

Freedom to Submit, Freedom from the Power of Sin, Freedom to Serve

1 Peter 2:13-16

In the previous verses, the Apostle reminded the Christians converts who they were – people of God having received His mercy. As a result of their new identity, they were to abstain from worldly behaviors and pay attention to their pursuit of excellence, even when slandered. The result – all glory to God. Peter now goes on to explain that through excellent behavior, God is honored. The culture surrounding the Christians at that time was engulfed in paganism and idolatry. The government was corrupt, much like we see today. However, the principle of submitting to the authority God has put in place remains.

1 Peter 2:13-16 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. [Act] as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but [use it] as bondslaves of God.

We are free to submit to Authorities. Consider – without Christ we are slaves to sin, we are incapable of choosing righteousness. Without Christ, the most important person in your life is self. There are individuals who do not have a relationship with Christ who are helpful, considerate, and generous, so it may be difficult to imagine that 'self' is involved – but consider, who receives acknowledgement and praise for their good deeds?

Verse 13 begins with the word 'Submit'. Submission is a choice. The previous verse says we are to keep our behavior excellent and one way to do this is to follow authority. Not because we always agree, not because we cannot think for ourselves, but because **we are free to choose to obey God's commands**. Submission without choice is called force; force causes rebellion and God does not force us to follow Him. Instead, we act in obedience because we love Him. So we can choose to submit, even if we think our authorities are not honest, even if we think our 'rights' are being stepped on, because we are not under the control of sin and selfishness.

This concept is applicable in many areas. The overriding concern at this time is Covid. So we will address the 'elephant' in the room – not based on opinion but based on the truth in God's word. We find ourselves still in the midst of a pandemic. If you want to begin a lively and probable controversial discussion, all you need to do is mention the word Covid. We all have opinions regarding masks, vaccines, gathering, distancing, and on and on. In fact, we all have thoughts and opinions regarding most everything. But in all cases, including this,

Opinion does not matter – obedience to truth does.

Look at the word 'submit' in our text. It comes from the Greek word *hupotasso* meaning to subordinate, to obey, to be under, to subdue, to make subject to, to submit self unto.

Our English definition of submission says it is **surrendering power to another, the feeling of patient, submissive humbleness, compliance**. To submit to someone

is an act of yielding to another's opinion, it is accepting another's decision, it is a choice we make. There is a difference between accepting an opinion and agreeing with an opinion.

Accepting is choosing to tolerate without protest; agreement is the harmony of opinions. You can choose to tolerate without protest because you choose to obey and follow Christ.

Look closely at the word following submit in our text – it says, "**Submit yourselves**". It does not say, 'make sure others are submitting'. We are to pay attention to our own actions much more than the actions of others. Personally asking ourselves if we are doing what God would have us do, **backing up our behavior with the truth of scripture**, is what we are to be concerned about.

We all make decisions, but what are they based upon? What we have heard, what we think, or Truth?

We are to submit ourselves *for the Lord's sake*. It is not about you or me. It is about God! God is supreme in authority, He controls all things, He is our master. Therefore, we willingly follow His commands in response to His deity. We are commanded to submit **to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.**

The Pharisees tried to trap Jesus when questioning His authority over government.

Matthew 22:17-21 "Tell us therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the coin [used] for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius. And He *said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They *said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He *said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."

Unfortunately, it is easy to recognize failure and corruption in our government. However, this does not mean God has lost control or is unaware of events or has given up. He is using all things for His greater purpose of building His kingdom. Concerns you may have heard regarding the current crisis – the government is lying to us, the vaccine will change our DNA, it will cause sterility, we don't even know if the vaccine works, Covid isn't real, those who are wearing a mask are fearful of death, etc., etc. The questions I would ask you to consider are, 'Who is more powerful, Who is in control, Who knows all things, Who has a perfect plan'? When did our government and when did man and his intelligence become greater than God? We should not fear death, Covid, or government – we should fear acting in disobedience to God.

God has given man the freedom to choose, however He has not given man power over His Supreme authority.

Romans 13:1-2 Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. **For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.** Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

Ultimately, who do we trust? If our trust is in God's perfect plan and His power over all creation, we can follow His commands without question. We do not need to understand in order to obey. God has given man governing authorities. Even heads of government who do not submit to God are under His hand. God can work through all things and all people, even those who deny Him.

