

There is a story of a little boy who disobeyed his mother. As punishment, she told him to sit in a chair in the corner. After a while, she asked him, “Have you learned your lesson yet?” With a look of defiance, he replied, “I’m sitting on the outside but I’m standing on the inside.”

This morning I am preaching a sermon that I don’t want to preach because it’s on a topic that no one likes – not a single one of us, to include myself, and it generally involves a command that quite frankly none of us really want to obey. This morning, I am going to be talking about a key concept in the Bible – submission.

Submission is a word with a bad reputation and generally we avoid using it. I just call it the “S” word. People cringe at that word “submission”, especially us Americans, because we enjoy our freedoms – and we want to do what we want to do. We want to make our own decisions about our own lives and we don’t like the idea of someone else telling us what to do. Oh, when push comes to shove, we will likely do what we are told to do, but we won’t like it – our hearts won’t be in it, and just like the boy being punished by his mom, we are sitting on the outside – but defiantly, we are standing on the inside.

Last week we stopped at **1 Peter 2:11-12**, where Peter said, *“Beloved, I urge you as foreigners and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God on the day of visitation.”*

As Peter related in this passage – although we are strangers in a foreign land – just passing through this world, our personal conduct should still be excellent amongst the unbelievers – our overall manner of life – our walk should be characterized by Christ-like behavior because unbelievers are watching us, and though we may be different from them, we don’t want to give them any reason to reject Christ because of our behavior. As I related last week, we are an open book – our lives might be the only Bible that a lost person reads, and our behavior should draw attention to the gospel – to Jesus – and not away from Him.

So, as a way to conduct ourselves in an excellent manner as strangers in a foreign land, Peter shares with us some truths about our interaction with others – and that leads us to our passage for this morning.

So, turn with me to **1 Peter 2** and we will start with **verses 13-14**.

¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

Is this a timely passage or what? I suspect that after reading this passage, some of you can feel your blood pressure already rising. You don’t like what I just read – you are already thinking of exceptions, because there are leaders in our government that you don’t trust, and there are laws in this land that you don’t like. It’s true – it’s true for all of us, and it was just as true for Peter in his day.

Keep in mind that when Peter wrote these words, the believers in these churches in Asia Minor were experiencing or were about to experience intense and severe persecution by the Roman government. If you recall, Christians in Rome had been falsely accused of setting the city on fire by Emperor Nero, who was a complete maniac, and as a result of his false claims, he started his brutal and ruthless government-sponsored persecution against the innocent Christians. This persecution began in Rome, but it eventually spread throughout the Roman Empire, outward to the other Roman provinces where these churches were planted.

So, Peter was keenly aware that these believers were living under extremely hostile circumstances, but surprisingly he does not call for a rebellion or an overthrow against those who oppose the faith – instead he encourages just the opposite, and begins with a simple and straight forward statement – **“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution.”** That’s a pretty clear statement by Peter, who gives us both a command and the reason for the command.

The command we are given is to submit to every human institution, and Peter goes so far as to specify that he is focused on human created governments by referring to kings, including crazy emperors, and their subordinates such as governors – individuals placed in official positions of governmental authority. Peter says we are to submit to those who are in positions of authority over us.

Now, I know we hate that word “submit” – but what does that word really mean? That word “submit” is the Greek word *“hupotássō”* which is a military term that literally means to be placed under someone in an orderly fashion or to rank yourself under someone, and it carries the idea of getting in line behind someone.

When military troops gathered for battle, they were arranged and divided by units under the command of their leader. The commander determined the best arrangement of his troops on the battlefield so they would be successful, and it was

important that the troops fell in line according to the orders of their commander. The troops had to submit to the commander, they had to recognize their proper place – they had to willingly yield to the authority of the one placed over them.

This was true on the battlefield and Peter says this is equally true when interacting with governmental authority, and it's important to point out that our submission to these authorities is not a suggestion, it's not an option, it's not something you do only if you agree with them – it's an imperative – it's a command to recognize the government's authority over certain aspects of our lives and to obey the laws of the land. While we may not personally respect the man or the woman in a certain position of authority in our government, while we may not agree with everything they say or do, while we may not embrace their political ideas or agendas – like it or not, we are commanded to submit to their authority over us. As much as possible, we should seek, we should look for ways to fully cooperate with the government and obey the laws that are given to us – that should be our normal attitude and posture, and just so you know, Peter was not alone in giving us this command. Paul essentially said the exact same thing. Turn with me to **Titus 3:1-2**, where Paul states,

¹Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, ² to slander no one, not to be contentious, to be gentle, showing every consideration for all people.

