

FIRST PETER 2:13-18 "Submit To Earthly Authorities, Even If It's Not Convenient"

Peter has reached the point in this letter where he now wants these Christians to understand that the love they've been given in Christ should constrain their hearts to trust the Lord and know that even in the midst of trials they are to make themselves available to be used by God for His glory.

And part of that practical outworking of the Spirit of God in their lives has to do with allowing the world to see them in a way that demonstrates that they do belong to God. And that's where we ended last week when Peter said in 1Pe 2:12 "Live such good lives among the pagans (Gentiles) that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

But how is that done? And how is the world able to see us in that light? Peter brings it home when he explains that walking in the Spirit is walking in the real world in the power and love which God supplies.

All of life is meant to be used to show how God is the One who gives eternal life in Christ and that this eternal life is to manifest itself in this present world.

1Pe 2:13 "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,
14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.
15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men."

Here we have an overview of what God's will is for you and me in one arena of life. And in this overview we have the reason for such submission. Keep in mind that God has called us out of the darkness of sin, into His marvelous light, so that we may shine for Him.

In a sense He has placed us in a glass showcase to allow the world to see us and to be drawn towards the light of Christ through us. This happens as we live as children of light, not as children of the darkness from which we've been called.

And so God has seen fit to give us a new life, a new nature in Christ, and then He has placed us right smack in the middle of this world to bear witness to this life with our lives.

But you see it's not as though God creates a new environment for us to work in. He keeps us in the same environment with a promise of a new home with Him in the future.

Our present environment which we are to effect for Him starts with where we live. "1Pe 2:13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men..."

Peter is talking about the country in which you find yourself. But with every community, whether large or small, there you will find some form of organization to protect that community.

And Peter says, you must submit to that authority. Concerning this idea of submitting, Dr. Hiebert in his commentary on Peter says, "It is not a derogatory concept, demanding forced submission, but rather a voluntary acceptance of a position of obedience to a superior authority. It is not the cringing obedience of spineless weaklings, but the free acceptance of the duty of submission."

The duty has been given to us from God Himself. Jesus clearly tells us to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars." And the reason He can say that is because God is the One who empowers Caesar for the work of keeping an orderly society in which all Christians are a part.

You might remember the conversation Pilate had with Jesus regarding authority of the state.

Joh 19:7-11 "The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." 8 When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, 9 and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. 10 "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" 11 Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

All authority comes from God. That doesn't mean that all authority is used properly. But God has sanctioned authority, even among unbelievers, and as Christians we are to submit to human institutions even if unbelievers are the ones running the show.

Remember that when Peter wrote this letter the Roman government was in control and the one at the helm was Nero. Nero would be the one to put both Peter and Paul to death. Nero would be the one to burn Rome and blame it on the Christians and then persecute believers.

Nero had done none of this at the writing of this letter, but everyone in the Roman world knew that Nero was the one responsible for such heinous acts, and yet Peter says submit for Lord's sake.

We must keep in mind however, that submission to the state does not mean that we obey to the point of disobeying God. This same Peter who says to submit to governing authorities is the same Peter who we read of in Act 5:27-29 "Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 28 "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." 29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "**We must obey God rather than men!**"

Notice that when Peter says to submit to governing authorities he doesn't limit it to just the highest in command, but he includes all who have any authority over us.

1Pe 2:13-15 "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. 15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men."

In verse 14 we see one of the major reasons of governing authorities and it includes punishing those who do wrong as well as commending those who do right.

Government is supposed to deter wrong-doing. And the implication here is that Christians should not find themselves on the wrong end of the law through their disobedience to it.

And so submission to governing authorities would carry with it the idea that we should obey the law, but there's more to submitting to such authorities than just from a negative stand-point. Submitting would also include lawful participation in the system.

In Peter's day such participation in government was difficult for the common man, but it didn't preclude the common man from getting involved. The common man could participate on a local level in some cases, particularly in his own village or community.

For us today the implication is that we are to submit to governing authorities which, for example, allows us to participate through voting, through lawful forms of dissension, through running for office and so on.

Again, the idea is that God wants us to take full advantage of our opportunities to represent Him in this sphere of our lives. And so Peter says in 1Pe 2:15 "For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men."

In other words, don't dishonor God as we represent Him before the world, because God has given authority to punish evil-doing even when Christians do it.

That's not the message God wants us to send to the world. We are free in Christ, so let's not be in bondage to anything that would drag His name through the mud.

