

## HUMAN GOVERNMENT AND CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

What do you do if you are a Christian and you work for someone or under someone but – you are smarter than them? They make a decision and when you hear it – you just think - “What was she thinking? Is he serious?” Andy Stanley suggests that, *“Everyone of us has a story about working for somebody and feeling like, If I were making the decisions, not only would it be different but it would be better?”* What do you do when there is someone in authority over you and they are making bad decisions and coming up with ridiculous rules? We’re not talking about the more extreme situations where you are asked to do something immoral or illegal but just stuff that is unnecessary, unfair and unhelpful? What do you do when you are in a situation like that and it is not just the boss who pays your wages but the *government* that runs the nation? How do you respond?

One thing we learn when we study 1 Peter is that our Christian faith and our relationship with Jesus as Lord affects all of our life and all of our relationships and responsibilities. When God chooses, calls and converts you he doesn’t leave any part of your life unclaimed. When you understand that and take it to heart it is beautiful but challenging. It was challenging in Peter’s day because the book of 1 Peter, was written to people who were living under a government officials that didn’t understand the Christian faith, and were hostile to it. This is, in part, why 1 Peter is so relevant to us today. But make no mistake - what Peter tells us is absolutely revolutionary. ***He says, as Christians in a hostile culture we should live as model citizens.***

First, Look at what he says in **verse 13**. He says,  
**I. BE SUBJECT FOR THE LORD’S SAKE  
TO EVERY HUMAN INSTITUTION.**

Now in this passage it is important to notice two things 1.) What God wants us to do. 2.) Why God wants us to do it. He wants us to be subject and to do so for his sake. When you put the two together you not only get what God wants us to do but the limitations to which we are to take this and the motivations for which we are to do this.

*So let's start by addressing one of the biggest misunderstandings and objections to what Peter is saying.*

*Let's be clear, this does not mean we should just blindly obey authority figures in government or any other area of life no matter what.*

**A. To be subject for the Lord's sake means that your highest allegiance is always to God.**

If your submission to government *is for the Lord's sake* then you will not obey government when to do so would be against God's revealed will. God ordains human authority but retains ultimate authority over his people. In **Acts 5:29** Peter resisted the commands of the authorities when they told him to stop preaching in Jesus name. He said, “*we must obey God rather than man*”.

Throughout history, from the times of the coliseum to the present, Christians have suffered at the hands of governments that asked them to compromise that principle. If in our day, over issues of our freedom of speech, or the sanctity of human life, or the Christian teachings about marriage and sexuality, we come into conflict with the government, we have to remember that *we must obey God rather than man.*”

*God receives our highest allegiance however...*

**B. To be *subject* for the Lord's sake means that our normal response to human government is to be willingly submissive.**

1. *The Bible teaches that human authority, however imperfect, is ordained by God and to be honored by believers.* Listen to how Paul puts it in **Romans 13:1-2**. Before we read this consider the fact that Paul was writing about the Roman Government under Nero, a government that persecuted Christians and used tax dollars for wars of expansion. Yet, we read: *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.* So to go back to the question at the beginning, “How do you respond when you think you are smarter than the government and you don't agree with the government?” *We choose to be subject, for the Lord's sake, to every human institution.* God prefers imperfect government and authority to self-centered anarchy in which everyone does what is right in their own eyes.

2. *We can submit to human institutions because we trust in the sovereignty of God.* Peter knew what the prophet Daniel had said to Nebuchadnezzar, the pagan king of Babylon.

In **Daniel 2:20** he told him that God is the one who “sets up kings and deposes them”. That has tremendous implications for how we think about politics. In **Daniel 4:17** he said, “The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes....” Does that mean whoever ends up in power is good? Absolutely not! That's the mystery of God's sovereignty. Daniel was saying Nebuchadnezzar had risen to power because of God but that didn't mean he was a good and godly ruler. God was working out his higher and hidden purposes in the political realm. God was and is sovereign over all political authority and we can and should always trust in Him.

1.) *Our highest allegiance is to God, 2.) our primary response to government is submission. 3.) what is our motivation? Verse 13...*

**C. To be subject for the Lord's sake means our underlying motive for submission to government is to please the Lord.**

This is so important – if we miss this we miss the heart of the whole passage. Peter isn't asking us to submit to human institutions simply because they have power and can punish us. He doesn't tell us to do it because we have compliant personalities or because it is just easier that way. He gives us a far more satisfying and compelling motive. He says submit to human institutions for the Lord's sake.

There is a bumper sticker that says, “Obey God's Laws Not Man's Laws”. That sounds good but Paul and Peter are telling us something different. They are saying, “Obey Man's Laws as God's Laws, unless they are in conflict with each other. And do so for the Lord's sake.”

*Now, what Peter makes clear is that this emphasis on submission is important but it is only part of his message. He doesn't just tell us to be subject. He also tells us to be servants.*

Look at **verses 15-16** says, *For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 16. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.* God calls us to a relationship with human government in which we are not only willingly obedient to the laws of the land but also actively working the good of society. Be subject and be servants.

*He says.*

## **II. BE SERVANTS WHO ARE FREE IN CHRIST BUT SERVANTS OF GOD.**

Notice that first it says...

