

Faithful Christian Citizenship Part 2

Our Identity in Christ

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Bible Text: 1 Peter 2:13-17
Preached on: Sunday, June 11, 2023

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Turn within your bibles to 1 Peter 2. 1 Peter 2:13, pick up where we were last week as we return to our exposition of the first epistle of Peter, and we title the message is the same as last Sunday, "Faithful Christian Citizenship." Faithful Christian citizenship. What does it look like to live faithfully for Christ in the midst of a dark world and how do we do that as we relate to the government under which we find ourselves?

Let's go ahead and read the text of Scripture. I want to start at verse 11 because I've noted previous messages that there's a sense in which there's a turning point in the letter. First, a section goes from the first verse of chapter 1 through the 10th verse of chapter 2, which is really focused on our identity in Christ, focusing on all that God has done for us in Christ and who we are. And then chapter 2:11 to the end of the book, the focus is really on what are we to do in light of who we are? What does God call us to do? And so we see that verse 11 and 12 is the introduction and we're going to be focusing on verses 13 to 17. We're going to be answering the question, what does God call us to do in relation to the civil authorities? How are we to live? So, let's begin reading verse 11.

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12 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 in the day of visitation. 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. 15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16 Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. 17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we come to You this morning and we come to praise and worship You and to submit our lives to You. We ask that You might, through Your word, rule in our hearts that You might send forth Your light and Your truth this morning in the pages of

Scripture, in these verses and the other verses we'll consider, and You might lead us to Your holy hill, to the place of Your habitation, to the place where Your glory dwells, that through Your word, You might have us become more faithful followers of Jesus, more true in our worship and our devotion. For the glory of our Savior, we pray in His name. Amen.

Faithful Christian citizenship, what does that look like? This is one of Peter's great concerns as he's turned the corner now to talk about understanding who you are. If you're going to be faithful in the midst of dark days as these Christians were living in, if you're going to be faithful, you need to know who you are. He's hammered that home in the first section of his epistle, telling us all that God has done for us in Christ, that we've been born again, that we've been made holy, set apart unto him, that we are a holy temple, a dwelling for God. And he ended that with four descriptive terms: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession; these four descriptive terms to say who we are. And now he says, how are you to live and with these initial two verses, he says, we're to turn from the flesh, that's our relationship to the flesh, we're to abstain from fleshly lust. Fleshly lusts war against the soul. We looked at that and now he says how are you to relate to the government and we looked at this last time, we began to look at this and we noted, I'm going to remind you of just key outline points to set the context. We said that the first thing we observed in verses 13 to 17 was a surprising command, that is, that when you really think about it, it's surprising. When you step back from it and you see it with freshness and you forget that you already know that's what the text says, it's actually surprising that he would, Peter writing from Rome, remember he uses the code term for Rome in 513, Babylon, from Babylon, those who are in Babylon greet you. He's writing from Rome. He knows all about the emperor and the wickedness and he says, "You are to obey every institution, emperor and the governors who are sent by Him."

And so it was a surprising command. In fact, I wanted to read to you something that I found in a sermon by Tom Pennington and I think he says this very effectively. He says, I'm going to read directly from his his message here. He says, "As I'm," he was opening Romans 13, not 1 Corinthians, I mean, 1 Peter 2, but that the passage there is dealing with how we relate to authority and he says, "As I write, I don't want you to think, as I speak, I don't want you to think about the US and the current political environment that has really fractured the nation. Instead, I want to begin for just a moment by creating a country in your imagination." Pennington says, "I want to create a country in your imagination. Imagine with me, if you would, that you live in a country where the politicians all come from only wealthy families and the current leader of the nation is really, really young. He has no experience. In fact, the only thing he has to offer is his family's pedigree. He comes to power under questionable circumstances. In fact, rumors are circulating that his mother may have very well poisoned his predecessor. Once this young man comes to power, he begins to shred the nation's laws. He begins by banning capital punishment. He reduces taxes without reducing government expenditures, and he begins spending wildly on the arts. As time goes on, we discover that this leader has a dark side. Word spreads that he's involved with married women, and even worse, with young boys. As time goes on, we discover that he actually ends up marrying his male

