

# **Gospel Motivated Submission to Government**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Context**

Three important and pervasive themes that emerge from the gospel in Peter's letter: Identity, Conduct & Witness.

### **1 PETER 2:13-17**

*13Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 15For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 16Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. 17Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.*

**Loyalty to Christ calls for our active submission to governing authorities**

### **Exceptions?**

Are there any qualifications or exceptions to the straightforward teaching of this text? Does our loyalty to Christ ever call us to disobey the governing authorities? Is civil disobedience ever an option for a Christian?

I think the biblical answer to these questions is: Yes -- on certain occasions and in certain circumstances, our loyalty to Christ will compel us to peacefully resist the governing authorities.

### **Examples**

**Exodus 1:15-20 v.17** - *But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.*

**Esther 4:16** - *Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.*

## **Daniel 6:6-10**

**Acts 5:29** “*We must obey God rather than men.*”

The history of the church is littered with those who suffered loss and even death because they would not submit themselves to authorities that *forbid what God commanded or commanded what God forbid.*

Three main points: The Command for Submission; The Reasons for Submission; and the Heart of Submission

### **I. THE COMMAND FOR SUBMISSION**

**Theme of this larger section**

**v. 13** “*Be subject, for the Lord’s sake, to every human institution . . .*”

The implications of this text are massive & far-reaching. Its’ message speaks to matters of war and peace, death and taxes, education and retirement, childrearing and employment, protesting and speed limits, medicine and motherhood, seat belts and dog collars, sex and marriage.

The command itself is very straightforward: “*Be subject . . . 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.*”

The command is clear and the extent of the command is also clear. We are to willingly and actively submit ourselves to all governing authorities – local, Provincial & National.

→ **Romans 13:1** *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities .*

→ **Titus 3:1** *Remind [everyone] to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work . . .*

The view of government here is that it is for our good. Government is in place to punish evil and promote the good. It is part of what is called God’s common grace. And we are to submit ourselves to it.

John Piper writes: “The proper aim of government is to dam up the river of evil that flows from the heart of man so that it does not flood the world with anarchy. Governments do not save, they are to maintain external order in a world seething with evil so the saving message of the gospel can run and triumph on its own power.”

Governing authority keeps Canada from becoming like Rwanda and slipping into anarchy and mob rule.

***v. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.***

There is a progression

→ All people deserve our basic respect – we are called to honor everyone as creatures created in the image of God.

→ Beyond the respect we owe to all people, we are called to esteem and love fellow Christians in a special way. Through our mutual love for Christ, we are called into a fervent love for one another (**1 Peter 1:22**)

→ Then, above our special love for one another, we are called to “**fear God.**” There is an appropriate reverence and submission to God that is due to Him alone – and no other!

→ Then, with the these relationships before us, we are to “**honor the emperor.**” We are to show those in authority the courtesy and respect we are to show all people.

How might this instruction inform the way we think and speak about our political representatives?

We tend to look upon politics and politicians with a jaundiced eye

Much political commentary on the left as well as the right is very cutting, harsh, insulting, cynical, petty, combative, or argumentative --

I think the call to honor and submit to those in authority should cause us to chasten our tone and choice of words when we speak about these things.

We must ultimately strive to see the authority of God and His good purposes above and behind all governing authority.

### **Application Questions**

Have we actively sought to honor those who are in authority over us?

Do we have to repent of a cynical attitude toward our government or our leaders?

Do we pray for our leaders? – 1 Tim 2:1-2

Do we see our government as God ordained for our good?

## **II. THE REASONS FOR SUBMISSION**

We actively submit ourselves to the governing authorities - *“for the Lord’s sake”*

These are the four most important words in this passage. Peter is calling us to bring all the spheres of life into proper relation to God. What might seem like a fairly routine event in our day – like paying a parking ticket or obeying the speed limit – becomes an act of worship when it is done *“for the Lord’s sake.”*

Peter was not naïve in calling us to submit ourselves to the governing authorities. (He wrote in the time of Nero’s reign – Nero would eventually have Peter put to death. He had seen the Lord betrayed by and handed over to corrupt authorities).

He knew that some governments can be unjust and cruel. But he also knew that behind and above all governing authority stood a greater authority – the authority of God. Therefore, even as we submit ourselves to those we may even strongly disagree with, we can do

**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. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed . . .*

**For witness**

**v. 15** – *“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people”*

The early church was often charged with being against the state and a rival to the authority of Rome.

Peter is very concerned about the witness of the church before a watching world.

See also **1 Peter 3:13-14, 17**

### **Application Questions:**

Are we mindful of our witness when we pay our taxes, go to the voting booth, drive in traffic, share our political opinion?

How can “for the Lord’s sake” turn the mundane into an act of worship?

## **III. THE HEART OF SUBMISSION**

***V.16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.***

“A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*

This helps us see why Peter addressed the issue of submission to governing authorities in the first place. The temptation that faced the early church is the temptation that faces us too. We can misunderstand our role in the world and our relationship with human institutions.

***1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.***

There is a tension here that we must get right – freedom & submission

How does our identity in Christ inform the way we live in the world? Specifically, how do we relate to governing authorities if we are called to live as “sojourners and exiles”? Does the fact that we now belong to God and comprise a new race, priesthood, and nation – through Jesus Christ – set us free from the obligation to submit ourselves to human government? Should we circle the wagons and withdraw ourselves from the whole political sphere of life?

We have been transferred from one kingdom to another. We live out our lives as Canadian citizens always mindful of our true and everlasting citizenship in heaven.

We honor the Emperor – we do not love him as a brother in the Lord or fear him as God!

As those who have been set free through the gospel, we engage the world in a new way. We engage in the democratic process – we inform ourselves on the issues, we consider the positions and policies of political candidates and parties, we vote, we write letters to the editor, we pay taxes, we fill out census forms, etc. – but we hold it all loosely.

We submit ourselves to the whole process “for the Lord’s sake.” We do not look to the process to bring in the kingdom of God or ultimately deliver us from evil.

Government is a means under God’s authority for restraining evil. Only the Cross of Christ can overthrow evil altogether. We cannot disregard the command to submit ourselves to government. At the same time, we cannot look to government to accomplish what only the Gospel can do.

Where do we get a heart to submit like this? How do we overcome our cynicism towards politicians and the political process and instead embrace the call to submit with a joyful heart that sees and embraces God’s good purposes through it all?

We look to Jesus – the Kind of all and over all who willingly subjected Himself to the very authorities He had created and put in place.

***John 19:10-11 So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.***

Christ was completely free, yet He laid aside His freedom and submitted Himself to the authorities His Father had established. At the hands of

**1 Peter 3:21-25** anchors this whole section on submission!

***21For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 24He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 25For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.***

Our active and willing submission is an act of Christlike obedience. We follow the one established His eternal reign through death on a Cross. His hands did not pick up a sword to establish His Kingdom, but were stretched out to be pierced through by nails. He did not take up a spear but received the thrust of a spear in his side. He did not come to bring judgment on those who do evil, but to bear it . . . in our place!