So, the command by both Peter and Paul to submit to governmental authorities is crystal clear. Yes, we are strangers in this world – yes, this world is not our home – yes, we are citizens of heaven, but with that said, as believers we are not above the systems of government in this world who are in authority over us. We are to submit to them instead of resisting and rebelling against them, and there are several reasons for this.

Let's go back to **1 Peter 2:13**. In this verse Peter tells us:

“Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution.”

Notice, we are to submit **“for the Lord's sake.”** **What does that mean?** As believers, we represent Jesus Christ in this world – our allegiance is to Him first and foremost, and for the sake of His reputation, for the sake of His honor, believers should be submissive to those in authority over us. As believers our light must shine before people in such a way that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

John MacArthur tells a story that speaks to this. He said, “I remember when Sam Ericsson was in our church before he went to Washington to be involved in the Christian Legal Society.

One day Sam, prior to the time he was a part of our church staff, was working for a law firm in Los Angeles, and he was having lunch with a group of attorneys in the city. Sam was very active as an elder at our church already, and it was his custom to invite men to come to the church and hear the Word of God, and he said to one attorney...

“I would like you to come to my church with me, I'd like you be my guest.”

And the man asked, “What church do you go to?”

Sam said, “I go to Grace Community Church out in the San Fernando Valley.”

The man hesitated for a moment and looked a bit shocked and then said,

“I would never go to that church under any circumstances.”

Sam replied, “Well, what makes you say that – have you been there?”

The man answered, “I've never been there and I will never go.”

Sam said, “Well how can you make that kind of judgment about the church?”

The man responded, “It's very simple, the most crooked attorney I know of in this city goes to that church.”

MacArthur said this was distressing to hear from Sam, so the following Sunday, he got in the pulpit, told the story, and then he said, “I don't know which one of you attorneys is that one, but I wish you'd get your act together or quit saying you belong to this church because the character of your life is making evangelism impossible.”

We must be careful how we live our lives and be mindful of Who we really represent. We must consider how our behavior reflects on the One we profess to follow. It's **for the Lord's sake** – that's the reason to submit to governmental authority, but Paul gives us second reason in **Romans 13:1-2**, where he says,

¹Every person is to be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

²Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

Of course, Paul wanted believers to submit willingly, but just like from Peter, this is a command we are given. We are commanded to submit because it is God's desire for His people to submit – and just so you know, believe it or not, all

governmental authority placed over us is ultimately established by God to keep order in this world – and to resist their authority over us is to resist God Himself. That’s what Paul said, and this means that submission to governmental authority is really an aspect of our submission to God. That’s how God sees it – whether we want to see it that way or not.

Now, there is a third reason to submit to governmental authority and we find back in **1 Peter 2:15-17**. Peter tells us,

¹⁵ For such is the will of God, that by doing right you silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Act as free people, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bond-servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

We are servants of God, and with our spiritual freedoms, we are to choose to do what is right, we are to choose to do what we ought to do instead of choosing to do what is evil and malicious and rebellious – and by doing so it will silence the objections and that accusations that come from those who lack understanding when it comes to the things of God.

God has willed that we silence the critics by doing good, not by opposing authority. If we are sincerely submitted to authority “**for the Lord’s sake**,” then we will show honor to all who deserve it. We may not agree with their politics or their practices, but we must respect their position.

Now, maybe you are thinking to yourself right about now, well Pastor, we are singing in this church after we were prohibited from doing so by the Governor – a person clearly in governmental authority over us. **Aren’t you being hypocritical? Are you being rebellious? Are you leading the church into sin?**

As both Peter and Paul have said, governments have a rightful authority from God. We are bound to obey them, and we should seek to obey them – that is the rule, but there is an exception to the rule. We are to submit to the governmental authority unless we are ordered to do something in clear contradiction to God’s will, and let me give you some examples of this from the Bible.

