

**Subject: *The Submission of Christian Citizens***

**Scripture: *1 Peter 2:13-17***

The Bible has something to say about the role of government and its citizens. On the one hand the Bible speaks about the responsibility of government officials, and it also speaks about the responsibility of the citizens who are under their authority.

### **The Authority and Responsibility of Government**

1. God delegates His authority to government officials
2. God authorizes government to promote good and punish evil
3. Government officials are the ministers (servants) of God

John Brown said, “The great design of civil government is to protect the liberties, properties, and lives of mankind.”

### **The Submission and Responsibility of Citizens**

1. Citizens should submit to government authority
2. Citizens should pay taxes to the government
3. Citizens should respect and honor government officials

Our text in 1 Peter 2 and Romans 13:1-7 stress the importance of Christians being submissive to government authority. We need to know what the Bible teaches and we need to obey it. Christians must understand their unique place in the world. We have a dual citizenship. Peter refers to Christians as “pilgrims and strangers” (2:11) and then he tells us to submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake. We are citizens in this world and citizens of heaven. We must obey the laws and authority of men, and we must obey the laws and authority of God. As citizens of earth and of heaven we have special blessings and privileges, but we also have duties and responsibilities. Our text deals with the important matter of Christian submission as citizens.

#### **1. The command to submission (vs. 13, “Submit yourselves”)**

It is a clear command. This is a voluntary, willing submission. Submit is a military term that means “to arrange or line up under authority.” The concept of submission is a distinctive Christian virtue. Peter introduces the duty of submission here in this letter and reminds us of the areas where it is called for: submission to the government, submission in the workplace (vs. 18), and submission in the home (3:1-6). In each case, it is voluntary and willing submission.

#### **2. The extent of submission (vs. 13, “to every ordinance of man...the king...or governors”)**

It is a comprehensive command. We are to submit to every institution of government and to people in every level and form of government. Peter refers to the king (emperor), who at that time was Nero, an ungodly ruler and a madman. Governors were those who served under the king’s authority.

For us, it means we must submit to every institution of government and to government officials at every level, the president and those in national government, the governor and those in state government, the mayor and those in county and city government, also judges and police officers at every level of government. God designed government to do two things: to punish evil and promote good (vs. 14).

This is the difficult part—we are to submit to government officials regardless of their political party, their moral character, their competence, or their personality. The only time we must not submit to the government is when we are forced to do something that God forbids or when we are forbidden to do something that God commands.

*Acts 4:18-20* <sup>18</sup> And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup> But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. <sup>20</sup> For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

*Acts 5:28-29* <sup>28</sup> Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. <sup>29</sup> Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

If there is a conflict between what government commands and what God commands, then we must do what God says and then accept the consequences whatever they may be. We remember in 2020 when some areas of the country were in lock down during COVID, some churches had to decide if they would obey the government or obey God.

*Hebrews 10:25* Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

### **3. The motive for submission (vs. 13, “for the Lord’s sake”)**

It is a matter of honoring the Lord and bringing Him glory. Why are we doing this? It’s for two reasons. First, we submit because of the Lord’s command. Since all government authority is given by God (Rom. 13), we submit to authority for His sake.

Second, we submit because of the Lord’s example. Christ lived under the government of the Roman Empire from birth to death, yet He never attacked those in authority. He never led a protest movement or took part in civil disobedience. He never led a demonstration against the corrupt Jewish religious leaders or the corrupt Gentile leaders. He never even protested when He was unfairly arrested, tried, beaten, flogged, and crucified. If anybody had rights, Jesus had rights, yet He submitted to government authority.

Jesus put His responsibilities ahead of His rights. He spoke only of the Kingdom of God. He called sinners to repent. He entrusted Himself to the God who judges righteously. Jesus knew His Father was in control. We must submit to government because He commanded us to and He taught us to by His example.

### **4. The purpose of submission (vs. 15, “that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men”)**

When we submit to government authority, we silence the critics. The phrase translated “put to silence” means “to muzzle.” The whole point of the passage is to remind Christians to live in such a way that we stop the mouths of those who criticize our faith. There is no greater way for people to see the power of the gospel than to see a true Christian who obeys the Lord.

The ignorance of verse 15 is willful ignorance, not just lack of information, but hostility and rejection of the truth. By well doing, by obedient submission, believers can silence the critics.

Peter is saying that it's essential to live in such a way that your testimony becomes believable. When Stephen was stoned to death and Paul was standing by and watching it all.

*Acts 6:59-60* And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

#### **5. The attitude of submission (vs. 16, “as free...as the servants of God”)**

As Christians we have spiritual freedom. Christ made us free by redemption (1:18). We are free from sin and bondage, but we are not to use our freedom to do what we want. We are free to do what we ought. We should never use our freedom as a cloak (cover-up) for doing what is evil. We are free, yet at the same time we are servants (slaves) of Christ. We are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, but our liberty must not become a license to do wrong.

#### **6. The practice of submission (vs. 17, “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.”)**

Peter ends this part of the letter with four short commands. They are a good summary of a Christian's responsibility as a citizen. We are to show honor (respect) all people, no matter their race, nationality, color, or background, because all people are made by God in His image. We are to have a special love for our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. We are to have a deep reverence and respect for God. And we are to honor the king, no matter who he is. Notice that fearing God and honoring the king go together. And remember that Peter is writing this when Nero is the king.

*Proverbs 24:21-22* <sup>21</sup> My son, fear thou the LORD and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change: <sup>22</sup> For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?

One modern translation says, “My child, fear the Lord and the king, and don't associate with rebels. For you will go down with them to sudden disaster.”

We are to honor government officials and obey the Lord by being good, submissive citizens. We are to respect government authority because we respect God's authority. Being a good Christian means being a good citizen.