

# Studies in 1 Peter-08 1 Peter 2:13-20

by Dwight Pentecost

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*The believer is to submit to civil authority because it is the Lord's arrangement and by submitting, you recognize that government is a divine institution.*

**Duration:** 38:47

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 2:13

**Topics:** "Civil Obedience", "Gospel Authority"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that the solution to the problems in our nation is not more police or higher salaries for law enforcement agencies, but rather the preaching of the gospel. He argues that until people's hearts are brought into subjection to the gospel and the authority of Jesus Christ, they will continue to find ways to rebel against any law enforcement agency. The preacher urges the audience to take the message of Christ's sacrifice to others and encourage them to submit to His authority. He also highlights the importance of being in submission to the government and using our freedom responsibly, as outlined in 1 Peter 2:13-20.

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## Transcript

Scripture reading this morning is from 1 Peter, chapter 2, beginning at verse 13. 1 Peter, chapter 2, beginning at verse 13. We will be reading down through verse 20.

Beginning at verse 13, then, Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, or as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God that with well-doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, as free and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy if a man for conscience toward God endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it if, when you are buffeted or punished for your faults, you shall take it patiently? But if, when you do well and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." The Apostle Peter is writing to a group of believers who are enduring intense persecution because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

These, born as he had been into the nation Israel according to the flesh, were undergoing persecution, first of all, from religious leaders. For the established religion in Israel counted Jesus Christ a

blasphemous imposter, and they called themselves the Sons of Moses and the Servants of Moses, counted all who deemed Jesus Christ the Son of God as heretics from the Mosaic faith. The persecution also came from the political leaders, for the group of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ held to the truth that Christ was coming to this earth a second time to rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and to subject all political powers to his own authority.

The political rulers deemed the believers guilty of treason. So, no matter where the believers turned, they found persecution, and Peter is writing to strengthen and encourage the believers in their persecution. That which Peter writes is not theoretical with him, for Peter had felt the persecution from both the political and the religious powers of his day.

You have but to turn back to the Acts, for instance in chapter 4, and find that Peter had been brought into prison because of the accusations leveled against him by the Sanhedrin. There in chapter 4, they were commanded, verse 18, not to speak at all nor to teach in the name of Jesus, but Peter and John answered and said unto him, whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God judge ye, for ye cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them because of the people, for all men glorified God for that which was done.

This persecution was persecution at the hands of the Sanhedrin, the established religious leaders of Peter's day, and there Peter underwent the threats of the leaders as they sought to stifle his testimony for Jesus Christ. When we come into chapter 5, we find that the persecution has gone beyond the religious realm and has moved into the political realm, for Peter is imprisoned in his because of his testimony for faith in Christ. This imprisonment was evidently an imprisonment by the Roman authorities, or otherwise Peter would not have found himself in the common prison.

There we find in verse 40 that they called the apostles and had beaten them. They commended that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go, and they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. The apostle Peter knew what it was to endure persecution, and in his persecutions he had suffered physically the scourging and the beating of those in authority over him, so that when Peter writes to those persecuted believers in his first epistle, he is writing out of his own experiences, not out of theoretical or philosophical speculation, but he writes out of that which he had experienced.

As we come into chapter 2 and verse 13, the portion that will occupy our attention this morning, Peter is dealing with a very practical problem in facing this experience of suffering or of persecution. It was a problem of the relation of the persecuted one to the persecutors, or specifically, Peter is dealing with the problem of lawlessness. For there were those among the body of believers who felt that since they were being persecuted by the Roman authority, they had the right to rebel against civil authority, and that the persecution by the Romans gave the believers the right to become lawless, to rebel against the authority of Rome.

And that, in Peter's mind, raises the question of the relationship of the persecuted to the persecutor. It raises the question of the relationship of the believer to the civil authorities under which he lives, and if ever there were a case where man would seem to be justified in rebellion against authority, it would have been the case of Peter in the fourth and fifth chapters of the book of Acts, where he was unjustly thrown into prison because of his faith in Christ, was beaten in his imprisonment. That would seem to be

justifiable rebellion.

If there were a justifiable cause for rebellion, it would seem to be the experience of these to whom Peter is writing. For they have had to leave their home, their homeland, their employment, the society in which they had lived and moved because of their faith in Christ to escape political and civil persecution. And so Peter, because of the temptation that faced them, deals with this question of the relationship of the believer to the civil authorities under which he lives.