companion. He flaunts his power by completely ignoring the other positions of state. He's implicated even in plots to murder some of his own citizens, a number of innocent people, including, if you can believe it, even his own mother. It turns out as time unfolds that he hates the Christian faith. He begins to attack it. He begins to persecute its leaders. He rules for many, many years, essentially dismantling the country that we have come to know and love, and he's run out of office by those who are tired of his abuses and ends his young, troubled life by committing suicide. If you lived in such a place under such a ruler, how would you respond as a Christian?" He says, "You may have already guessed it, but I'm speaking about Rome and its ruler, Nero, who took office in 54 AD." Paul wrote in 56 AD about obeying the emperor. Peter writes in 63 AD, Nero's been in office now by nine years, and some of these things that he talks about have begun to become very clear and he says, "You're to obey every institution of man," and when he says the king, he means the emperor. And he's going to say in that passage also, "Honor the king, honor the emperor." That's why it's a surprising command. Isn't it surprising when you put it in context?

We said last time too, the second point we see in the text is that he gives the reason. The command is "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution," and he expands it in verse 13 and 14 by saying "whether to a king as the one in authority or to governors who are sent by him." Verse 15, he gives the reason and we said a surprising command was our first point, and last week we said a compelling reason given in verse 15, "For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men." He wants to silence the ignorance. God wants to silence the ignorance of foolish men. What is he talking about here? We have to look at the context to understand, and we saw this last time, that Peter is concerned that Christians have a widespread reputation, though they're still a minority in Rome, a small minority, they have quite a reputation and the reputation is as evildoers. They are believed by the Romans, the everyday citizens of Rome, to be evildoers, to be those who are working against the good of society. I mentioned last time that the historian Tacitus writes about the Christians in the first century as being enemies of humanity. This was the view. They were seen to be harmful. I mentioned that the word evil that's used here, speaking of evildoers in verse 14, "the punishment of evildoers," and verse 12 actually read too, "they slander you as evildoers." That's Gentiles, unbelievers, slandering Christians as evildoers that the word evil essentially means harm. It means injurious behavior, to injure, to hurt, to damage.

And so the Christians are viewed by their contemporary society and the people around them as enemies, that they are undermining the social order and we talked about this a little bit, and I just want to hit a few points because some of you weren't here, and all of us probably can use some reminder anyway, even if you were, that in the first century, the Roman culture was a paganistic culture. That is, it was a polytheistic culture. There were many gods worshiped by the common people. Most people worshiped a number of gods. There were regional deities, deities that belonged to cities. There was the Roman pantheon that was basically the Greek pantheon that is a group of gods that they worshiped in Rome and in Greece, and if you've read ancient mythology, you've read about some of those gods, Jupiter or Zeus and all of the others. And in Roman culture, Greco-Roman culture, and particularly first century Roman culture, it was basically, there

was kind of a, one historian calls it, an easygoing syncretism dominated the day. I like that phrase, easygoing syncretism. Syncretism means that you take from various things and you join things together. You amalgamate various worldviews. You bring them together. So you may worship, you know, the god Diana because you're from Ephesus, but you're happy to worship other gods too. You go to a new place, you find out a new god, you offer a sacrifice to that new god because you've got to keep all the gods happy. And so it's an easygoing syncretism. Everybody kind of has their own gods that they really are devoted to, but they acknowledge all the others and they're basically, if that's good for you, that's great. So it was kind of a syncretistic and pluralistic society. Pluralism, you know, is the opposite of singularism. Plural means more than one. Pluralism means there are many ways to God, many truths.

And so first century Rome was pluralistic, syncretistic and what they begin to understand about Christians was Christians would not worship other gods. They worshiped only one God. They were like the Jews in that sense. They were monotheistic. In fact, it's interesting, the Romans, do you know what the Romans called Christians? Not only enemies of the state, they called Christians atheists. Why? Because they did not acknowledge their gods. You know, an alpha-primitive means not, theistic, god. There's no God. That's what we understand atheist to be. They believe in no god. Well, they called Christians atheists because they did not believe that all of the other gods were gods. And one of the things about first century Roman culture was that there was this sense that you had to placate the gods, that is, that you needed to show appropriate reverence. And so the Romans were fine with you worshiping your God, but they demanded some sense of allegiance to the gods of Rome and particularly to the expression of that as veneration of the emperor. Not necessarily worship of the emperor, they didn't have the Persian idea that the emperor was God yet. They kind of flirt with it a little bit, but really the idea is that the gods of Rome, the emperor is the tool of the gods of Rome, and you honor the emperor and you honor the gods of Rome so that things will go right with Rome, with our culture. And the idea is if you don't honor those gods, then the gods become angry and so Christians in being, according to them, atheists are inviting the wrath of the gods of Rome. Do you see that? They're not honoring the gods. And you must honor the gods. This is the way they think. It's a matter of life and death.

