

An Example to Follow

SERMON

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TEXT: 1 Peter 2:13-25

PROP: The result of the submission of Jesus was the healing of his people and the building up of his church. In our own behavior before the world of unbelief we must be like Jesus. Whatever we do must promote the good of the church and the glory of our Savior.

1 Peter 2:13-25 (ESV)

Submission to Authority

¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

¹⁸ Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The new birth brings about significant changes to our relationship to the world around us and as we see from our text in 1 Peter 2, we, as new creatures in Christ, submit to authority. Peter commands us to "be subject to every human institution" because we are enabled by conversion to do so. Our obedience to the will of God in this matter is a matter of degree in all those that God is pleased to regenerate but the

sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit moves us onward to greater love for the law of God and the performance of his will.

Submission to human authority and in particular to the authority of God is something quite unnatural to us. Aaron's rod that budded was kept in the Ark of the Covenant as a symbol of our innate rebellion to the will of God, along with the Ten Commandments written on tablets of stone that symbolized our inability to keep the law of God, and the bowl of Manna that symbolized our refusal to live by everything that comes from the mouth of God. It is not our nature submit to God. Neither is it our nature to submit to human authority. Ungodly people pledge their allegiance to the flag of our nation and insist on the phrase "One nation under God," but they despise YAHWEH and his gracious law. They promote homosexuality and abortion which are an abomination to God yet they insist that the "under God" phrase should remain in the Pledge and "In God we trust" should be printed on our currency. The patriotism of most, it would seem, is conditioned by the freedom to live by the slogan, "If it feels good, do it."

(10-16-14 Wednesday) The city of Houston Texas has issued subpoenas demanding a group of pastors turn over any sermons dealing with homosexuality, gender identity or Annise Parker, the city's first openly lesbian mayor. And those ministers who fail to comply could be held in contempt of court. The subpoenas are just the latest twist in an ongoing saga over the Houston's new non-discrimination ordinance. The law, among other things, would allow men to use the ladies room and vice versa. The city council approved the law in June. After opponents of the bathroom bill filed a lawsuit the city's attorneys responded by issuing the subpoenas against the pastors.

According to our text we must be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution. We notice immediately that our submission is to be for the Lord's sake. Peter has told us our lives are to proclaim the Excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into God's marvelous light and this means that in all our social relationships we are representatives of Jesus Christ. This is especially true when it comes to our relationship to government and people in authority. The King James Version uses the word "ordinance" to translate a Greek word that simply means creation or institution. It does not refer to the individual laws created by those who are in authority over us. Instead it refers to the institutions that make and enforce the laws. Therefore it is possible to submit to the institutions and still disobey their laws.

For example, when Nebuchadnezzar brought Judean captives to Babylon, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were among them. The king chose these four young men to be trained for his special service and required them to eat food that God

commanded them not to eat. They refused to eat from the king's table and therefore disobeyed his dietary laws. We read

Daniel 1:8 (ESV)

8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

They were very careful not embarrass the official in charge of their training and they agreed upon a different diet that in the end proved to be better than what the king had required of them. They disobeyed the law yet they glorified God and at the same time submitted to the authority of the king.

Later on, king Nebuchadnezzar constructed a 90 foot tall golden image of himself and required by law that everyone had to bow down and worship it. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, whose Babylonian names were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, once again refused to obey the law which required them to worship a false god. Again they submitted to the authority over them by accepting the punishment meted out for their disobedience and God rewarded their faithfulness by keeping them unharmed by the fiery furnace.

Daniel himself was cast into a den of lions because he refused to obey the law of the king which limited all prayer to king Darius alone. He disobeyed the ungodly law which required him to sin against the True and Living God, and yet he submitted to the authority of the king and took his punishment. God spared him and his enemies were punished instead.

Peter and the other Apostles were commanded not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus,

Acts 4:19-20 (ESV)

19 But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, **20** for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

The Apostles did not cause rebellion or riot or in any way question the authority of the Jewish council. They simply refused to obey the council and submitted to whatever punishment the authorities wished to impose on them. They showed respect for those in authority over them even though the authorities opposed preaching the gospel of Christ.

There is much more to consider in the matter of submission to civil authorities but we move on in the text to consider our primary and sublime example of submission.

Peter continues his instruction about submission to authority as he speaks of *servants*. We must remember that he addresses his epistle to the elect exiles of the dispersion; to those that God has caused to be born again to a living hope. These servants therefore are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God's own possession. The word Peter uses for servant refers to a household slave who lives with the master's family. The slave owns nothing but instead, he is owned by his master. The slave is to show respect for his master whether the master is good or unjust. He is to show "all respect." If servants rebel against severe treatment by running away or using force to throw off their yoke of slavery, it can hardly be said that they respect their master. **Respect arises from a proper knowledge of what God requires in his law.** Therefore submission to authority is limited to what is right as determined by God in his revealed will. As Calvin puts it, "Then servants are to be subject to their masters, only as far as God permits, or as far as the altars, as they say. But as the word here is not δουλοι, slaves, but οικε̅ται, domestics, we may understand the free as well as the bond servants to be meant, though it be a difference of little moment."

