told to submit to every human institution whether emperor or governor.

It is important that we respect the office even though the person holding the office is ungodly and evil. Peter tells us,

1 Peter 2:15 (ESV)

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

Submission to authority and doing good is the will of God according to this text. Doing good or doing what is right can only be determined by the law of God. Therefore in order for our submission to authority to be good and right it must conform to the precepts of God. On the other hand, for the authorities to punish evil and reward good, they must also subject themselves to the law of God. Both the authority and the subject to authority are to be related to each other and to God in accord with the Bible. Neither the church or the state can separate themselves from their obligation to obey the law of God. The church and state have separate duties to each other but the same obligation to God in whom both live and move and have their being.

The biblical province of the state is the maintenance of piety, justice and civil peace in accord with wholesome laws that comport with the law of God. To this end the state is given the power of the sword and may wage war upon just and necessary occasion. (Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 23). However civil authorities may not arrogate to themselves duties and powers granted by God only to his church which include preaching and teaching the word of God and the administration of the sacraments. Neither do civil authorities have the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Therefore the church and state are separate in function and mandate but the same in their obligation to do what is good and right according to the word of God.

We notice that although the Roman government was hostile to Christ, Peter did not criticize the Roman government or suggest that it be overthrown. God's church has been able to live and grow in all kinds of political systems. No government has consistently punished those who do evil and rewarded those who do good. Some are more hostile to Christ than others yet we must remind ourselves to respect the office even if we cannot respect the officer. And we are to do this to silence the ignorance of foolish people. The Greek word translated "silence" in verse 15 means to tie shut or muzzle as if to compare the ignorance of foolish people to menacing, snarling dogs.

Peter continues to address the issue of our freedom as Christians. "Live as people who are free", he says. Are we actually free to do as we please? The hedonism of our day would seek the freedom to do whatever feels good so long as no one gets hurt. Surely Peter is not urging us to be morally free but live as if we were not slaves to sin. Those who are slaves to sin will not submit to the authority of God or to anyone else for that matter. Hedonists are inherently self-centered and selfish for they are concerned primarily with their own pleasure. The drunkard is free to go to his bottle as he wishes and he has little concern for well being of his family. Similarly the adulterer is free to indulge himself which he does with little concern that he is destroying a family unit. However, while we are to live as people who are free we are not free to sin. There is no such thing as "gay rights." No one has the right to break the law of God. No one is free from moral constraints and no one has the right to live as he pleases.

There is a sort of hedonistic evangelicalism that characterizes the so called Christian church in our country. Many feel that they can worship God in any way they wish. They want to come away from their worship experience feeling good. Individualism and self-worship are also part of the new evangelicalism. Some don't even go to church, they just read their Bible or go to a fellowship group. Many who call themselves evangelical have little concept of what the church really is and no real sense of the historical character of the church nor do they understand the need for corporate worship, the public reading and preaching of the word of God, the corporate singing of God's praises and the proper administration of the sacraments. They are too self-centered for all of that. But the elements of worship are given to us in the Bible as is the will of God, for it is his will that by doing good we should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people

Peter summarizes the matter of submission to authority by telling us to live as servants of God.

1 Peter 2:16-17 (ESV)

16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. **17** Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Any refusal to submit to authority is tantamount to believing that we are self-sufficient and therefore free from restraint. Nothing matters but I, me and mine. Servants of God submit to his will. They love his commandments. They honor everyone, they love the brotherhood. They fear God and they honor the emperor or the president in our case. If we submit to authority as we should, we will show respect for all who deserve it. We may not agree with their politics or their life-style but we show respect for their office. Godly

submission also issues in love for the church of God which he purchased with his own blood and submission to her appointed leaders.

Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)

17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

“Fear God” and “honor the emperor” go together, since all authority derives from God. Paul writes,

Romans 13:1 (ESV)

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Solomon set forth the same precept,

Proverbs 24:21 (ESV)

21 My son, fear the Lord and the king,
and do not join with those who do otherwise,

We honor the king precisely because we fear Yahweh. It is also important to take note of the Greek verb tenses of this command in 1 Peter 2:17. The tense of words "love", "fear" and "honor" indicates that we are to keep on loving the brotherhood, we are to keep on fearing God and we are to keep on honoring the emperor or king.

We need to be wise and careful in our relationship to human authorities. When Paul visited Philippi he cleansed a slave girl of the demons that possessed her and because her owners suddenly lost their source of income Paul and Silas were thrown into prison. Paul submitted to the authorities and took his punishment for Jesus sake. However when he was released the magistrates wanted him and Silas to leave quietly,

Acts 16:37-40 (ESV)

37 But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out.” **38** The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. **39** So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. **40** So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

In this case, Paul used his citizenship to protect himself. He used his citizenship again as personal protection when a rioting mob would have beaten him to death in the temple complex in Jerusalem. He went on to insist on a fair trial before Caesar. So we learn that our relationship to the authorities over us is very important and must always reflect our living as servants of Christ.

The issue of submitting to authority is a very practical matter since we are faced with many such relationships every day of our lives. Wives are to submit to the authority of their husbands and in return husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. Children are to obey their parents and submit to their authority and in return fathers are not to provoke their children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Slaves are to submit to their masters with fear and trembling as servants of Christ and in return masters are to treat their slaves with respect and fairness. In our modern society this precept applies to the employer-employee relationship for Paul addresses himself to both slave and free. We read of this in Ephesians chapters 5 and 6 where Paul bases our submission to authority on the 5th commandment for he says,

Ephesians 6:1-3 (ESV)

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **2** “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), **3** “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

Let us therefore as children of our heavenly father live as servants of God, just as Paul writes concerning our submission to authorities,

Romans 13:7 (ESV)

7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

And as Peter writes,

1 Peter 2:17 (ESV)

17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.