And so they see Christians as truly the enemy. "They're trying to undermine our social order. They're trying to undermine Roman greatness, our governing structures." You see, that's the basic suspicion that first century Roman citizens had of Christians and Peter is saying, "Listen, what you need to understand is you're not going to be all that God wants you to be and accomplish what God wants you to accomplish unless you put things in their proper order, and to do that, you must submit to every institution, human institution for the Lord's sake." That's the call of the Christian because in doing that, you will silence their ignorance. You'll show them, "Hey, no, I'm not, as Christians we are not here to overthrow the government. That's not our purpose." That's what he's saying. He's basically saying implicitly, "We're not here to overthrow the government," and isn't that essentially what Jesus said when he was before Pilate? Remember when Pilate's talking to him and he says, "You're a king." "It is as you say." "Well, where are your people not defending you, if you're a king?" He understood that the Jews of the day were looking for

a messianic earthly king that would deliver them from Roman dominion, would overthrow Rome's rule of them and Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, yeah, My people would fight for Me. But My kingdom is of another realm." That's the message of the gospel.

So he's telling us here that Christianity is not about social and political movements. That's not fundamentally what it is about at all. Christianity is not about transforming the institutions of this world directly. That's not our point. That's not our main objective. It may be a secondary concern for the well-being of people, that we would like to see that, and we'll get some of this a little bit, but Christianity is about the transforming of individual lives through the gospel. It does not seek to change the world by changing the structures and then getting to people. It seeks to change people at the very individual, atomistic level, delivering them from sin, and as that happens, one of the effects of it is it does tend to change the culture, changes society.

So those were the two first points: a surprising command, a compelling reason. And what we want to come today to is the third point, a counterintuitive mindset. We saw a surprising command, a compelling reason, the command verses 13 and 14, the reason verse 15, a counterintuitive mindset verse 16. He calls us to a mindset, a way of thinking about ourselves in relation to others in general and to the government in particular and it is definitely a counterintuitive mindset. It's there in verse 16, "Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God." He's saying, this is really how it reads in the Greek, "As free men, as free men having freedom, not as a cloak for evil, but as slaves of God." What he's saying is, "You are free." In fact, the word there is in the Greek twice as it is in the English. "Act as free men. Do not use your freedom." The emphasis is upon freedom for the believer, but the paradox is that "in your freedom live as slaves. You've been set free, now live as slaves of Jesus Christ." That's the counterintuitive part. You're free to now be enslaved to Christ. This is how he's going to do it. The command is submit to the government. The reason is because we need to make the gospel preeminent. We need to remove the barriers to unbelievers that they see against the gospel. And the way we're going to do that is by having an appropriate mindset that as free men, we are not free for our own purposes. We do not belong to ourselves.

I love that. The way God says this, the image of redemption in the New Testament, important biblical concept is that salvation, and there's different windows God gives you in the beauty of salvation, this is one of those windows, you have, if you're a follower of Jesus, you have been redeemed. Redeemed is the language of slavery. It is the language of the slave market. To be redeemed is to be purchased out of slavery. God uses this a number of times. One of the really clear and powerful passages is 1 Corinthians 6:18 to 20. Paul says, "Flee immorality," flee sexual immorality. "Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." He says you've been purchased, you've been bought, you are not your own. You can't use your body for sexual immorality if you're a Christian

because you belong to Jesus Christ. And he's saying the Holy Spirit's in you, how can you possibly use the temple of the Holy Spirit in that sexually dishonoring way? But the underlying argument is you are a slave. You have come to Christ, you've been set free, but the joy of freedom is not for your own pleasure, but slavery.

This is a concept that's again and again, Galatians 5:13 says, it is for freedom that Christ has set you free, "only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." You've been set free to serve. You've been set free to be a slave. Doesn't sound good on the front end, but when you understand what being set free from, we know it's the most wonderful thing in the world and the reality is, slavery to Jesus Christ is the truest freedom that we can know.

But what are you set free from? Think about this because he's saying, you're free, act as free men. He says don't forget that you're free. Know that you're free, but use your freedom rightly. Now think about this, before I get into what we're free from, let me just say how this stands in contrast to the way the world sees freedom. For the world, freedom means to do whatever you please, right? Whatever you feel, whatever's in your heart, obey your thirst, obey, you know, whatever your desire is, let it reign. That's freedom. God says that's not freedom, that is slavery. True freedom is to submit to Jesus Christ.