In Roman society it was a foregone conclusion that most slaves would have ungodly and unjust masters. So Peter addresses himself specifically to that situation. He tells us that even if unjustly treated it is the duty of the slave to submit to his master whatever he may be. When a superior or master abuses his power over his slaves he will answer to God but he does not lose the right to his power. The word unjust as it applies to masters means one who is crooked, unscrupulous and dishonest. He may also be cruel and perverse. Here are masters who perhaps have no humanity or kindness, yet the servants to whom Peter speaks, are to submit to them for the Lord's benefit.

On the other hand when a master required a Christian slave to offer the family food to idols, he very well may refuse to do it and get beaten as punishment. To suffer for doing what is right is a gracious thing, Peter says. It finds favor with God, **By submitting to authority we may not disobey God's higher authority such that we sin against God.** It is not that we rebel and mount insurrection against an unjust master but we simply refuse to sin against God. Joseph was such a household slave in Egypt but refused to commit adultery with Potiphar's wife. He did not rebel against his master but he refused to sin against God in this way. We read,

Genesis 39:20-23 (ESV)

²⁰ And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. ²¹ But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. ²² And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. ²³ The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed.

Joseph was mindful of God and endured sorrows while suffering unjustly. Peter says, "This is a gracious thing." That is to say, this finds favor with God. To the contrary, there is no credit at all for being punished justly. Then Peter informs us of a surprising thing. We have been **called by the Lord to patiently bear suffering** brought upon us by doing what is right. Though Peter addresses servants we must understand that all of God's people are in view here for the example given to us by Christ applies to all his people. We all should follow in the steps of Christ not just slaves. **Jesus is an example for all to follow.** It may seem to be a great burden to bear to be called by God to suffer for doing what is right but we are not better than our Lord who suffered unjustly for sins he did not commit. Again Calvin writes, "Nothing seems more unworthy, and therefore less tolerable, than undeservedly to suffer; but when we turn our eyes to the Son of God, this bitterness is mitigated; for who would refuse to follow him going before us?"

If we are to imitate Christ we must know who Christ is and what he did that we might follow in his steps. To try to imitate him as mighty God would be absurd. How could we ever cleanse lepers, raise the dead, walk on the sea, heal the blind and lame. These things are impossible to us and were never intended for us to imitate. Instead we read,

Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and **learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart**, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

We learn the same thing from the words of Peter in our text that the **patience of Christ in bearing suffering** is what we are to imitate. Jesus committed no sin and he therefore suffered not only unjustly but in complete innocence. Even when we suffer unjustly we are not at all innocent for we continue to break the law of God in thought and word and deed. We read that there was **no deceit found in his mouth** but there is certainly deceit found in our mouth. As James says,

James 3:2 (ESV)

2 For we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

All this shows how much we fall short in following in the footsteps of the Lord. In Christ there was the highest perfection of innocence and there is, therefore, no reason, says Calvin, why any one of us should refuse to suffer after his example, since it is so clear that we all fall short of the holiness of our Savior. An example to follow must possess qualities that are good to imitate and there can be no better, no more worthy example for us to follow than the Lord Jesus Christ who is morally perfect.

Peter notes that, "*When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*" (1 Peter 2:23, ESV) If we are to imitate Christ we must patiently take wrongs done to us and not seek revenge. By nature when we are injured by someone we immediately want revenge, but Christ did not retaliate in any way. We need to bridle our tongues and our minds that we not render evil for evil.

Instead of taking revenge, Jesus "*continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*" (1 Peter 2:23, ESV) What a wonderful example to us, having patiently endured the violence of the wicked, to place himself in the hands of his Father. How terrible it would be to suffer unjustly but have no one to turn to for comfort and strength. But we can place ourselves into God's hands even as our Lord did when he suffered on the cross saying, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*" (Luke 23:46, ESV)

[In the following illustration I refer to a piece of art that depicts the crucifixion of the Lord. This is simply an illustration and not meant to condone making so called pictures of Christ. To depict any of the persons of the Godhead in works of art is a flagrant breaking of the 2nd commandment where we are forbidden to make images of God. The second commandment actually consists of two separate commands in the Hebrew. Except for the fourth command each command begins "not shall you do" or "not shall you make", etc. The 2nd commandment says, "Not shall you make a carved image of any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." And secondly, "Not shall you bow down to them or serve them." There are two separate commands in the Hebrew thus we understand that we must not even make images of any sort, of the True and Living God. This means that for an actor to arrogate to himself acting the person of Jesus Christ is flagrant blasphemy. With this background I give you this illustration.]

