

“SUBMIT FOR THE LORD’S SAKE.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

February 7, 2016, 10:30AM

Text for the Sermon: I Peter 2:13-17

Introduction.

Last week I said verse 11 was a shift in Peter’s letter from doctrine to practical application and that verses 11-12 were the generalization before the specifics.

Now we come to specifics. In our war against the passions of the flesh that are out to kill our souls, what is the godly conduct that we should have in this world and among unbelievers so they might see it and glorify God?

I Peter 2:13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution.

Those are strong words. Let me remind you of the context in which they were written.

First, they were written by a man who on the night Jesus was betrayed took a sword and cut off the ear of the High Priest’s servant who had come to arrest Jesus. Not exactly submitting to authority. Decades later Peter is much older and wiser.

Second, Peter wrote this letter during the time of the wicked reign of Nero who took particular delight in persecuting Christians and who was behind the martyrdom of Peter himself. Of all the Caesars, Nero was one of the worst, he killed his stepbrother, his mother and his wife. He demanded to be worshiped.

These are not cavalier words tossed out lightly, these are serious words for serious Christians in serious times, times like ours. If he said that then, how much more would it apply to us?

How do Christians who are citizens of heaven and sojourners and exiles on this earth relate to governing authorities? How do we juggle this dual citizenship? What does the Bible say about how we are think about and behave toward those in places and positions of power or authority over us? What is our duty?

The Citizen’s Duty

Let me summarize our text first and then dig into it.

God has created human institutions of authority and power to govern over us. They are from God and by God, and they will all give glory to God in the end. We are to submit to them as

God's servants, not for their sake, but for God's sake. We are to respect and honor them and according to I Timothy 2:1-2 we are to pray for them.

God is the creator of the universe and He governs it in an orderly fashion. He has not left the human race in chaos or anarchy. God has ordained that there be human institutions for the purpose of governing and maintaining justice and order and peace.

We have only to look at Somalia to see the terrible consequences of no government. However bad you may think our government is or is becoming, I can assure you a bad government is better than no government.

Our lives are divided into many compartments and every one of them has authorities, those in charge, those responsible, those over us in some way. Teachers, police, bosses, managers, parents, city hall, landlords, regulators, IRS, DMV.

And just in case someone thinks we have authority structures because of sin let me burst that bubble by reminding us that there is some kind of authority among the sinless angels (I Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 9) and among the saints in heaven (Luke 19:17, 19; I Corinthians 6:3; Revelation 4:4) and finally and most importantly in the *Trinity* itself (Jesus did the will of the Father; I Corinthians 11:3; 15:28).

I have preached before that the authority structure built into human society is a reflection of the image of God, the image of the Trinity. Authority and submission are both God-like. Human relationships reflect this nature of God.

Peter's meaning is clear, whether we are dealing with the highest ranking authority or some low ranking authority we are to obey everyone who is in a position of ruling authority.

Peter gives two reasons

First, Peter gives a theological reason for our doing so. For the Lord's sake, on account of God, as servants of God, because they rule at the will of God. So when every bone in our body wants to resist for human reasons, we submit for spiritual and theological reasons, higher reasons than our own desires.

By saying it this way Peter is cutting off a hundred "yeah, buts" and "what abouts." Peter is not ignorant or naïve. He knows Rome rules over Asia Minor by many very unjust means and that Caesar ruled with tyrannical force and much abuse especially toward Christians.

By mentioning lowly governors Peter is saying there is no kind of government or authority to which we ought not submit and show respect, whether Nero or Pilate or Herod. It is God who raises up kings and gives them the sword, it is God who transfers rule to them according to His wisdom and will.

They rule by the will of God and are agents of God sent by God and therefore to not obey is to disobey God.

Peter gives a second reason to obey, a horizontal reason. Those who rule are meant to reward the good and restrain and punish the evil. For the sake of the public good and for the sake of good order.

Many of you will be watching the Super Bowl this afternoon. It would be impossible without an authority structure of leading and submitting, from the coaches and quarterbacks and referees, the control trucks and camera crews and stadium personal and security.

A car can't have two steering wheels. Some lead, some follow, it's not about inferior or superior.

Freedom.

Did you notice that in this text about being subject and submitting Peter says live as people who are free? True submission is not being dominated or being a doormat, true submission is free.

We do this in *freedom*, as free people, this is our free response. Yet in this freedom we are servants of God. We submit what we want, to what He wants, our wills to His will.

Our freedom is to do what is right, to serve. We don't submit out of fear or because the government has power over us, we submit because our King has called us to submit to kings. Our consciences are free even as God commands us to be subject to human authorities.

The governor's duty.

Peter doesn't focus on the other side of the coin as much as Paul does in similar passages in Ephesians and Colossians. Peter speaks mostly to the side that may be more mistreated, the citizen, the slave and the wife. But he does give a one sentence statement of *God's purpose for governments* and authorities. To punish wrong and reward right. Governments that fail to punish wrongdoers and maintain justice disobey God's purpose and will be subject to Him.

The duty of honor.

Peter concludes with four separate summary commands, a kind of progression of honor.

Honor everyone. This is the general overarching command. It is grounded in the Scriptural truth that all men are made in the image of God, none are excluded. As fellow image bearers we ought to treat each other with basic human respect. All lives matter.

