

SUBMITTING TO GOVERNMENT FOR THE LORD'S SAKE

1 Peter 2:13-17

INTRODUCTION

- Ronald Reagan once said, "Government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem."
- Many of us today would agree with that statement, yet governments are necessary for order in society, and moreover, God has ordained them for our good
- A theme that permeates the rest 1 Peter is *submission*
 - ✓ The submission of citizens to government (2:13-17)
 - ✓ The submission of servants to masters (2:18-20)
 - ✓ The submission of wives to husbands (3:1-6)
 - ✓ The submission of younger to elders (5:5)
- The word "submit" (*hupotasso*) means to place under in an orderly fashion, to fall in rank under authority, to be in subjection
- As fallen creatures, we are not naturally submissive to authority, but rather are rebels who seek to break free from all restraints and "do it my way"
- Indeed, at the root of man's fall into sin in the Garden of Eden was a rebellious heart that refused to submit to God's command
- As Australians, there is a strong tradition of rebellion against authority
- As believers, knowing the commands of Scripture to submit to authority, we are yet prone to rebel against God-ordained authority, reasoning that the authority may be unworthy of submitting to
- Peter has established in this epistle the fact that believers are "strangers and pilgrims" in this world, foreigners whose kingdom is not of this world, and whose King is Jesus Christ
- Such a truth could be misapplied to justify a rebellious attitude towards the authorities of this world
- Such thinking appeals to our fleshly, disobedient nature that only wants to rebel
- But Peter corrects this thinking, showing that it *does* matter how we live in relation to the unbelievers around us (v.12), and we have a duty to submit to the human governments that are over us (vv.13-17)
- It must be remembered that the government was by no means godly, and the Emperor Nero was thoroughly wicked, brutally persecuting Christians; and yet Peter calls these persecuted, suffering Christians to submit to the king and other Roman authorities

Why must we submit to government authorities?

I. FOR THE SAKE OF GOD (13-14)

- A. God has ordained three institutions by which men relate to each other and God, which establish order among people, and over which Christ is the supreme head
 - 1. The family, governed by the parents
 - 2. The church, governed by pastors/elders
 - 3. The state, governed by civil authorities

- B. The powers that be are ordained of God (Romans 13:1)
 - 1. "The most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Daniel 4:25; 2:21)
 - 2. Though we would prefer righteous, God-fearing governments, God in his wisdom may give us ungodly rulers as a form of judgment (Isaiah 3:4; 10:5; Hosea 13:11), for the perfection of his saints or to display his power and glory (Exodus 9:16)
 - 3. The word for "ordinance" (*ktisei*) means "creation" or "institution" and refers to all human institutions set up to maintain order in the world through the creation and enforcement of laws

- C. God gave us governments to punish the evil and praise the good (v.14; Romans 13:3)
 - 1. It is an act of God's grace in giving us governments, as without them we would have anarchy (Judges 17:6)
 - 2. Even a tyrannical government is better than no government
 - 3. While this is God's design for government, there are often times when wicked rulers punish the good and reward the evil
 - 4. In such cases where man's law contradicts God's law, we have a duty to disobey man in order to obey God (Acts 4:18-20; 5:29)

- D. We are to submit for the Lord' sake
 - 1. If God has ordained these authorities, we are resisting God by resisting them (Romans 13:2)
 - 2. God himself has commanded us to submit
 - 3. Christ himself, whose example we are to follow, humbly submitted himself to earthly authorities when he dwelt on this earth (see vv.21-25)

II. FOR THE SILENCING OF MEN (15)

- A. The will of God
 - 1. The believer once lived according to the will of the flesh, but now lives to the will of God (1 Peter 4:2)
 - 2. We say with the Lord Jesus, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42)
 - 3. Only those who present themselves to God in sacrifice to him and separation from the world "may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:1-2)

- B. Unbelievers are ignorant and foolish men

1. They are wilfully ignorant of God and of the truth
 2. The word for “foolish” (*aphron*) indicates “mindless” and “stupid”
 3. Their ignorance and folly provokes them to opposition to God’s people
- C. Believers can silence these critics by their exemplary behaviour in civil life, as model citizens (Titus 2:8)
1. The Lord Jesus demonstrated this by his paying of tribute in order to not give offence (Matthew 17:24-27; 22:21-22)
 2. By our godly conduct, we may not only silence these enemies, but bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (v.12)

III. FOR THE SERVICE OF GOD (16-17)

- A. The Christian is free – to serve God
1. Christ makes us free from sin and condemnation (John 8:32,36)
 2. Christianity is the greatest influence for freedom in the world, ending tyranny, slavery and bondage wherever it spreads
 3. But this freedom must never be used as a pretext to commit evil, claiming that if we are indeed freemen, we are under no restraint whatsoever
 4. Such people are *antinomians*, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness (Jude 4)
 5. Liberty must never be used for an occasion to the flesh (Galatians 5:13)
 6. Rather, our liberty is as *servants of God*, that is we are now free from the bondage of sin and the flesh, and have been brought into the blessed freedom of serving God
- B. Our social obligations as servants of God
1. Honour all men
 - a. All people are made in God’s image
 - b. All people have souls that are more valuable than the whole world
 - c. In even the worst of sinners, we can find something praiseworthy and honourable
 - d. The world disrespects, dishonours, mistreats and abuses others, but the Christian must never do so
 - e. Christ showed love and compassion upon those who were despised by the world
 - f. By showing honour to others, we open doors for the Gospel
 2. Love the brotherhood
 - a. The brethren in Christ are to receive more than honour, they are to have our love (*agapao*)

- b. This is the “new commandment” that Christ gave to his disciples (John 13:34)
 - c. This love is not a mere feeling, but a sacrificial, self-denying love, worked in us by the Holy Ghost, and modelled on the love that Christ extends to us (see 1 Corinthians 13)
 - d. This love finds its fullest expression in the context of the church
3. Fear God
- a. This is a solemn reverence of God
 - b. It is the foundation of a holy life, and results in obedience to God’s commandments
 - c. We are to “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28)
 - d. We are to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Corinthians 7:1)
 - e. We are to submit to one to another in the fear of the Lord (Ephesians 5:21)
4. Honour the king
- a. The king/emperor was not to be worshipped as the heathen did, yet he was to be honoured
 - b. This is an attitude of deference to the ruler because of the position he holds, as ordained by God
 - c. An ungodly leader may not be worthy of our *respect* because of their beliefs and behaviour, yet we should not be *disrespectful* of them, but rather show the honour to them that due according to the office they hold

CONCLUSION

1. Submitting to government does not mean:
 - Trusting them
 - Believing them
 - Blind obedience to them
 - Never disobeying them
2. Yet, as much as possible, we are to seek to be subject unto our authorities in the will of God
3. The apostle Peter at one time thought physical retaliation was the best way to deal with evil authorities (Matthew 26:50-54), but he learned from the Lord that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, and the way to overcome evil is with good
4. What Peter is impressing here is not a mere outward subjection to rulers, but a spirit of meekness, imparted by the Holy Ghost, which permeates the whole life (Titus 3:1-2)
5. By our speech and behaviour we can either fuel the criticisms of the ungodly, or quench them – which is it for you?
6. Are you daily praying for our leaders that their laws would not interfere with our duties as believers? (1 Timothy 2:1-3)