This is not a new thing. It is a theme on which we have had cause to comment frequently in these last months, but a theme that, again, is brought to us as Peter commands us, "...submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." Peter, in these verses, gives several reasons why the believer is required by the word of God to submit to civil authority.

First of all, in verse 13, he is to submit for the Lord's sake, for the Lord's sake. And the first reason that Peter presents why the believer is to be in subjection to civil authority is because civil authorities are the Lord's appointee. It is the Lord who has sent kings as kings, governors as governors, local authorities as local authorities.

It is a part of God's design, and the believer needs to recognize God's plan in the administration of his kingdom. We find that civil government, as an institution, began back in the ninth chapter of the book of Genesis. After the flood, God instituted a new plan for the supervision of man.

God instituted human government and gave authority to human government. That authority came not by human arrangement, but came by divine appointment. To civil authority was given the responsibility of administering law and order, of maintaining rights, of rewarding those that do good, and punishing those who do evil.

It was a responsibility by divine arrangement of the human government to maintain law and order, to curb lawlessness and violence, and to control violent and lawless men so that those who were lawful could live in righteousness, and could live a righteous, godly life without interference or without danger. Now, this was a new institution, for before the flood, God had operated through the law of conscience, and from the time of the fall of Adam to the time of the flood, God had controlled man by the voice of God within man, that is, the voice of conscience. The apostle Paul, in Romans chapter 2 and verse 15, refers to conscience as the law of God that was written in every part.

But men could not control themselves. You see, conscience operated individually within the man, and my conscience did not operate for you nor yours for me. Conscience operated from within the individual to control the individual.

But because man was a sinner, he could not control himself. He recognized no authority outside of himself. The law of conscience was within him, but while conscience could convict of that which was wrong, it could not give the enablement to do that which was right, nor to curb that which was wrong.

And as we read human history from Genesis 3 down to Genesis 9, we find that while conscience testified to the fact that man was a sinner and was lawless and a rebel against man and against God, conscience could not curb that lawlessness, and society deteriorated and degenerated so that, in Genesis chapter 6

and verse 5, God testified that every thought of his heart was only evil continuous. Every thought of his heart was only evil continuous. Now, while conscience convicted, conscience did not restrain, and God had to step in in a divine judgment, and wipe sinners off the face of the earth.

And God began a new society with Noah and his wife, his sons and their wives, and God instituted a new control over the sinfulness of man. God instituted human government, and human government was designed to put a control upon the sinner. It was designed to curb the sinner in his sinfulness, the rebel in his rebellion, the lawless one in his lawlessness.

The human government had the responsibility of punishing the evildoer, and according to Genesis 9 and verse 6, the authority to punish included the death penalty. The government had the responsibility to provide the atmosphere in which righteousness could flourish, in which godliness could be practiced. Therefore, human government was to do two things.

It was to curb lawlessness and provide the atmosphere in which righteousness could flourish. Now, we find Peter tells us in verse 13 that we are to submit because of the Lord's faith. I believe Peter means by that we are to submit to every ordinance because this is the Lord's arrangement, and that when one submits to government he does so because he recognizes that government is a divine institution, and that men in submitting to government are submitting to the authority of God.

Now, Peter does not decide what kind of government we are to have so that we may submit to it. The word of God does not recognize one kind of government or approve one kind as over against another. The word of God approves any government, any form of government which does what government is designed to do, curb lawlessness and provide the atmosphere in which righteousness may flourish.

And when a government serves that fundamental objective of government, it is a government that fulfills the divine appointment, and any form of government which fails to perform that which God intended in a government is failing in its primary function for which it was instituted of God. These are facts that Peter had in mind when he told them that they were to submit, even in persecution, because of the Lord's faith. The second reason that Peter gives is in verse 14.

We have already anticipated this in what we had to say. We are to submit to every ordinance of man and to king or governors or local authorities because of the ministry entrusted to the rulers and the governors. Peter says they are sent by God for the punishment of evil doers and for the praise of them that do well.

Will you notice that this is Paul's concept of government? He writes in Romans chapter 13 and verse 4, says that the powers that be are the ministers of God to thee for good. If thou do that which is evil, be afraid for he beareth not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Twice in Romans 13, Paul calls the governors ministers of God.

They are not ministers of the gospel, they are not teachers, but they do have the responsibility of the ministry of curbing sin, lawlessness, and of providing the atmosphere in which righteousness may flourish. This was a divine ministry, and those who were appointed were called ministers of God. Peter and Paul have the same concept of the ministry entrusted to those who were rulers in authority over them.

