

Submission to Civil Authority

1 Peter 2:13-17

Series: Exiles in the World

1. Introduction:

- a. After making an appeal for Christian conduct, Peter directs our attention to instituted authority and to those appointed to rule the people. He implies that the first demonstration of the Christian's personal behavior is his conduct toward government.
- b. The same message is uttered by Paul the Apostle in Romans 13:1-7 and Titus 3:1-2
- c. To what extent are we to obey the earthly rulers – the law of the land must be upheld as long as it does not force the Christian to disobey God's law

2. Verse 13a – *The Command to Submit* – Be subject

- a. Be Subject—Submit yourself – The word basically means “to place under; to subordinate,” and in this passage is a synonym of the verb to obey.
 - i. As citizens of heaven, Christians submit wholly to divine authority. We know that we are not ultimately under human authority, yet God still expects believers to submit. As Believers we must have a proper respect for and humble submission to all the legitimate institutions of human authority.
 - ii. This word is a military expression literally meaning to arrange in formation under the commander.
 - iii. This is contrary to what we are seeing within Christendom.
 - iv. As Christians we promote the welfare of our respective societies and governments.
 - v. Peter and Paul both lived in an openly sinful, decadent Roman Empire. This society was infamous for homosexuality, infanticide, corruption, abuse of women, immorality, violence and yet we are told to submit.
 - vi. **Matthew 22:21** ... Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.”
 - vii. Every human government has evil within—they are led by sinful people.

3. Verse 13b – *The Motivation for Submission* – for the Lord's sake

- a. Motivations:
 - i. Motivation 1 – It’s for the Lord’s sake. We obey because we desire to honor the Lord. To disobey is disobey God.
 - ii. Motivation 2 – We obey earthly authority to honor God’s sovereign authority.
 - iii. Motivation 3 – We submit in order to imitate Christ’s example of obedient submission to His Father.
 - b. God is pleased when unsaved people associate Christians with the saving gospel instead of protest against human institutions.
 - i. Listen to Paul’s singular purpose: **1 Corinthians 2:1-2** And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.
 - ii. We engage in spiritual war for the souls of lost men
 - 1. **2 Corinthians 10:3-5** For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. (4) For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. (5) We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,
 - 2. Remember, Christ’s Kingdom is not of this world.
4. Verses 13c-14 – **The Extent of Submission** – to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.
- a. Government’s purpose is to restrain evil, and promote the public good. Romans 13:3-4
 - b. We are to be submitted to every human institution
 - i. Everyone is God ordained (Romans 13:1)
 - ii. Corrupt leaders will be judged by God
 - iii. The only time we can disobey is when we are being asked to either commit sin or omit proper devotion to God.
 - iv. Emperor – the bible recognizes a one-man rule as a form God uses.
 - v. Jesus affirmed the Roman government’s right to use the sword against Peter if he used it on anyone—there can be no vigilante justice.

5. Verse 15 – **The Reason for Submission** – For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.
 - a. It is the will of God that Christians do right and therefore remove any reason for the sinful world to accuse us.
 - b. Ignorance of foolish people – those that are hostile to Christ are put into an open shame.
 - i. **Titus 3:1-2** Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, (2) to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

6. Verse 16 – **The Attitude of Submission** – Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.
 - a. Our right attitude is displayed when we recognize that we are free in Christ.
 - i. However, this freedom from the evil of this world does not grant us license to cover-up evil by not submitting to our rulers.
 - b. We are reminded that though we are free from the evil of sin, yet we are slaves to Christ

7. Verse 17 – **The Application of Submission** – Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.
 - a. Peter summarized his demand for submission to all authority into four practical dimensions.
 - i. Honor everyone – Every person was created in the image of God and therefore is due some degree of respect.
 1. **1 John 3:23** And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.
 2. **1 John 4:7** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.
 3. **1 John 5:1** Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.
 - ii. Love the brotherhood –
 1. **1 John 3:23** And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.
 2. **1 John 4:7** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.
 3. **1 John 5:1** Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.
 - iii. Fear God – trusting him in all circumstances no matter how difficult.

- iv. Honor the emperor – submission to civil authority is an implementation of what might be called “evangelistic citizenship.”

8. Benediction –

- a. **Romans 13:1-2** 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. (2) Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.