Nothing tears down peace and getting along like contempt and bitterness and anger and rebellion. Where there is no discipline or order or obedience there is chaos and discord.

And where there is no honor for basic human life and dignity we have the horrors of man's inhumanity to man seen in what ISIS and al-Qaeda is doing. Which raises another question, how do you honor a terrorist? By treating them as human beings, giving them a fair trial and a just punishment. And by praying for their eternal souls.

Two simple words, honor everyone. Can you imagine how doing that would transform the political arena, the media, the blogosphere, the work place, home life, our schools, the highways? Is there someone to whom you have been disrespectful, have not honored appropriately?

Love the brotherhood. Whatever we owe unbelievers we owe double to believers. The love we owe to the human race is especially owed to Christians. In here the bar should be raised higher from what we say and do out there.

This is agape love, the supreme desire to do and say what is best for another person, putting them above ourselves.

Do you feel a special affection for these brothers and sisters here? This will become more important as the world moves against us.

Galatians 6:10 As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Fear God. This is the highest obligation of all, not just honor God, not just love God, but fear God. We are not to fear the king, the president, nor are we to fear man in general, but only God. Whoever truly and rightly fears God will love the children of God and honor everyone made in the image of God, even the evil emperor.

Honor the emperor. He is not divine, he is not to be feared. Our obligations to God and to our fellow Christians are higher.

Being a Christian today in America puts us increasingly at odds with more and more of our government leaders and with political positions being prompted and adopted. How do we honor those who are doing things contrary to Scripture and aren't doing what God put them in authority to do, like "punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good"?

How do we honor and respect and obey a dishonorable authority, whether a president or a boss or supervisor or a teacher or county or state official?

First, by acknowledging they are worthy of our respect simply on the grounds that they are created by God and created in the image and likeness of the living God, and that their authority is derived from God, He has sovereignly put them in place as His appointed representative over us.

We recognize from Scripture that God was the one who raised up kings and rules and brought them down. He used bad rulers to be an instrument of His judgment or to chastise His own people to bring them back to Him.

Do you know people who have been respectful and have submitted well even when they disagreed? Rush Limbaugh serves us in this regard only as a bad example and so do countless other journalist and analyst on both sides of the political aisle. Our country is awash in disrespect and dishonor and slander and liable and ad hominen attacks, attacks on character rather than ideas and policies.

Let us never be one to cuss out anyone in authority, or call them names, either to their face or behind their back. We should never make fun of them or make them the butt of jokes.

Second, we honor and respect those in authority over us by submitting to and obeying the laws and policies and rules as long as they are not in conflict with our obedience to God and His Word.

We do this in a thousand ways and we do it every day, obeying countless laws, following speed limits, putting on seat belts, not texting and driving, not smoking in public buildings, paying taxes, returning books on time or paying the fine, getting our shots, getting fishing licenses, doing our homework, going to bed when told.

Third, we honor and respect those in authority when we exercise our lawful rights to disagree or oppose unjust or unbiblical laws or policies in a godly and respectful manner, with truth and not slandering, not tearing down or attacking or throwing mud or creating dissent. We have incredible rights and privileges as free citizens of a free democracy, beyond what Peter could imagine, but we must use our freedoms in a God-honoring and God-glorifying manner.

Let me give a current example. In light of the same-sex unions ruling last summer by the Supreme Court, our council has created a task force of individuals with a mandate to review our bylaws and policies to make sure we have everything in order.

I want to say something to them and all of us about what they are doing. Their goal is not to protect us from a lawsuit. If we think we can come up with lawsuit-proof policies or bylaws we will be sadly disappointed some day. If we think we can write everything so well no government lawyers can get around them, we are naïve.

We need to do what we are doing not out of fear of a lawsuit, but out of a desire to be as clear as we can be about what we believe about what the Bible teaches and where we stand on marriage. We aren't putting our trust in our policies, but in the Bible. If a lawsuit comes, it comes. We just want to make sure we have been clear about what the Bible says.

And if we are sued and slandered and attacked, let it be over the truth of God's Word so that if not before, at least on the day of visitation God and His Word are glorified.

Fourth, we honor and respect those in authority by praying for them and working in government in ways that do good and lead in godly directions.

Implications and applications.

The world has a lot of reasons to criticize Christians. A lot of Christians have behaved badly in public and the media loves to report it. The actions of a few brand us all. So our actions, our good deeds, become our greatest testimony. They are our sermons, they silence the lies and slander and accusations of those watching. Showing respect and honor to our leaders and authorities, and submitting to their authority is a great opportunity.

Parents play a crucial role in this business of submitting to those in authority. It starts at home, they set the tone, they build the foundation of respect and honor and obedience, by our words and example and discipline.

Christians should excel at submitting first to God and then to those in authority. Christians should excel in doing good. It should be so recognizable as to be praised by a watching world.

May our conduct toward authorities be a clear contrast to unbelievers that they have to take notice and glorify God. Perhaps they will even say, "They have been with Jesus."

May we bear witness to the truth, to declare who is the true King. May we "proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (I Peter 2:9) and keep your "conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (2:12).

May God be glorified as we honor everyone, love the brotherhood, fear God and honor the emperor.