

EXPOSITION OF I PETER

Message #9

I Peter 2:13-20

We are in an election year and that means in the political arena the mud will fly and the emotions will run wild. In my opinion, politics does not bring out the best in people, it brings out the worst. People fight, people debate, people argue, people verbally attack incumbents as if this is just the way the political system is supposed to work. Well that is not the way it is to work according to God's system. God does not think politician bashing, political backbiting and verbal attacks are cute, and **in no arena are we in a better position to demonstrate that we are an alien here in this world than in the arena of politics.**

God wants our spirituality to be lived out socially and there is no better starting place to begin than with our attitude toward those in society who have authority and are in authority. This point is stressed in several passages in the N.T.: Mark 12:14-17; Romans 13:1-7; I Timothy 2:1-3; Titus 3:1-3.

We come now to a crucial word that is used many times by Peter and it is the word "submit." The Greek word υποτασσω is used in **2:13, 18; 3:1, 5; 5:5**. The word comes from two Greek words which mean to place ourselves under the authority of another recognizing their rank which God has given them. It was often used in the context of the military and it described the response of a junior officer in regard to the command of a senior officer. When we choose to willingly submit ourselves to various authorities and recognize the subordinate role we are in, we actually become a reflection of the grace of God and put ourselves on an eternally award winning path. Let's face it, most people in this world hate authority and certainly don't want to submit to it. But when we do, we demonstrate that our citizenship is in heaven, not here on earth.

The submission Peter is talking about here is not a coerced submission, it is a voluntary submission. This type of submission is something we voluntarily and intentionally decide to do. This type of attitude is so foreign to the world and it stands out as a tremendous reflection of God's grace and lays up treasures for us in heaven. **The point of submission is not self - preservation, it is God's glorification.**

What particularly makes what Peter says here so difficult, is that Peter is asking believers to submit themselves to the very people who were making life difficult for them. The Roman world was not nice to Christians. What Peter is asking us to do here is to, as Dr. Chuck Swindoll said, submit "when we are getting ripped off." The Christians had a present existence that was anything but glorious, but Peter wanted them to know that they could have a future existence that would be glorious. The primary point Peter makes here is this:

THE BELIEVER DEMONSTRATES THE GRACE OF GOD IN AN ETERNALLY AWARD WINNING WAY BY FEARING GOD AND BY HONORING AND SUBMITTING TO THE GOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITY GOD HAS ESTABLISHED.

Now I want to draw your attention to **verse 16**. You are absolutely free in Christ by the grace of God. You can choose to live any way you want and never have to worry about the condemnatory wrath of God. But God does not want us to use our grace liberty in a way that clothes ourselves with evil; He desire that we use it in a way that earns His praise (**2:19, 20**).

You do not have to submit to authority if you don't want to. Certainly in the United States you probably won't be forced to submit. **However, if you want to reflect God's grace and find the favor of God and ultimately be rewarded, you must voluntarily decide that this is what you will do.** This is how you will choose to live your life, which in all reality is a choice to yield to God's Spirit because this is not the mindset any normal human has.

Now I would like to handle this section in a question/answer format. I would like to ask and answer three questions:

QUESTION #1 – To whom does God want us to submit ourselves?

Before we move through this passage, I want to remind all of us that Peter is writing to Christians who have truly been hurt by the political world. They have been chased out of homes, they have lost jobs and a good peaceful life simply because they believed in Jesus Christ. It was the government that sanctioned every bit of this. So when Peter asks believers to submit to this government, this is mind-boggling and it certainly would show we are an alien and foreigner to the way most live and think on this earth.

You cannot find anywhere in Scripture a mindset that is given to insurrection or government overthrow. When things aren't going good should we pursue anarchy or riots? Should we take up arms and start blasting away at the political crooks? Peter says, no, pursue submission.

Now there are four specific types of authority mentioned to whom we should willingly submit:

(Authority Type #1) - We are to submit ourselves to every human institution. **2:13a**

We are to obey the law. In our little church, we have had to obey the law on certain things. For example, the law tells us we must have certain aisle room in case of fire. When we were considering the expansion of our parking lot, the law told us how many cars we could legitimately park, which would still give room for a fire truck to get in here. These are good laws. They are there to help us and to protect us and we should obey them.

(Authority Type #2) - We are to submit ourselves to a king. **2:13b**

The king who was ruling the world at the time Peter wrote this was an insane madman named Nero. This power-crazed dictatorial kook was known for his wicked cruelty aimed at Christians.

We are to consider the king as being one God has put into authority.

(Authority Type #3) - We are to submit ourselves to a governor. **2:14a**

This term probably referred to the governors of the various provinces of Rome. Their primary assignment, as Peter writes here, was to watch over a province and see to it that those who do good are praised and those who do evil are punished. In the Grace Age and Church Age, God turns the responsibility of punishing evildoers over to the government. He does not sanction any type of vigilante action on our part.

(Authority Type #4) - We are to submit ourselves to a master. 2:18

It has been estimated that in the Roman Empire there were as many as 60 million slaves. It didn't matter if you were a doctor, lawyer, accountant, musician, actor or technical person, you were a slave in the Roman world. Roman citizens were pampered and the slaves did the work. You worked for a master and whatever a master decided about you whether good or bad was unquestioned and unaccountable.

What makes this so difficult is that Peter qualifies this by saying we are to submit to them even when they are unreasonable and unjust and harsh. It is a lot easier when they are "good and gentle and fair."

