

“Living as Free”

1 Peter 2:13-25

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1 Peter 2:13-25 *Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. 17 Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. 18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. 19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. 20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. 21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*



I think we would all agree that from what we know of their situation, the original recipients of this letter were “in the thick of it.” Certainly it was not an easy time to stand up and be counted for Christ. And it was not an easy time to exercise faithfulness and holiness...but then, *I'm not sure there ever has been such a time.*

I can't help but feel that the council and direction they received from Peter was not what they wanted nor even what they expected. Maybe they were looking for a "call to arms" but received instead a call to commitment! Or maybe they wanted the opposite...the equivalent of a big pastoral hug, a sucker, and Band-Aids with little super hero pictures on them. If such was true, it would speak volumes as to what pastors and leaders can expect from *our* generation...an age of increasingly fragile emotions and delicate ego's.

Truly, the natural tendency today is to want to hear only gentle pleasing words, comforting conversation, and encouraging pats on the head. Sadly, it is often that very environment that we as Christian leaders are trying to operate in. If people don't leave a service “feeling encouraged” they're off to the next church down the street that tells them that they are swell people and Jesus is ok with how they are right now. I can't help but think about how Christ dealt with people, and how very far we are from that dynamic today in the greater church.

Whether they wanted to hear it or not, the believers had to “up their game.” Satan stepped up his attacks and so they would have to step up their defense...the prayer, the unity, the fellowship, and the church life. The alternative was *and is*, to simply “roll over” and surrender. Many of done it. Many more will.

Peter had already called upon these believers in verse 13 of chapter 1 to “pull themselves up by the bootstraps” and to get it together. If that wasn't enough of an offense, he now begins down a road of instruction that would be no doubt hard to swallow. It still is. The passage before is one of the most controversial of scripture. It can tend to make us bristle and maybe just “write it off” altogether. Maybe if Peter had just used different vernacular...you know, something easier on our “fragile emotions and delicate egos!”

Peter uses a word here that just runs contrary to every natural bone in our bodies and stands in direct conflict to the “red, white, and blue American spirit” that courses through our veins. The word is “**submit.**” Some folks would rather chew off their leg than submit. We usually are so far on the other side of this that the issue and reason doesn't even matter! If we are told to go left, we go right. If we are told to stay, we go. And don't you dare tell us we “can't.” Obviously, Peter's

instruction is not realistically being given to the Christian novice or the rookie. This direction...albeit just as true for *all* believers, realistically will only be stomached by the mature in Christ.

We tend to see that word "submit" as synonymous with "surrender," *humiliation and bondage*. Yet submission in simple terms involves not seeking one's own interests but rather assuming a voluntary commitment of service to others. If one studies Paul's exhortation for believers to "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" it becomes apparent from the context that submission is the fruit of one who is **filled with** and **controlled by** the Holy Spirit. We are only ruffled when we are protecting our **own** selves: OUR image, reputation, standing and social position. But the mature Christian has set himself or herself aside...died to self, and now **live** Christ and **to please** Christ.

For such a believer, he or she understands the sovereignty of God, and that God is never threatened or intimidated. Daniel 2:21 "... *He (God) changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings...*" Certainly we will not always understand why God allows some things to happen, and some people to rule and even some people to abuse. But as always, the "grown-up" believer knows such understanding is not necessary or even realistic. For God's ways are "beyond our finding out." Romans 11:33 NLT "*Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!*"

Some of us never 'get' this. We spend our lives looking for that "feel good faith." One that is consistently affirming, clearly understood and imminently uplifting. One that makes us feel all fuzzy and warm about ourselves. Yet I honestly must say that I know nothing of that Messiah. He is gentle and loving and so patient. But He is often also quite brief in his communication and quite straight in his style. He is not cruel, just *honest and straight* up. Some of us never knew discipline in our childhood or in our early adult years, so we can't imagine a loving God who would tell us "no," or call us to act in a way that is inconvenient, sacrificial, or humbling!

I do not want to in anyway minimize the pain and difficulty that these believers were going through. Things were rough by any measure! But all of us will deal with the issue at hand on some level. We all will have to answer that question: *do we want the truth or do we want to be handled with "kid gloves?"* The truth of our flesh is that we tend to avoid the hard stuff at any cost: an "out of sight, out of mind" scenario.