Now, so he says, what are we free from? We're free from the reign and rule of sin. If you belong to Jesus, you are free from the reign and rule of sin. You see this in John 8:31 to 36, where Jesus says in verse 32, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The Jews say to him, "We've never been slaves to anyone. What are you talking about, freedom? We don't need to be free. We've never been slaves to anyone." It's so ridiculous because they're slaves to Rome right then. But anyway, they say that and Jesus says, "Everyone who sins is the slave of sin but if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." So that to come to faith in Jesus Christ is to be set free from the reign and rule of sin. Now, you're not set free from the presence of sin. You're not set free from the temptation to sin. You still have the body of sin, which you must put to death through union with Christ every day, every moment of every day. It's a fight. But you have truly been set free from the reign and rule of sin. If you're a Christian, you no longer have to sin. And you must believe that. You're free. You say, "I don't feel free." God says you are free. "I don't feel free." You want to put your feelings up against God's word. Only a fool follows his feelings when God has been so clear and plain and if you believe his word and you trust his word, over time you'll begin to feel what's really real. You'll feel free. You'll know that you are free.

You've been made free from sin. You've also been freed from the domain of Satan, the dominion of Satan. Colossians 1:13 says you've been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved Son. You were a prisoner of Satan. He was the God of this age who's blinded the eyes of unbelievers, 2 Corinthians 4:4. He's held you as a captive in his house. But a strong man, Jesus says, the strong man comes, he plunders. I mean, the strong man, I'm sorry, the strong man has his goods in his house, speaking of Satan as a strong man, but one greater than the strong man has come and he's plundering

his house. Jesus says that's what's happening when he's delivering people from satanic control and bondage in his ministry and the Christian has been set free from the domain of Satan.

Not only that, you've been set free from the world system. There's a sense in which this is no longer your home. You're free from sin, you're free from the devil, you're free from the world. This world is just, it's a transient thing passing away. Your citizenship is in heaven. You're heading to Canaan. That's where you belong. So you're free. You're free from the concerns and cares about the destruction of this world. I mean, yeah, you can be compassionate. We ought to be. We should work for the well-being of others. But in reality, we are free men and women in Christ. Now, as free men and women live as slaves of God. The world has nothing on you. Satan has nothing on you. Sin has nothing on you. Don't use your freedom as an opportunity for yourself. Use it as an opportunity to glorify God who owns you and who bought you.

That's the mindset that we're called to. Now think about that. What does it mean to live as a slave? Let's get practical. You're free. You and I are free. We're free to live as slaves of Christ. A slave has no will of his own. A slave has no rights. A slave has no possessions. You don't own anything. You and I don't own anything. Our lives are not our own. Our time is not our own. We don't have any rights. It's all Jesus. A slave has to do what his master says. That's our calling to do what our Master says. What does Jesus want me to do? What are his priorities? What are his purposes in this situation? That's what you and I are called to. That's the favorite, in fact, you think about this actually to the two half brothers of Jesus, Jude and James, they were both children of Mary and Joseph, so half brothers of Jesus. Same mother. They end up writing two books of the Bible. They both describe themselves not as brothers of Jesus, but what? As bondslaves of Jesus Christ. It was their honor to be a bondslave of Jesus Christ. Christian, that's what you signed up for when you said yes to Jesus. You signed up for a slavery that is true freedom indeed, because when you live as a slave of Christ, you live as free from everything else. When you realize that you have nothing, you have everything. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. When you start letting go of things and you start letting God have everything, you realize that you now have everything. You have freedom from every care, freedom from every burden and the joy of knowing that the God of heaven loves you as his own dear child. He's brooding over you. He's watching over you. He's making you more like his Son. Every circumstance in your life, he's orchestrating to bring more and more blessing, to pour out blessing upon blessing as you serve him. There's no better way to live because that's how you're living and if you live that way, think about how that means you relate to people who are calling you evildoers, who are messing up this world. If you don't have any rights, when somebody slanders you, you're not worried about your reputation, it doesn't feel quite the same. And especially when you remember they slander you because they're slandering Jesus, you're standing with Jesus, you have the privilege of suffering with Christ.