It was not uncommon in the 1800s, for slaves to head west, because the west offered wide open spaces and no slavery. In fact, many of the great cowboys who were the real deal were black. In reading historical accounts, I have run across a couple of instances when the freed slave would be out in the foothills tending cattle, with not much to eat or drink, no sleep, no clean clothes and not earning much money and the slave would actually say, I would be better to go back to where I was as a slave because life was much easier. I had all my needs met and was well cared for. It is pretty easy to submit when you work for a good master, but it is tough when the master is a power-crazed unreasonable, harsh person.

Certainly if a person chooses to willingly submit in this context, it would truly stand out that something is very different about the person.

QUESTION #2 – How are we to submit to them?

In **verse 17**, we learn the specifics of how we are to submit and there are four ways spelled out:

(Way #1) - We are to submit to them by honoring all men. 2:17a

This challenge, in fact the command (imperative verb) is to honor the entire human family. The verb "honor" (τιμαω) is one that means to recognize the value, specifically as it relates to the price of something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 445-446). The aorist tense of the verb would indicate we are to look to a specific moment in time, when the value was seen and that moment was when Jesus Christ was on that cross. Peter is saying that we are to honor all humans realizing that Jesus Christ saw them as so valuable that He went to the cross and paid the price of His own life for their sins. Each person you will ever cross paths with should be honored for this reason.

(Way #2) - We are to submit by loving the brotherhood. 2:17b

This is a major theme of I Peter, which means it must have been a major problem (1:22; 2:17; 3:8; 4:8; 5:14). This challenge is to love those who are in the family of God, that is, those who are in the church. The kind of love we are to have is not the sentimental, emotional, irrational nonsense often said to be love; it is agape, which means we are to choose to calculate what is the best for another person according to God's Word and will and in that context love them. Agape love is the highest love.

(Way #3) - We are to submit by fearing God. **2:17c**

The challenge to fear God is a command (imperative mood), it is to be continual (present tense), and we are not the source of the action, we are the recipient of it (passive verb). The verb “fear” (φοβέω) is one in Greek that means to continually live in a way that reverences and is even terrified in a right sense of God (Smith, pp. 471-472). This is a tremendous reverential fear of God that we need to have. The passive verb would indicate we are to allow this fear of God to continually dominate our lives. God’s Spirit will produce this action and we need to let this attitude dominate the way we continually think. **Don’t miss this point - one truly led by the Spirit of God will fear God in a deep reverential way.** One who wants honor in heaven will live with a reverential fear of God on earth.

In today’s world of religion, you will truly stand out as an alien if you choose to fear God. Most are belittling Him. Most don’t even care if rock bands are in His church. Most don’t care if you even carefully teach His Word in the church. Most will tolerate anything as long as they feel good about themselves. But we are to fear God. We are to reverence God. We are to tremble at the thought of God. This is to be the way we continually live our lives.

(Way #4) - We are to submit by honoring the king. **2:17d**

The present tense of the verb honor, means we are to continually see the value and honor those whom God raises to political leadership. God has ordained all government officials and we are to honor them.

QUESTION #3 – Why are we to submit to them?

There are seven reasons given in this context as to why we are to submit to various authorities:

(Reason #1) - For the Lord’s sake. **2:13**

We don’t submit because we always love or agree with the leader, we do it for God. This is all the motivation we need for submitting to authority, on account of the Lord.

(Reason #2) - Because God has sent this person to punish those who do evil and praise those who do good. **2:14**

God has a purpose for ordaining leadership and having leadership is better than not having it.

(Reason #3) - Because submitting to authority is the will of God. **2:15**

Two things are specifically said to be the will of God - 1) We do what is good and right; 2) We silence the mouth of the foolish. Again this is critical. We do not submit because we agree or because we support all of the rules or codes or regulations. We submit because it is the will of God.

Sometimes at Bible schools or Bible colleges there are some rules with which you may not agree. But when you are there, you submit because that is the will of God.

(Reason #4) - Because submitting to authority silences the ignorance of foolish men. **2:15**

Remember this about the lost world - they always have their mouths much wider open than their eyes. In the first century Christians were constantly being slandered and falsely accused by people who didn't know what they were talking about. Peter says by our consistent quiet submissive attitude we muzzle the mouths of these fools. Ignorant foolish people aren't interested in the facts of anything. They shoot off their mouths without knowing them.

The word "ignorance" is the word from which we get our English word "agnostic" (αγνωστικ). It refers to one who has no perception, no understanding (p. 92). The word "foolishness" (αφρων) is a word that refers to one without reason, one who is without sense (Smith, p. 72).

People who don't know what they are talking about run their mouths off against God's people, and when God's people live their lives quietly and submissively, they shut their mouths.

(Reason #5) - Because submitting to authority uses our freedom in a way that shows we serve God. **2:16**

We demonstrate that we are a servant of the living God, through our quiet, faithful submissive service.

(Reason #6) - Because this finds the favor of God. **2:19a**

Our primary focus on our job, working for our boss, should not be getting a raise but getting God's praise. When we willingly submit when we are being unappreciated or mistreated, we earn the favor of God. When you suffer unjustly and take it and bear it, you glorify God.

(Reason #7) - Because this keeps our conscience good. **2:19b**

Your conscience will never feel any better or any cleaner than when you are leading a quiet, submissive life.

Now you can choose to hate authority or you may choose to submit to it. It is your decision. If you want to be a grace reflector, and if you want to earn the praise of God, and if you want to show the world that you are an alien here, then you opt to willingly submit and you will find "favor with God."