When it comes to this subject we need to realize that "self" and "pride" are the real issues and they are ironically the core issues which lay at the root of all our sin. I mean, we don't naturally want to submit to anyone, anywhere. Not to government, not to law, civil authority, instructors, employers, churches, or even God Himself! Our corporate rejection of the concept has brought us our culture of over-crowded prisons, politic wars, work place shootings, skyrocketing divorce rates, broken families, broken relationships, lousy churches, etc etc. The word "submit" is intimately related to the word translated "humility." When we reject this call, we stumble down a road of life chaos.

The call to submit is found four times in this letter: Citizens are to *submit* to the government (2:13). Slaves are to *submit* to their masters (2:18) (employee/employer relationship). Wives are to *submit* to their husbands (3:1). Younger believers are to *submit* to the elders (5:5). This scriptural issue ranks close to the top of biblical passages that many believers just flat out answer "no." Just flat out reject. No apologies and no excuses, just refusal. There are several of these passages that we just don't like at all, and in lieu of an obvious way out of them, we are forced to accept or reject them out-of-hand. This is one of those passages.

We even have extreme anti-government groups existing today that tie themselves to Christianity. Some of these folks are truthfully nothing more than terrorists. We may not count ourselves that extreme, but the crime is the same even if we only wear the label of "rebel." We need to remember the words of Christ before Pilate: "*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.*" (John 18:36)

But in a country and a time where believers lived under such overt persecution and much of the population was living as slaves, how could Peter in good conscious ask this of his readers? One of the obvious answers to that question...*even if we don't want to admit it*, is that we have on a vast scale built a faith dynamic that is very different than the one we find in scripture....the one which Jesus practiced and taught. Not just cultural nuances based on time and location, but just a flat out different animal than the scriptural version. So the bigger question must first be answered: Are we committed to live out the scriptural version of Christianity, or have we "re-invented" this thing to be more comfortable and compatible to our passions and emotions?

Paul too called *HIS* readers in Romans to adhere to these same principles: Romans 13:1-7 *"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor."*

Paul gave Titus similar instruction even considering that Crete was not a "good" place...
"Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed..." (Titus 3:1)

So we must acknowledge that this was not an isolated issue or a pet project for the apostle Peter. It seems with the plethora of call in scripture on this subject, that it is safe to assume that it is a bedrock issue of Christianity.

Firstly, let's relieve some of the concerns that are rolling around your head, by noting some obvious qualifiers in light of the totality of scripture. Please know that Scripture does not teach us to follow any law, call, direction, or order which would compromise our "Jesus first" living. Just because the world *allows* something, that does not mean we are necessarily being ordered to *participate*. We scripturally and morally stand against the horror of abortion which is legal in this country, but we are not commanded to abort our babies! We aren't forced to marry someone of the same sex, nor am I required to get high when I drive through Colorado. The greater government may not be overtly supportive of Christianity, but thus far no one is outlawing the gathering together of believers or our worship practices. When *that* day comes, the "gloves come off." For no such acquiescing is required or even requested in such matters, but seldom is that really our problem today in this country.

What Peter is seeking, and to a greater degree **all** of the scriptural directives, is two-fold: *One*, we are being called to live on this planet in a calm, quiet, and steadfast fashion. Paul called us in his first letter to the church in Thessalonica...chapter 4, *"...we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing."* (10-12). We are gathering the same motif via Peters earlier call upon us be just "sojourners" here in this world...just "visitors passing through." When I go to another country, I don't reject their laws and say "well, *I am an American! I don't have to follow your laws!*" Not unless I want their courts and correctional institutions to be part of my tour! But when we forget this fact and think that this *IS* my home and this *IS* my life, and further, that this is *MY* life, then I am going to have conflict whether I call myself Christian or not! But we that *are* children of God, are without excuse, for we are aware of another way and have been so empowered to live in it!

This issue that Peter is dealing with is far reaching for some of us, because we are actively rebelling in multiple areas of our lives and our world, and such simply proves that we are still attempting to control our lives which negates the very core principle of Christianity. Some years ago there was this guy who came around some that saw himself as a Christian, but he was living with this woman who he called his "wife." However such a title was in his head only for he rejected the government's participation in the marriage process and standing. You know...things like a marriage license and the governmental view of his "marital status" for taxation, etc. So he refused to go along and had decided that they were "married before God" even though the US government failed to see it that way. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that the law of Moses and the very words of Christ gave instruction concerning the practice and aspects of divorce. If there was no issues of legal marital status, how could there be legal divorce?

My presentation of this caveat left this guy speechless. I would love to tell you he repented and got married, but sadly he simply moved on to some other unwitting church. I did see him some years after with a different woman on his arm, which ultimately tells us the truth of the whole story! The rejection of the scriptural call to adherence to government and law is not righteous on any level. It is just rebellion. A "lack of submission." I'm not here telling you that this is always an easy things to swallow. I'm just telling you that this is what God wants of us.

