

“Submitting To Authority?”

Portions contributed by [Matthew Stoll](#).

Psalm 23:1-6

1 Peter 2:13-25

Since Easter, I have been looking at one of Jesus’ disciples...Peter, and Peter’s first letter. Now, Peter is a man who actually walked with Jesus, while Jesus was still here on earth. He was one of the twelve disciples, and his life was transformed by the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, and he became one of the leaders of the early Christian church.

I think what he has to say to the church, in this letter, is very important. Yet his letters are often overlooked. In this short letter, found towards the end of our NT, Peter is trying to help the Christians understand how to live out their new life in Christ. Since Christ has risen from the dead into a new life, Peter says that He has given us all a new birth and a living hope.

At the beginning of Peter’s letter, he mentions that we are “...**strangers in the world...**”. And what he means is, that once we receive Christ by faith, we become strangers on this planet. Do you remember what I spoke about last week? We are not of this world, as we are to strive to live as “**strangers**”, so we do not “**backslide**” and conform to the former “**lusts**” of this world.

You are all aware of the issues of illegal immigration that was always in the news...before the pandemic crisis. Well, for Christians, the ironic twist is that we are the foreigners here.

Because you see, this is not our home anymore, we are just passing through this place. Now...we are citizens of God’s kingdom, heaven, therefore we live according to a different set of values and guidelines than the rest of this world.

As citizens of God's kingdom we don't follow popular opinion polls, we follow the King of kings. Yet, at the same time, we still have to live here, and we are still citizens of this nation. So, how do these two citizenships interact with each other? How do we live as citizens of two worlds?

The Christians in Peter's day, found themselves in a tough predicament, because they were trying to live for God in a world run by pagans...you know non-Christians, whether it be in the political realm or the work realm.

Many times the pagan's religious life...of worshiping false gods...intertwined with the political, social, and economic realm. It was hard to get away from it, because it was so ingrained in their culture.

Interestingly though, many Christian leaders have been saying that we are now in a post-Christian culture. It used to be a few short decades ago that even people who were not Christian still had Biblical worldviews, and Christian values. Well, not so much anymore, as our culture is becoming more like Peter's day with a smorgasbord of religions and belief systems.

The problem they struggled with...and that we also struggle with today...is, as a Christians, how do we live with those in authority over us when they don't share our values?

Christians Must Submit to Governing Authorities (Political and Legal Realm)

In 1 Peter, he addresses the political and legal realms. If you were listening to the reading you heard just moments ago, Peter begins this passage by saying, **“Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as supreme**

authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong, and to commend those who do right.”

While we are citizens of God’s kingdom it does not mean we can ignore earthly authorities. We don’t live above the laws of the land. As Christians, we must submit to them just as everyone else does. The Apostle Paul even went one step further, in his writing in Romans 13:1:

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”

Both Peter and Paul agree, that we should submit to our governing authorities, because God himself has established these authorities to keep the peace. **“They punish those who do evil, and reward those who do good.”**

If we do not submit to the authorities of our land we are disrespecting God who established them. Paul continues in Rom. 13:2

“Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.”

We are to submit and not to rebel. So, what does it mean to submit to those in authority? Well, it means obeying the laws of the land, even in this particular time in our lives.

You see, when we submit, it is actually a step of faith, because...it is not our natural instinct. Our natural instinct is to dominate. So, by submitting, even to non-Christian authorities that are acting in unChristlike ways, we are trusting in faith that God will correct the situation. We have faith that God will provide justice rather than just...taking justice into our own hands.

Respect Everyone/Honor the King

Okay, back to Peter's letter...you see, he goes one step further also. In verse 17 he says, **“Show proper respect for everyone, love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.”**

It isn't enough just to live by the rules of the land, out of fear and reverence for God, we must also honor the king. Of course we don't have a king, we have a president and governors, but the principle applies nonetheless.

Think of the President, or Governor, that you have liked the least (but please, don't mention any names). Perhaps it's a person whom you disagreed with their policies and viewpoints, or one you thought had morale character problems, or didn't provide a good quality of leadership.

When you have talked about that individual with others would you say you honored and respected them in your conversations? You may say, 'But you don't understand he or she failed the American people, or the people of Michigan.' I must tell you to be very careful with what you say, because you my friends, are treading on dangerous ground.

Before you think Peter doesn't understand what it means to honor and respect a leader who doesn't measure up, consider the situation Peter faced when he wrote his letter. Nero was the Roman Emperor. He was known for his lustful pleasures, his lust for power, he even killed people in his own family out of his own selfish ambition and narcissism.

He was also the first Emperor to strike down Christians. Some think he actually became insane. Not exactly the kind of person you want in authority over you...right? But nevertheless Peter says as Christians we must respect even the most disreputable leaders.

Unlike the political world of the Bible, we live in a democracy “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” Along with that, comes the sense that we have the power, we have control, our voice and vote counts. So, we are under the illusion that we are in control.

Now, I say “illusion”, not because I am criticizing our government or the people of the United States, but because God is ultimately the one who is in control.

Well, with that power that we have, comes the expectation that leaders will do what I want them to do, and we begin criticizing our leadership because we didn't vote for them, they aren't from our party, or we feel they are not representing us, or doing the right things in office.