When Moses was born, he was hidden for three months by his parents against the official orders of the Pharaoh to drown all newborn sons. In Daniel, three young men – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego refused the official command of King Nebuchadnezzar to bow down and worship a golden image that he had built. But

ironically for me, I think the best example for us comes from Peter himself. The same man who wrote our passage for this morning is the same man who shortly after Pentecost stood before the governing body of the Jewish Council in Jerusalem to speak on this very matter. Listen to this, beginning with **Acts 4:17**.

¹⁷ But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let's warn them not to speak any longer to any person in this name.”¹⁸ And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, make your own judgment; ²⁰ for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Peter and the other apostles were commanded by the Jewish Council to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, but Peter and his associates refused to obey. And did you notice, they did not cause a rebellion or in any way question or deny the authority of the Council. They recognized their authority – although they refused to stop preaching. They showed respect to their leaders even though these men were opposed to the faith.

So, Peter and the other apostles respectfully disobeyed these leaders – they continued to preach about Jesus, and later in **Acts 5:27-29**, they are all brought back in front of these same leaders again to explain their disobedience.

²⁷ When they had brought them, they had them stand before the Council. The high priest interrogated them, ²⁸ saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this Man's blood upon us.” ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”

If there are occasions when the believer feels they must obey God rather than the government, he or she ought to have a very compelling *biblical* reason for doing so and be willing to own it and accept the consequences for it.

We should never defy those people placed in positions of authority over us because we don't agree with their political affiliation or their agendas, and we should not neglect laws simply because we don't like them, unless we are given an order from them that is contrary to God's Word which would cause us to sin. The only justifiable reason to disobey an earthly king is when it leads us into disobedience against the King of kings. So, when the government asks you to submit and do the

opposite of what God asks you to do, you have no choice but to respectfully violate the government and then bear the consequences.

Last week we were prohibited from congregational singing, and as your pastor, I have determined to respectfully decline based solely on biblical reasons, and I want to share just a couple with you this morning.

In **Psalm 149:1**, we are told: ***Praise the Lord! Sing a new song to the Lord, and His praise in the congregation of the godly ones.***

Here, God has commanded us to sing to Him – not just individually, but together, corporately as a body of believers.

In **Ephesians 5:15-20**, Paul tells us, ***¹⁵ So then, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, in which there is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your hearts to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to our God and Father.***

In **Colossians 3:16**, Paul says, ***Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.***

Singing is an integral part of our worship of God, and oh by the way, here's one more reason for singing. We are told in **Mark 14**, beginning with **verse 22**,

²² While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body." ²³ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is being poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine again, until that day when I drink it, new, in the kingdom of God." ²⁶ And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

We sing because Jesus sings. Here He sings after the last supper with His disciples – just hours before He was to be arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane and later crucified in total submission to the will of His Father.

I hope I have made my biblical case to you, but I also have a fear – and it's not what you might think. I fear that as we sing, some will sing with a heart of defiance, with a heart of rebellion, with a heart of arrogance rather than a heart of worship, and in my opinion, that would be worse than not singing at all.

There is a song by Matt Redman called "The Heart of Worship" and it was written for an entire congregation that felt far from God – they were just going through the motions in their congregational worship. So, the pastor temporarily removed everything that distracted them from pure worship, to include the worship leader, the choir, the band, and the sound system – and they simply allowed the voices in the congregation to spontaneously unite in praise and song.

This song by Redman is about their experience and their desire to worship God for the right reason and without distraction – and it speaks to us just as well.

*When the music fades
And all is stripped away
And I simply come*

*Longing just to bring
Something that's of worth
That will bless Your heart
I'll bring You more than a song
For a song in itself
Is not what You have required*

*You search much deeper within
Through the way things appear
You're looking into my heart
I'm coming back to the heart of worship
And it's all about You
It's all about You, Jesus*

*I'm sorry, Lord for the thing I've made it
When it's all about You
It's all about You, Jesus
I'm coming back to the heart of worship
And it's all about You
It's all about You, Jesus*

Source Material:

Holman New Testament Commentary, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude – Max Anders, David Walls
Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible – David Brown, A.R. Fausset, Bobby Jamieson
James, 1, 2 Peter & Jude, The Randall House Bible Commentary – Robert E. Picirilli & Paul V. Harrison
Exposition Commentary – Warren Wiersbe
Faithlife Study Bible - Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Bomar, D.
Notes on the New Testament: James to Jude – Albert Barnes
The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Walvoord & Zuck
Enduring Word – David Guzik