God does not need us to run His world, instead He has purposed us to share His truth.

Titus 3:1-2 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

Consider how God has worked in your life in the past. Looking back at His faithfulness, you should be able to see His hand directing your path in ways you would have never imagined. Often, the most difficult situations render the sweetest blessings. Throughout all, God is working, just as He has in the past, He will continue His work today and in the future.

Each one of us is individually responsible to obey the governing authorities set before us, "not because man invented it, but because it is proper for men" (1599 Geneva Bible Notes). Government is set for order – to punish those who cause trouble and to protect those who are upright citizens. There will always be imperfections and even corruption in leadership. But we do not want to be the cause of impeding the efforts of authority unless they are directly asking us to deny Christ and sin against Him. Read the next verse of our text:

1Peter 2:15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

We are free to submit because we are free from the power of sin. Believers can choose righteousness – it is God's will for us. Christ's death and resurrection has freed us from the control of sin. This means your life should look different than the world. People may act negatively towards you or even slander you, but upon looking closely at your life, there should be no basis for their accusations. The Bible says they are foolish, having no saving knowledge of God.

Titus 2:7-8 in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, [with] purity in doctrine, dignified, sound [in] speech which is beyond reproach, in order that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

1Peter 2:12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe [them,] glorify God in the day of visitation.

Consider the following questions –

Are you acting uprightly and obediently at all times?

Do you give others a reason to accuse you of wrongdoing?

In the early Christian church, those who testified of Christ were targets of false accusations against the authority. It was imperative that if put to trial, the charges would

not stand. Integrity and a life of strict adherence and support of the government was the best way to silence foolish charges. In this way God is honored and the opportunity for continuing to witness through words and actions remains.

Say you were called to evangelize in a foreign country where customs were unusual. You may not agree with dressing a certain way or eating a certain food. You may think some rituals were unnecessary and foolish. However, unless it was an offense to God, you would adhere to the culture in order to secure your audience to hear the truth of the Gospel. You would seek to live in a manner pleasing to those around you in order to build opportunities for speaking about Jesus.

It is possible that for those who have never read the Bible, their first introduction to Christianity may be your lifestyle. This is a sobering truth and responsibility for those who follow Christ. It is imperative to live in a manner which honors Him.

Right where you have been placed is where you belong. And there is a mission field outside your front door, perhaps even within your own home. Rather than get caught up in the restrictions placed on man by government, or become obsessed with exercising your 'rights', you can choose to focus on the gift of your salvation and the importance of sharing that gift with those around you.

"In every settled state, and under every form of political government, where the laws are not in opposition to the laws of God, it may be very soundly and rationally said: ***"Genuine Christians have nothing to do with the laws but to obey them."*** ***Society and civil security are in a most dangerous state when the people take it into their heads that they have a right to remodel and change the laws"***, Adam Clarke's Commentary.

Why obedience to authority? – Because God wills it and commands it. Deciding whether to act in accordance with obedience to authorities is based upon the Truth we find in God's inerrant word. It is not based upon anything man says or thinks or what we would rather do or not do. It is not based upon 'what ifs' or unknowns but is based upon trust in an all-knowing God who perfectly protects His children according to His will for His purpose and His glory. ***So if God wills us to be obedient to the laws set before us, will He not protect us also? There is no fear in following God's commands.***

Will circumstances always turn out the way we expect? Mostly, no. We are unable to fathom the ways of God. This is where faith must compel us to obey.

After Peter and John healed a lame man, they preached the gospel in the temple. Those in charge were upset because they were proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. They were put in jail and questioned what power they had to speak of Jesus. Peter answered with a testimony of the Gospel. They were then ordered to stop speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus.

Acts 4:19-20 "But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard."

His focus was on the gospel; his loyalty was to God's commands. The scenario continues as Peter and the apostles teach in Jesus' name and were again questioned by those in authority.

Acts 5:27-29 And when they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered and said, "We must obey God rather than men.