Yet, we are told here, by Peter, a man who walked with Jesus, to honor and respect those who are in authority over us, even submitting to them, because God has placed them in authority.

Now, this doesn't mean we have to agree with them, or that we shouldn't express our opinion if we feel it is right and just, but it does mean, that we must treat those leaders with the honor and respect they deserve. When we fail to honor them, we are failing to honor God, who has placed them in authority over us.

What happens when those who are in authority abuse their power or do unjust things, things that God does not approve of? Issues like committing perjury, slavery, segregation, favoritism of rich, abuse of the poor, the list goes on and on as we look at just our own short political history as a nation.

When Peter and the other apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin, (the Jewish religious authorities), the second time, they were told to quit preaching about Jesus being raised from the dead. Their reply, **“We must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29)!”**

And that's exactly what they did, they went on to declare that Jesus was raised from the dead and God exalted him to his right hand. They ignored what their leaders told them to do, because, well...they had to follow God.

We must submit to the authorities unless we are told to do something which is in conflict with God's character, His values, or His commandments. Now, if there is a conflict we must say like Peter said, **“I must obey God rather than man.”**

We cannot compromise with God. Like...people like Martin Luther, who would not submit to the Roman Catholic Church. Or, people like Rosa Parks, who was told to sit in the back of the bus. She refused, because it required her to do something which was inconsistent with the God...for God created all people in his image and treats them all alike.

But, when you stand up for God and His commands, you must be prepared for the persecution. Peter says, we should expect to be persecuted for doing good...the right thing. In fact, it should be welcomed because it brings us reward in heaven.

We know from history that Christians during the first few centuries, including both Paul and Peter, were killed for their faith, because they would not bow their knee to Caesar and declare that he is Lord. Why? Because they believed Jesus is Lord and no one else, and they would not compromise.

Later in chapter three and four of 1 Peter (1 Peter 3:8-14; 4:12-16) Peter tells us that, we, as Christians, will suffer just for being Christians and doing good. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't honor those very same people.

Christians Must Submit To Authorities in the Workplace

Peter then switches over to talk about how Christian should submit to authorities in the work environment. Let's say your boss is being a jerk, he treats you harshly. He criticizes your work at every opportunity. They don't consider you for a promotion even though you work harder and longer hours than everyone else.

How should we as followers of Christ respond? Should we quit? Should we start a little anti-boss campaign, gossiping with other employees about the boss behind their back? Should we start cutting corners at work, or lie about the amount of time we have worked just to show them?

Peter says, **“Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect.”** I think we could apply this to today by saying it this way, employees submit to your boss with all respect.

Peter continues, **“...not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.”**

This is so contradictory to our Western culture, isn't it? Our culture says if someone mistreats you at work or anyplace else, do it back to them. After all they deserve it, they brought it upon themselves. Or perhaps you've heard this, 'Don't get mad, get...even.'

As Christians, our response is to be different than our cultures. We don't respond to hardship the way the world does. We don't sink to their level. We don't respond evil with evil. We don't compromise our faith and our integrity by acting like the world, retaliating with words, gossiping about them behind their backs. We are to respond, the way Christ would respond.

Peter reminds us of how Jesus responded to this type of harsh treatment, and how we should use this as a model for our behavior. **“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”** Yet **“when they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (referring to God).”**

In fact, when Jesus was on the cross he actually prayed for his Father to forgive those who persecuted Him. When He said, **“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34).”**

Jesus submitted to those over Him, even though they were unjustly punishing Him for crimes that He did not commit. Jesus’ suffering was part of God’s plan to bring forgiveness to all who would believe, by his wounds we are healed.

As Christians, we seem to believe that God would never condone our suffering, God wants us to be happy, right? And if we are not happy, then obviously it is not what God wants, so we should do whatever it takes...to get out of the situation whether it is a work environment, a marriage, or a friendship; even if it means being deceitful (lying), gossiping, yelling and swearing, backstabbing to accomplish this...as though the ends will justify the means.

Well, Peter tells us this is not so, we will suffer like Jesus for doing good, but whoa to the person who chooses to take the easy way out. We should never lose our integrity even when we are enduring suffering.

Jesus said, **“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven (Matt. 5:10-12).”**

You see, it’s easy to be a Christian when times are good, and people are nice to us. But, when situations turn for the worst and we are mistreated, and people talk behind our back, that is when our faith is truly put to the test. It is at that point people see us for who we really are.

Now, they should see how solid our faith foundation is in Jesus Christ. Because people are watching us...and they are watching us to see how we behave. That is when we are to be a true witness for Christ.

Backing up just a little bit, in verse 12, Peter writes, **“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”**

Every day we are to be a witness for Jesus Christ. And Peter reminds us that we will be rewarded for enduring suffering.

Can we submit to our employers, our Governor, our President, and treat them with respect even though we feel they may be making a wrong decision, even though we may disagree with them, even though they may be harsh with us? Are we keeping our Christian integrity in our everyday life, by respecting those who work with us, and even those over us?

Perhaps you're thinking to yourself, Pastor Eric, I just can't accept that...God would want me to do this. Well, I challenge you all today! I challenge you this week to read over this passage, 1 Peter 2:13-25, and these other passages, (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-25; Romans 13:1-8).

Read through today's passage again, along with these other passages this week, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to what the truth is. **Amen!**