Peter addresses this in 1Pe 2:16 "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.
17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king."

There's a tendency to think that just because we've been given freedom to know and love God that somehow that allows us to think we're free from our responsibilities to other men and the institutions they have authority in.

God has given us freedom, but it's freedom from sin and its effects. It would be sinful to discount governing authorities which God has placed over all men for their benefit.

And so, we don't want to use our freedom as an excuse or covering for sin. Sin is never the proper way to exercise freedom. Sin only promotes more sin and as such it keeps us in bondage.

Jesus speaks of this in Joh 8:32-34 "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone.

How can you say that we shall be set free?" 34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

Let's not put ourselves in bondage by entertaining sin. Rather, let's flee from it and honor God through obedience. We have been called to freedom, but this freedom is meant to allow us to be bond-servants of God.

I know that sounds like a contradiction in terms but it's the truth. All men have a master. All men are servants to someone whether they admit it or not. And ultimately that master is Satan or God.

We were created to serve. Originally man served and loved God in the Garden of Eden. They were Adam and Eve. But they chose a new master in choosing to disobey God and obey the evil lies of Satan.

God wants to restore us to the original intent of loving and serving Him rather than serving the enemy and our sinful selves. And that's what Peter has in mind when he says in 1Pe 2:16 "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God."

Peter then summarizes our responsibility to God by living out our responsibility to men in this world.

1Pe 2:17 "Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king."

A fourfold command. Show proper respect to everyone (or Honor all men). In other words treat people the way you want them to treat you. This doesn't mean we are to be naive about the way people may try to mistreat you, but we are called to overcome evil with good.

"Love the brotherhood of believers.." We are to love all people in this world, but our love for one another, for other believers, should shine and should alert the world that we have a special fellowship among each other and a unity that's found only in Christ; one that will last forever.

Paul brings this out in Gal 6:10 "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

You and I in Christ have a special relationship to one another. And as we love one another and serve one another the world will see that and Christ will be glorified.

"Fear God" is what Peter says in our text. We must understand that the God we serve is an awesome God. A God deserving our full love and allegiance to Him. And as we bow before Him the world will see this submission and love.

"Honor the king." A reminder that the authorities in this world are to be honored because God has placed them in such positions. Their honor comes from God and we must acknowledge that. What these people do with their authority they will be responsible before God.

If they are cruel, unjust, unscrupulous and devious we don't have to sit idly by in our form of government. But we must understand that God is just and when our ability to alter such governing authorities is hampered God is more than able to deliver us and give us those who would honor Him.

This is why we are instructed to pray for such leaders. And so Peter ends this section regarding our responsibility to government. But our responsibility doesn't end with that particular authority.

1Pe 2:18-21 "Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. 19 For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. 20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

Peter addresses slaves here because in those days slaves made up the majority of people in the work force. Now, when we think of slaves we usually associate it with our own sordid history of enslaving people, where they were taken by force from their own country and brought here against their will.

In first Century Roman rule slavery was not always practiced in quite that way. In fact the word slave used here in our text is an uncommon word. The word *doulos* in the Greek is the word usually used, but here it can be translated household servants.

Dr. Grudem in his commentary on Peter notes that slavery in 19th Century America was worse than the kind of slavery referred to by Peter when addressing slaves of the first century.

He says, "Although mistreatment of slaves could occur (in the first century), it must be remembered that 1st Century slaves were generally well treated and were not only unskilled laborers but often managers, overseers, and trained members of various professions including doctors, nurses, teachers, musicians and skilled artisans."

He goes on to say that "there was extensive Roman legislation regulating the treatment of slaves. They were normally paid for their services and could expect eventually to purchase their freedom."

This is not to suggest that being a slave was a great career move. These people in most cases didn't have a choice, most of whom were born into a life of slavery. In fact there are estimates that there were over 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman world in the first century.

You can see why Peter would address this particular group. The Church would have been comprised of many slaves. Though all of your needs, as a slave, may have been met, it was a life which was not easy primarily because of the way you were viewed by society.

William Barclay writes in his commentary: "Many slaves were loved and trusted members of the family; but one great inescapable fact dominated the whole situation. In Roman law a slave was not a person but a thing; and he had absolutely no legal rights whatsoever. For that reason there could be no such thing as justice where a slave was concerned."

Quoting from Barclay: "Aristotle, (who is considered one of the great Greek thinkers and philosophers of the ancient world) wrote, "There can be no friendship nor justice towards inanimate things; indeed, not even towards a horse or an ox, nor yet towards a slave as a slave. For master and slave have nothing in common; a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate object."