Now, Paul says that these ministers of God, or the rulers, have a responsibility for maintaining order in the state, and if believers promote disorder because they must acknowledge God instead of acknowledging the king or the ruler, they expect the rulers to administer punishment. Paul nor Peter do not question the

right of Rome to punish. They counsel believers as to how they will endure the punishment, and Peter will go on to say in verse 19 and 20 that this is thankworthy if a man for conscience toward God endured grief, suffering wrongfully.

What glory is it if when ye be buffeted for your fault ye take it patiently? If when ye do well and suffer for it and ye take it patiently, this is acceptable to God. We find in the second reason, then, that believers are to submit is because of the responsibilities resting upon these appointees to punish evildoers and to reward them that do well. The third reason that they are to submit is given in verse 15.

They are to submit for testimony's sake. So is the will of God that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. The foolish men, in verse 15, refers to rulers who step out of the rightful bounds of the authority entrusted to them, and move into the sphere that belongs to God Himself.

There are certain bounds as to what government was appointed to do, and from the scripture we would gain that the bounds on government are restricted to the punishment of evildoers, and the rewarding of those that do good, the providing of an atmosphere in which righteousness may flourish. Those were the divine bounds of government, and when government gets outside of those bounds, it has overstepped its authority. The foolish men of verse 15 would be those men who feel that they have a right to do what the men in Acts 4 and Acts 5 were doing to Peter and John and the apostles, stepping into the sphere that belongs to the authority of God and legislating in that sphere.

The apostles preached because they were under divine authority, not because civil authorities gave approval. Civil authority overextended itself when it went into the realm of the preaching of the gospel, and when they forbid the gospel to be proclaimed, they became foolish men. And yet, when foolish men exercise an illegitimate authority and cause believers to suffer in the exercise of that authority, believers are to so submit even though that authority is wrongly used in a wrong sphere, they are so to submit to authority that those who wrongly use their authority may have a testimony of the faith of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, that submission to authority came because they were suffering in the will of God, and that through that submission to suffering and submission to every ordinance of the Lord's faith, they may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Now, Peter deals with another problem. Does not this submission to civil authority curb the liberty that belongs to me as a child of God? Does it not put me under law, take me out of the operation of the sphere of grace, and put me under law? Not at all, for Peter says in verse 16, as free, yet not using your liberty as a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

Peter asserts our freedom, but our freedom under grace is not a freedom to be lawless. It is not a freedom to ignore the God-given rights of civil authorities when they operate in their own realm. We are under a higher authority.

Now, to submit to the highest authority, the authority of Christ, does not mean we are free from the appointed authorities which Christ has instituted. For instance, the believer in the church must recognize that God constitutes authority in the church and the elders, and the individual believer in the assembly is to submit to the authority of elders, because that is a divine arrangement. He has no right to say, I have been saved, therefore I am free from any authority over me whatsoever.

In the same way, the believer is free to submit to the authority of Christ, but that does not mean he despises the civil authorities that Christ uses in the administration of dealing with lawlessness in our land

today. We are free, but to refuse to submit to any constituted authority, whether in faith or in the church, would be using our liberty as a cloak of maliciousness. The cloak of maliciousness in this context would be despising the appointed authority, despising constituted authority.

And Peter said that, even though you suffer wrongfully, you recognize the right of the state to maintain law and order, and if they feel that your presence in the state is disruptive to the state and persecute you, they are doing what they are ordained of God to do, preserving law and order. You submit, and you do not become a rebel because rebellion against them would mitigate your testimony, verse 15. To prevent them from doing their work, verse 14, would be a rebellion against Christ.

We are the servants of God, and to submit to the authority of God will never permit us to despise any constituted authority that God has arranged, and every area of divine appointment necessitates submission, because we are the servants of God. Now, Peter, who has been dealing with the negative side, tells us in verse 17 how we are to respond to those in positions of authority over us. While he is dealing with the question of submission to authority in faith, this would also be applicable to any area.

It would give us guidelines for submission to the authority in church, and also submission to the constituted authority in the home. First of all, he says, honor all men. The all would refer to all who are in authority on a local, state, and national level in the political realm, and the local level in the church realm.

It would have to do with the constituted authority of the parent or the husband in the realm of the home. Give them honor. This has to do with recognition of the authority that belongs to the person, not as a person, but recognition of the office to which that person has been appointed by the authority of God, to reverence and respect the official capacity that the individual has.