When authority demands obedience to laws which are *contrary* to the commands of God (such as denying Him), we obey God rather than men. However, when there is no offense to God's commands, we are to follow the authority given us through government – whether we like it or not and whether we agree or not. For instance, I do not like paying the exorbitant amount of taxes our government requests. But it is required and hedging around my responsibility would impede my witness of Truth. We could all question the value of many government policies. Yet, we have a duty to follow those in charge – because it honors God.

If our allegiance is to God, then how do we determine our obligation to earthly leadership?

Albert Barnes *New Testament Commentary* states, "When the laws interfered with the rights of conscience; when they commanded the worship of idols, or any moral wrong, then it was their duty to refuse submission. Yet, in what cases this was to be done, where the line was to be drawn, was a question of deep importance, and one which was not easily settled. It is quite probable, however, that the main danger was, that the early Christians would *err in refusing* submission, even when it was proper, rather than in undue conformity to idolatrous rites and ceremonies". "The *principles* on which Christians should act are settled in this chapter. *Be subject*. Submit. The word denotes that kind of submission which soldiers render to their officers. It implies subordination; a willingness to occupy our proper place, to yield to the authority of those over us ... The general principle will be seen to be, that we are to obey in all things which are not contrary to the law of God".

If you trust that God is Supreme and in control of all things, then you agree that God has appointed the leaders in our government and things are progressing exactly as planned. In response, we exercise our freedom to submit to the rules set before us and honor God by following those He has allowed to be in charge.

Daniel 2:21 "And it is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men, and knowledge to men of understanding.

"The truth is, the substance of the power of every magistrate is the ordinance of God", Bp. Sanderson.

Read this quote regarding submission, "Its use in the New Testament, then, *as far as human relationships in the redeemed community are concerned* yields the idea of humble, informed submission to another in the light of God's will and redemptive work. That kind of *submission* is to happen in all relationships in life", *bible.org*

The bottom line – we submit ourselves to the governing authorities appointed over us out of obedience to God who has set them in place. This brings honor to God. Read *Matthew Henry's Commentary* on this subject, "For the Lord's sake, who had ordained magistracy for the good of mankind, who has required obedience and submission (Romans 13), and whose honour is concerned in the dutiful behavior of subjects to their sovereigns".

1Peter 2:16 [Act] as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but [use it] as bondslaves of God.

The freedom we have in Christ does not mean we are free from the duty or subjection we have to governing authorities – which has been set in place by God. Christianity is not an excuse to neglect following the laws of our government. We are servants of God, acting in accordance with His commands. We obey human law because it is God's will for us.

"True religion is always the friend of order, as well as of liberty. The gospel is no doctrine of anarchy, and the Christian is no formentor of strife. Civil government is necessary for the well-being of mankind, and those who delight in the law of the Lord are among the last to wish to see its power weakened, or its executive despised. We had sooner suffer wrong, than see our country the prey of lawless mobs", *Spurgeon Devotional Commentary*.

1Corinthians 7:22 For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave.

Romans 6:18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Galatians 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only [do] not [turn] your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Can we be free yet still live under the constraints of governing authorities who do not follow God?

John 8:31-36 Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, [then] you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." They answered Him, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You shall become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. "And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. "If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.

"As free; he prevents an objection; they might pretend they were a free people, as Jews, and therefore were not to obey strangers; and made free by Christ. He answers: That they were free indeed, but it was from sin, and not from righteousness, not from obedience to God's law, which requires subjection to magistrates, for they were still the servants of God", *Matthew Poole's Commentary*.

We have complete freedom in Christ. **When we are free from seeking self and free from the bondage of sin, then we are free to serve God whole heartedly with our lives.** We are blessed to live in a country whose government allows the practice of

our faith. But we are not to abuse our freedom. We are not free to use 'religion' as a right to stand against those in authority to support what we think is best.

1. We are to submit to authority for the Lord's sake.

It is commanded. Jesus' example was to submit to governing authority. When we submit, we bring glory to God. It is His will for us to submit.

2. We have freedom in Christ.

Through Him we are no longer slaves of sin. We are free to choose righteousness; free to follow God's commands in obedience and submission which brings glory to His name. We are free to live our lives serving God.

"Believers are the freest of men, but they know the difference between liberty and license. As servants of the Lord, they submit for peace sake to man's laws, because their Great Lawgiver so commands", *Spurgeon Devotional Commentary*.

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.