This is how slaves were viewed. Grudem's definition of this word slave in our text gives the idea that the word in the Greek is stronger than servant but weaker than slave. And so what you end up with is a meaning which is a "semi-permanent employee without legal or economic freedom."

These are the people Peter addresses. But notice what Peter does. He doesn't encourage them to overthrow the system of slavery, but rather to glorify God in the midst of it.

1Pe 2:18 "Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh."

This is real life gang. Life is not always kind and Peter acknowledges this in the lives of these people, but it is not an excuse to dishonor God. To submit to and to respect the master could be a very hard thing to do especially for those whose masters who were harsh or unreasonable as the NAS has it.

The word harsh here in the Greek doesn't necessarily mean cruel in a physical way. The Greek word is *skolios*. It's where we get our English word scoliosis, which is associated with a curvature of the spine.

The idea here in our text is that some masters were crooked and in a metaphorical way it meant dishonest or morally evil. They were the type of people who didn't have any scruples when it came to interacting with their slaves.

They were the types who promised a bonus for a slave if they accomplished a special task and yet they wouldn't think twice about going back on their word. If it were put it into modern vernacular we might hear Peter saying that you need to submit and respect those masters who treat you well and even those who act like jerks.

It doesn't mean that some slaves weren't physically abused but it's more than that and Peter is recognizing how this can be very frustrating for these slaves he's addressing.

And now that they're Christians God is expecting their lives to be a model for their owners so they can see what the Lord has done for them. And in the process Peter is encouraging them that, though their masters may not see them as people, God does and He loves them very much, but He wants to use them in their own little world for His glory.

And this is what God wants for you and me. Though you and I are citizens of this country with certain rights, the comparison might

be that in our own little world of employment we are called by God to represent Him in a way that models the love of Christ.

Sometimes life won't appear to be fair and sometimes you're going to run into people who are less than fair and anything but likeable. But what God wants us to realize is that even those people are made in His image and they need a Savior as well.

And there are times when even those in authority over us, whether in Government or in an employment environment, may claim to be Christians and yet are still quite unfair and unreasonable.

The temptation is to react in like manner. The flesh doesn't like being bossed around. The flesh doesn't like someone getting in your face and we don't appreciate someone being two-faced especially when they claim to be Christians.

But remember God has called us to holiness. And in that process of sanctification God is molding us in a way that is being fit for eternity and in the process He wants to use us to bring others the truth of His gospel in love.

That's where real life comes in, as it did with these slaves in the Roman Empire. God was not asking them to do anything they weren't able to accomplish. But as we always say, the only way we can accomplish His work, especially under adverse conditions, is to rely on His grace and strength.

Because His grace and strength are meant to work in the real world. The problem is we're usually too impatient to allow God to work in us the way He desires.

Our solution to unreasonable people is to give them a taste of their own medicine. Well, slaves in the first century didn't have that luxury and Peter knew that. But he knew that God is just and loving and aware of every problem that could come up in their lives.

But God's method of solving the problem is often calling us to be what the world isn't willing to be. His method is for us to come to Him as a Father and by faith give that problem to Him.

I've got a feeling that some of those slaves quickly found the O.T. verse and came to God on many occasions with it. It reads in Deu 32:35 "It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot

will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."

Even the disciples of Christ felt that the quickest and best way to get rid of the problem of godless people was to zap them out of existence.

On one occasion they were going through the Samaria and we read in Luk 9:52-56 "And he (Jesus) sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them, 56 and they went to another village."

We are people of life eternal given to us in Jesus Christ. And like the rest of the world, if the truth be known, we all deserve to be zapped. But we need the compassion of Jesus and we need to see people for what they are; sinners in need of a Savior who desires to give them life as He's given us.

This doesn't mean that God has called us to be "holy doormats". But He has called us to respond in a way that is not fleshly. We'll talk more of this problem of unfair people in the world next week as we see how God desires for us to deal with people, even people who are unreasonable.

When you're tempted this week to call fire down from heaven, stop for a moment and reconsider and then ask God to open their hearts instead and make them a brother and sister in Christ instead of a dead enemy.

Chances are, that's how someone prayed for you and me when we were lost and dead in our sins. Praise God He responded to those prayers and we now know what it is to call our God Father and Savior, because of the blood of His Son shed on our behalf and who rose victoriously from the grave defeating sin and death.