

### 1 Peter 2:13-20

*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,<sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him for punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.<sup>15</sup> For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.<sup>16</sup> Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.<sup>17</sup> Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.<sup>18</sup> Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.<sup>19</sup> For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.<sup>20</sup> For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.*

Back in 1 Peter 1:16, we were told that we should be holy because God is holy. This indicates a certain way that we should act as God's children. So far, Peter has been giving some instruction as to how we should behave. We finished the last session with talking about how we should behave, and we continue that conversation in this session. For this session, we will be looking at how we should behave and interact with those who are in a position of authority. Let's dig in and see what Peter has to say.

Right out of the gate, we are given the command to submit ourselves to every human institution. That could be the king or the governor as the passage lists, but in today's context that could mean your boss, local government entities, your teachers, and the list could go on forever. This language is very similar to what Paul says in Romans 13

*Romans 13:1-6 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.<sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;<sup>4</sup> for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.<sup>5</sup> Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.<sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.*

Clearly, we are supposed to submit to those in positions of authority, government or otherwise. We also learn that those in power are there because God put them there. The leaders in our lives are there because God wanted them there. We now know why leaders are in the roles that they occupy and that we should obey them, but let's dig a little deeper and ask a child's favorite question. Why? Why should we obey those in authority over us? Well the answers to that are in the passages from both 1 Peter and Romans.

First, we should submit ourselves to authority simply because God said so. As obedient children, we should do the things that God has commanded us to do through the scriptures. Romans 13 tells us that to not submit is to oppose God. The last place we want to find ourselves is in opposition to God. Second, it is for the sake of the Lord that we submit to authority. Last session, we talked about how our lives can be a witness to God if we lived properly. This is the same concept here. If we submit to authority it reflects upon the character of Jesus. Third, if we act right, there is no punishment (for the most part, but we'll get into that next). On the other side of that same coin is this; if we behave properly we are to be praised. Fourth, if we act right it will silence to ignorance of fool. What if those in authority put laws into place that contradict or oppose the law of God and what God has commanded of His people? Are we to submit to those rules as well?

The answer to that is a big, fat NO! God's law supersedes man's law. Look at the case of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. King Nebuchadnezzar put laws into place that contradicted the laws of God and they disobeyed. Laws were put into place in the time of the disciples that said they could no longer preach in the name of Jesus and share the gospel message. That went against God's commands so they disobeyed. Romans 13 tells us that God established each person in their place of authority. He is the lead authority in all matters. When it comes to doing right, most of the time there will be no punishment. However, there may come a day that doing what God has commanded will come with a punishment from man. As obedient children, we are to stay faithful, act as God has commanded and let Him handle the details.

Another aspect of submission to authority we must talk about is when we are treated unreasonably or poorly by those in charge. This brings to mind a few bosses I worked for who never quite understood the idea of treating their employees well. What are we supposed to do then? Peter makes it very clear. We are supposed to continue to behave properly and push through it. He tells us that there is nothing to be said of us if we sin and suffer for it. However, if we suffer for doing what is right we find favor with God. It is like I have said before. It is easy to act right when things are good. It is when life has us down and things don't seem to be going our way that our character is truly tested. If we can resist the temptation to fall into fleshly desires during times of hardship or unjust treatment for those in authority, we will find favor with God. We are a good witness for God in moments like that.

I want to address one last thing, and that is freedom. Before we discuss this, let's revisit verse 16 from today's passage.

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

"Act as free men". This short statement tells us a couple things. We have freedom. Through the gospel we have freedom from the eternal consequences of sin. In the United States we have certain freedoms, rights and liberties. Peter does not deny this fact but embraces it. He also encourages us to act in that freedom. For what purpose or to what end are we exercising our freedom? "Do not use your freedom as a covering for evil". This has great similarity to the words of Paul in his letter to the Galatians.

*Galatians 5:13-14 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. <sup>14</sup>For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

Our freedom is not a "get out of jail free" card. It is not something that allows us to act in any way that we please. In fact, our freedom lies in serving God and living by His commands. We are bondslaves or bond-servants of God. This means that we are forever in His service. How can we best serve God with our freedom? We accomplish this by loving our neighbor as ourselves. This is the kind of love that forgets about our own "rights", "freedoms" and desires. I give you Paul as an example.

*1 Corinthians 9:19-23 For I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. <sup>20</sup>To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; <sup>21</sup>to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. <sup>22</sup>To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. <sup>23</sup>I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.*

Paul was a Roman citizen who had no obligation to follow the Law. Yet, he gave up his freedom to eat things like pork and to do certain things so that he might show followers of the Law the love of God. Paul, while following the law of God and Christ, gave up certain rights and freedoms to reach the people without law with the gospel. In each of the scenarios from above, Paul gave up something he had the right to and the freedom to do. Our freedoms are not something for us to hold with a tight grip, but rather we are to use them to serve God in any way that does not contradict His commands for His people.

In all of these things, our proper use of freedom, our submission to authority, suffering and enduring unreasonable treatment, we must remember one very important thing. None of this is about US. It is ALL about God and serving Him.

#### Application Questions

- Have you been submitting to the authorities God has placed in your life?
- If you are choosing to act in civil disobedience, does what you are standing for really contradict the law of God and the law of Christ?
- If you are being treated unreasonably by an authority figure, are you choosing to act out and do your own thing? Or have you chosen to remain obedient to patiently endure your suffering?
- Do you have a love for you neighbor that surpasses the love you have for yourself?
- In what ways can you love your neighbor better?
- What areas can you use your freedoms to serve God better?
- Has God placed before you an opportunity to give up a freedom as Paul did to win others to Christ? Are you willing to do what He asks?

#### Final Remark

We always have a choice in life. Serve God or serve ourselves. We must serve God as the ultimate authority. Beyond that, we must submit to the authorities He has put in place. Do not be afraid of speaking up for what is right, but also be careful not to abuse the freedom that has been given to you. If you are experiencing suffering or unreasonable treatment, pray, cling to God and endure. Often when things get hectic, life is hard or we are presented with a difficult situation we turn to our own understanding and act out of that. The difficult times are a true test of your character. We must respond to all situations as God has asked us to. God will see you through so long as you keep your focus on Him. Let us remain obedient children and let God handle all of the details.