In the National Gallery of Art in London there's a picture of the Crucifixion that is so dark that when you first look at it, you can't see anything. But if you stand and ponder it, and if you do not permit your gaze to falter, eventually you will see in the darkness a

very dim figure of the crucified Christ. If you look longer and do not allow your attention to be diverted, you then begin to discern behind the figure of Christ the presence of God the Father, whose hands are holding up his Son, and on his face is a look of unimaginable grief.

There, in those five hours, no matter what the depths to which he went, Jesus knew his Father was with him. The Trinity--Father, Son and Holy Spirit--suffering together.

Jesus entrusted himself to God the righteous judge and so should we. All mankind will one day give an account of themselves before this righteous judge and masters who abuse their slaves will not go unpunished. Neither will those who persecute the saints go unpunished. We must have patience with those who abuse us following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ and God the righteous judge will give us redress. Vengeance belongs to the Lord who will defend the saints and take up their cause. Therefore we are to possess our souls in patience and there is great blessing for those who do this. *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* (Matthew 5:11-12, ESV)

Jesus also taught his disciples,

Matthew 5:43-48 (ESV)

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ **But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,**⁴⁵ **so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.** For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Jesus left an example for us to follow when, *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness."* (1 Peter 2:24, ESV) He referred his case to God the righteous judge and prayed for his enemies saying, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* (Luke 23:34, ESV) No doubt our own feelings for our enemies are far from those of the Savior for his enemies. We often do not want the Lord to merely take vengeance on our enemies but to be their executioner. However, in submitting to God the Father Jesus left vengeance to God and instead of asking God to rain fire and brimstone on them he prayed God to forgive them.

We must see that the result of the submission of Jesus was the healing of his people and the building up of his church and in our own behavior before the world of unbelief we must be like Jesus. The world around us and much of the modern evangelical church seeks to enter into the politics of the nation, to influence legislation or to elect candidates for office that they hope will be of benefit to the church. But the political structure of our nation does not submit to the authority of Christ and will never do anything meaningful to establish and promote the kingdom of Christ. Many well meaning organizations would have us commit our resources and time to their programs of political influence but whatever we do must promote the good of the church and the glory of our Savior. Imitating Christ in this matter we must commit our resources and energies to the establishment and encouragement of the church of Christ and her mission of making disciples of the nations. Peter ends his instruction on submission to authority by saying of Jesus,

1 Peter 2:24-25 (ESV)

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

By his death Jesus healed his people from their sins, bringing back to himself all who were living in rebellion to God. We were all straying from the way of salvation down the wide road that leads to destruction until Christ brought us back to himself. We who were wandering in error are brought back to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. And this we were doing because we refused to be ruled by Christ Jesus. That we are brought back into the oversight of our great Shepherd condemns the whole wisdom of the world which does not submit to the government of Christ. There is then no cause to fear for Christ himself oversees and protects his church and will bring to completion at the day of Jesus Christ the good work that he has begun in each one of us.

Geneva was not only a refuge to Protestant fugitives, but, under Calvin's influence and direction, it became the hub of a vast missionary enterprise. The Venerable Company of Pastors was established as Geneva's missionary agency, sending an army of missionaries to Italy, Germany, Scotland, England, and especially to Calvin's homeland, France.

The Genevan missionaries traveled by night, hid in attics and false rooms behind chimneys, and used obscure roads. Once they arrived at their intended destination, they would join together with other Protestants to form an underground church. The churches gathered secretly in barns, open fields or secluded caves. But with Geneva's guidance, these churches underwent remarkable growth in France.

Sending missionaries in the 16th century, was a very delicate matter. Knowing that an indiscretion could mean the death of a missionary, the Venerable Company of Pastors often omitted the names and destinations of their missionaries. Even with the many precautions, not all of the missionaries reached their destinations. When missionaries were arrested and sentenced to death, as they often were, Calvin wrote tender and compassionate letters encouraging them to stand firm in the Lord.

The missionary enterprise of Calvin's Geneva was not confined to Europe. One missionary venture undertaken by Geneva still stirs the imagination. In 1556, Geneva's Venerable Company of Pastors sent Pierre Richier and Guillaume Charretier to accompany a Protestant expedition to Brazil. Richier and Charretier were to serve in the dual capacity of chaplains to the French Protestants and missionaries to the Indians of South America.

Regrettably, the leader of the expedition betrayed the missionaries and the Protestant settlers. Four of the settlers were murdered. Richier and Charretier were forced to return to France. Although abortive, the project was a striking testimony to the far-reaching missionary vision of Calvin and his Genevan colleagues. Calvin's interest in missions did not wane throughout his ministry in Geneva.

His missionary vitality led to the tremendous spread of Calvinism throughout Europe, eventually superseding Lutheranism as the most vibrant representative of Protestantism. **Historically, one of the most telling characteristics of Calvinism was that it thrived in those countries where opposition was the greatest.**

The result of the submission of Jesus was the healing of his people and the building up of his church. In our own behavior before the world of unbelief we must be like Jesus. Whatever we do must promote the good of the church and the glory of our Savior.