Besides the "quiet and peaceable life" aspect, Peter adds another reason behind this edict. He tells us that our submission is given also for the benefit of others. I submit, so as to bless another...often a third party. We obey the laws of the land because whether we agree with them or not, they are generally made for the benefit of not just me, but others too. It works

the same in the church by the way. Lots of folks rebel against the rules and guidelines here too. When my life is just about me, it will not be long before I find myself in trouble most everywhere I go.

The great pastor/author/teach Bonhoeffer was a perfect example of this issue. He was a passive individual and taught the things that I am teaching today. But the German government under Hitler was persecuting him, his church and seminary to such a degree that in the end he became entangled in a plot to assassinate Hitler and was arrested. He was executed just days before Germany fell to the Allied troops and he would have been free to return to his work unencumbered as before. If he had just waited on the Lord, it would have been taken care of. But he didn't and he lost the fight.

The example of Christ was a very different story! Jesus was all about *everyone else*! That's not hard to see for certainly the crucifixion didn't bring *Him* any direct personal and fleshly benefit and pleasure! He *allowed* himself to be beaten and killed so that all those who would come after Him would have the opportunity to stand before their Creator and live eternally with Him. Yet this is the age of *my* rights, and *my* feelings, and *my* desires. The cry of "what about *ME*?" Seldom do we stop and realize that such is the work of Satan in our world and negates the very foundation of Christianity...

When our faith becomes about these things...*my* feelings, *my* rights, and *my* plans, it then fails to be about submission, sacrifice, obedience and other-centered living that is the outpouring of the Spirit's presence and influence in my life. We are called to submit not because the government is so righteous, or our boss is so great or because our church leaders are so perfect...because they are not. But because of the "Lord's sake." (verse 13). We do it because He wants it and it benefits the greater kingdom of God. When it is all about us we end up spending our time as wounded puppies in "healing ministries" talking about how our feathers got ruffled or leaving google reviews about how that church, that guy, or that organization did me wrong. Sadly, this is why we as a church must actually have a plan to deal with church security against violent action.

One more aspect concerning this issue. When we reject this call, we are in essence saying that God is unable to handle things. That He is incapable of altering the field of play if He so desires. It shows that we do not understand the God we say we follow and worship; the God who created everything and holds my next breathe in His hands. He gives life, power, and status to whom he wishes, and takes it away just as easily. He is not helpless, inept, or aloof. As with Job...He asks "*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.*" (Job 38:4)

That's called "sovereignty." It means "He's *the man*." He made everything, He controls everything, He sees everything, He knows everything, He has everything in His control. And He never ever needs our help! But how often we think He needs us to get in there and fix things for Him? Our submission...*not our surrender*, to the "powers that be" is an acknowledgement of that sovereignty. It is saying..."I may not want this, or even like this, but you are God and I am not, and I trust you." And we are forever reminded of the fact that it is "*impossible to please God without faith.*"(Heb 11:6)

The aim of our life is not to "get mine" but rather to **live to God**. This is true freedom and the only one that is real. That means that we live with God in view, God in control, and under His authority. He is to 'be our life.' (Col 3:4) This passage places all of our social and political life into relation to God. The Bible is not a book about how to get along in the world. Rather it is God's instruction about how to **live to (for) God**. "*...Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Php 3:20) We must live as obedient and submissive citizens in this world so that God will be honored and glorified. Rebellious conduct by a Christian only brings dishonor on Christ, and says we do not trust Him.

Sometimes...in light of disagreeable issues, we may only be able to say "*I submit to you, I honor you -- but not for your sake. I honor you for God's sake. I honor you because God owns you and rules over you and has sovereignly raised you up for a limited season and given you the leadership that you have. For his sake and for his glory and because of his rightful authority over you I honor you.*" If Peter could command the Christian community to honor the king and the governor, knowing the wickedness of Nero, then how much more must we honor our leaders even though they may endorse and promote acts which we might regard as wrong?

We can say we love Him, and that even we are redeemed by Him. But for what? For your peace and joy, your salvation, eternal redemption before God our Creator? Yes certainly. But is that it? Is that as far as it goes? Did your salvation have anything to do with *HIM*? Ultimately you must ask yourself if God is indeed in charge, and if you trust Him to deal righteously by you. We are indeed free, and in truth more free than any of this world. In order to glorify God we need to abstain from needlessly giving those who are not of the family of God a reason and opportunity to speak against our Lord and Creator.