In verse 17, he also tells us we are to love the brotherhood. The brotherhood moves out of the political realm into the realm of the family of God. We are to respect the office of the king or the ruler or the president.

We are to love the brotherhood. Now, this is another form of submission, for the one who loves submits to the object of his affection. The first was submission because of the honorable office of the individual, but the second, when he says love the brotherhood, is the submission of love, not the submission to the authority of the office.

The third area of submission is to God Himself, where he commands fear God. Fear has to do with reverence, the respect that belongs to God because of the glory of his person and his character. This does not have to do with a trembling trepidation.

This has to do with respect for the sovereign authority that belongs to God. We love the brethren because we are in subjection to God. We obey authorities in faith because we are in subjection to the authority of God.

Honor the king, and this is repeated the second time. This idea is repeated the second time in the verse because this was the immediate problem that these believers were facing, the problem of submission to the state who is an instrument in the persecution of these believers. Now, the principles that Peter stated were not principles that were applicable only to his day.

They are timeless principles. They go back into the very beginnings of the word of God. They are based upon a recognition of the use that God intended to make of government to curb lawlessness, to provide

the atmosphere in which righteousness may flourish.

The believer finds himself today in exactly the same position that Peter's readers found themselves in, for the state is no friend of the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet, because we are in submission to the authority of Christ, we are commanded to be in subjection to the authority of government, to recognize that it has a right to rule. Many of us are concerned because our government seems to be abandoning that which was the primary function of government.

The curbing of lawlessness, the providing of an atmosphere in which the gospel may be proclaimed, the truths of Christ taught, in which righteousness and godliness may flourish and be practiced in accordance with the word of God. We trust that the emphasis of these last days made by our politicians is more than a passing emphasis when they build a platform upon law and order. It's almost inconceivable because of the present tenor that any politician would come out today and not be for law and order.

Yet, we realize that government was appointed by God to do that very thing, and is it not strange that a nation that prides itself on being a Christian nation, a nation that was founded on godliness and upon the word of God, finds it necessary to call its government back to that which was the primary function of government the maintenance of law and order, and to provide the atmosphere in which the gospel may be preached, and the children of God may live as the saints of God in this political relationship. But when Peter emphasizes the truths of submission to government, submission in church, submission in home, his whole concept is based upon one prerequisite, and that is the submission of the individual to the authority of Jesus Christ. There can be no submission of an individual apart from personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Government has a responsibility to subject all its citizens, whether they are Christians or not, and the more non-Christians there are, the stronger the authority of faith has to be. The more believers there are who submit voluntarily to the authority of God and the authority of faith, the less authoritarianism there must be. The preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ that brings man into subjection to the authority of Christ is the only final answer to the problem of lawlessness in any nation.

We can multiply police forces, multiply FBI, multiply law enforcement agencies, but lawlessness continues, and a nation will not be a lawful nation until individuals through the gospel of Jesus Christ are brought into submission to the authority of Christ. And thus we suggest that the ministry of the gospel, the proclamation of the truths of the gospel by believers, is the crime and the desperate need of our nation today. Not more police, not higher salaries for law enforcement agencies, not better training, but the preaching of the gospel.

For men who are rebels by nature will find ways of circumventing any law enforcement agency until their hearts are, first of all, brought into subjection to the gospel of Christ and the authority of Jesus Christ. If you're concerned about conditions in our nation today, it should lead you to take this book and go to men and women and young people and tell them that Christ died for them in order that individual by individual, men might be brought into submission and subjection to the authority of Christ. For thus and only thus will our nation become a law-abiding nation again.

Maybe I talked to some here this morning who themselves have never submitted to the authority of Christ, never personally acknowledged him as Savior, never trusted him for salvation. You have the same problem that our nation has, the problem of lawlessness, rebellion against God. The only solution to that problem is trusting Christ for your salvation.

God offers you a Savior who has promised to save you if you will take his gift. He offers it to you right now, and as his minister I ask you the question, will you accept Jesus Christ as your own personal Savior? We pray our Father in the Spirit of God who gives us instruction concerning the everyday affairs of life, may let us see the responsibility we have in the affairs of state. We might be in submission as the Word of God commands us to be in submission.

We might have a good testimony before man, and if we're called upon because of the ungodliness of state to suffer for our faith, may we be found faithful to thee in these trying days. We pray that we might be faithful in proclaiming the Word, that we might bring men to the Lord Jesus Christ, that lawlessness might be averted in our land. Will thou dismiss us with the riches of thy grace and mercy and peace upon us? We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

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