### **A. Live as people who are free.**

*The Bible talks about a unique freedom that belongs to every Christian.*

**1. It's the freedom of knowing your sins are forgiven. Romans 8:1-**

**2** *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.*

**2. It's the freedom of knowing you have God as your Father and heaven as your inheritance. Romans 8:17-18**

*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Hebrews 2:15-15 says through his death Christ delivers all who trust in him from the fear of death that made them subject to lifelong slavery.*

**3. It's the freedom that comes with this of knowing that God is for you and nothing can ultimately conquer you. In Romans 8:37-39**

*he says, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

You see pictures of this kind of freedom, this faith fueled freedom from fear all through the Bible. It's Daniel and his three friends standing in front of Nebuchadnezzar and refusing to worship him as God. They say, our God can deliver us from you but even if he doesn't we will not worship you (Daniel 3). They aren't the slaves of fear. It's Jesus before Pilate saying, *You have no authority but that which has been given to you by God.* (John 19:10-11) There was no fear. It is Peter himself dragged in front of the authorities and commanded to preach no more in the name of Jesus and saying, *—we must obey God rather than man.* (Acts 5) That's the kind of freedom he is talking about here.

*He says keep that confidence, that clarity. Live as people who are free. But what does he add to that?*

### **B. Live as servants of God.**

**1 Peter 2:16** *Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.* So this freedom is not a self-serving arrogance. It's not doing what every you want. It's stepping out of this world's power structure in which governments compel obedience by threats and punishments and then stepping back in not to live in selfishness but to live as servants of God.

This is the true King's subversive strategy for changing society. Listen to **Matthew 20:25-28**, *Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* First the negative: Jesus says the way my followers will influence the world for Him is *not* through the exercise of political clout: *"the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you."* Then the positive: Jesus says, my followers will influence the world through serving others and that servant-hood will be inspired by the gospel, by my sacrificial suffering for the sins of others.

*Do you know what happened in history? **The early Christians lived this and changed the world not through political power but through the spiritual dynamic of Christ-like service and preaching the gospel.***

**Illustration:** A few years ago I read a book titled *The Rise of Christianity*, by Rodney Stark. The author is a professor of sociology at the University of Washington. In this book he is addressing this question: "How was it that Christianity grew so rapidly and had such profound impact on the Greco-Roman-Pagan world?" his answer is that Christians influenced society through Christ-like service.

**1. The Christians served God by caring for those the world did not value.** He documents the fact that in the Roman Empire, female babies were often thrown away. A study of inscriptions at Delphi made it possible to reconstruct more than 600 family histories and of these 600

only six had raised more than one daughter. Female infanticide was common. They didn't consider girls worth the trouble. Plato and Aristotle recommended infanticide as legitimate state policy. From the start the Christian teaching, based on Psalm 139 and other Scriptures was that abortion, killing a baby before it was born and infanticide, killing a baby after it was born, were *both* absolutely prohibited as murder (p.124). The Christians not only raised *their* girls they rescued and raised the discarded girls of others. In the ancient world the followers of Jesus had no political clout but they lived as servants of God and demonstrated that political clout has nothing to do with spiritual power.

**2. The Christians served God by caring for the sick.** There were huge health problems in ancient cities and when plagues came millions of people died. But in this book, *The Rise of Christianity*, the author quotes an eyewitness writing in the year 260 who says: *Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ ... (Stark p. 82)* One modern writer summing up what happened said the Christian effort had created, *“a miniature welfare state in an empire, which for the most part locked social services.” (Stark p. 84)* They lived as servants who are free in Christ but servants of God.

**Illustration:** A man named Roy Hattersley, an atheist and news columnist wrote about what he witnessed in the aftermath of natural disasters. He wrote, "It is an unavoidable conclusion that Christians are the people most likely to take the risks and make the sacrifices involved in helping others.... faith comes with a packet of moral imperatives that, while they do not condition the attitude of all believers, influence enough of them to make [Christians] morally superior to atheists like me.

Another journalist, Matthew Parris, who grew up in Africa writes for *the Times of London*. He wrote an article titled, *“As an Atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God.”* He wrote, *“Now, a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa: sharply distinct for the work of secular NGOs, government projects and international aid efforts. These alone will not do.”* Among other things he said, *“In Africa Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good....”* (Matthew Parris, "As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God," *The Times of London Online* 12-27-08)

**Application.** We need more of that. Give yourself, your time, and your money, to the church, yes but also through the church and just on your own, to good causes in our community. Make it part of your life, your family, your small group.

In **verse 15** Peter said, *for this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.*

## CONCLUSION

At the end of this passage Peter summarizes his teaching. **Verse 17**, *honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.* Coming to Christ, trusting in Him as your Lord and Savior, is not just about going to heaven when you die. It's about a new relationship with Christ as Lord and Savior that changes your relationship to everything else in life.

One of the most important things to understand is that the Bible does not tell us to live as God's servants or do good works to make ourselves righteous with God. Our sins deserve God's righteous judgment. We cannot compensate for our sins or make things right by our good works. We need a Savior.

God became one of us in Jesus not just to show us how to live but to live the life we should have lived *for us*. He said, *I have come not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.* We are ransomed, which means redeemed, set free, saved by his dying and rising again. We receive that for ourselves when we respond to the call of God and turn to Jesus and trust in him.

You can never serve Jesus well until you understand that he served you first. He served you through his perfect life and his sacrificial death. You turn to him and trust in him and he forgives you, He becomes your Lord, your king, he comes into your life by his Holy Spirit, he pours his love out on you, he promises to guide you and never let you go and in that relationship he calls you to follow him and to become a part of the kingdom in which he is working for redemption. That's where your submission and service comes in. It's part of your response to his amazing love and saving grace.

**Amen.**