Now, let's move to the fourth point: a comprehensive plan, verse 17. I think this is a comprehensive plan for dealing with everybody you come in contact with. This covers the whole gamut, everyone you'll ever meet. "Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear

God, honor the king." This is how you're to act toward others. It ends with honor and begins with honor. Honor all people, honor the king, and in the middle, love the brotherhood, fear God. You see the supremacy of your relationship with other believers. You're called to honor all people, but you're called to love, agape, the brotherhood. There's a different level of affection and service toward other Christians. The way the world knows that Jesus is God's Son and that we are his disciples, "They'll know you're My disciples," how? "By your love for one another." Now we're to love them. We're to be like God and love unbelievers. Yes, we are. And we're to be different that way. But he says they'll really know that you are Jesus' disciples by the way you love one another as Christians. It's your love for other brothers and sisters that makes clear the reality that Jesus is the eternal Savior, that he's the one way to God. It's clear in our love. There's something about the relationships of Christians that are so pure and so beautiful that the world looks at it and says, "God is among us," and it's the love we have for each other.

So there's a priority of love for other Christians above unbelievers around you. Now, certainly there are obligations we have in our marriages and things like that; even if you're married to an unbeliever, you've got to put them in that appropriate place. But there's something about the believer's relationship that we must always esteem more highly. Fear God. You honor the king, but you fear God. God is to be we're to stand in awe of him at all times. Even as you honor the king, the reason you're honoring the king is because you fear God. Your whole life is lived before God for his glory. That's what it means to live in the fear of God, not to be afraid of God. No, he loves you. There's a sense of not love and servile fear, but it's a loving fear. It's a respect, a reverence, an awareness that he will discipline me, but he loves me. But I want us to talk about honor all people, honor the king. What does this look like? Honor all people, honor the king. The word honor means to esteem, to value, to hold in high esteem. So we're to hold other people in high esteem. We're to hold the king, even Nero, even the emperor, the wicked emperor in high esteem. That is, we're to honor his position even if we can't honor his actions.

Now, what I want to do, I want to talk about some balancing truths that we need to understand and I want to remind you that when you read the Bible, you're to understand that the Bible, God has given us in the Scriptures everything we need for life and godliness. His word is sufficient. It's complete, That the man of God may be equipped, furnished for every good work. Everything you need is in these pages of Scripture, the whole Bible. But what we see in the way God's revealed himself and the way we're supposed to interpret is we're supposed to listen to all of Scripture. We're to hear a particular passage and hear its force, and that's what I've been trying to get across, is that this hits us in a way that we need to understand, the issue is we're to have different attitudes toward government than we are prone to have. We're to have attitudes of honor and respect to our leaders. Even though they may be foolish men who are doing wickedness, we need to have honor in our hearts for their position. We need to honor them even with our words, honor them with our attitudes.

This text is saying that, but this text is to be interpreted in the light of all of Scripture. Some people can look at a passage like this and then think you're supposed to do

whatever the government tells you to do, in whatever the circumstance you find yourself in, and that is not biblical. That's a misreading of Scripture. That's reading this passage apart from everything else. And you think about this, it's just common sense that when you hear somebody say something, you interpret it in context of what they say. You don't take a verse out of context. You don't take a statement out of context. I mean, if somebody says something like, um, you know, uh, I was telling, I was telling, I can't think of a good example, but just bear with me and see if this gets us where we want to go. Um, you know, I was telling someone the other day that, um, I really, uh, I really hate, I hated, um, uh, gosh, this is not even good. What I'm trying to say is, if you hear someone say something like, "I absolutely did not say that I hate this." You hear those words? "I absolutely did not say that I hate So-and-so." You could take the words out of context and say, "I just heard you say, I hate So-and-so." Do you see that? That's absurd, right? No, that's ridiculous. The principle is valid for the reading of the Bible. It says something here, but if you put it in context of the whole, then you understand what it means.

You have to hear the whole of what someone says and God says things in other places that balance this particular passage and that tell us that it's not an absolute command, "Obey in every single thing that they ever ask you to do." No. What I want to share with you, I mentioned that Tom Pennington's sermon I read was really helpful and I want to share with you some of the principles. I'm going to give you eight exceptions to this command to obey that I think help us then to have the right attitude because we understand that we're to honor the king but to fear God. What does that look like? Honor the king always, yes, but fear God. And so Pennington in his sermon talks about five exceptions and I'm adding three additional, and so I'm gonna give you eight, eight ways that we fear God while we honor the king, and it means sometimes we do things that the king won't like.

Okay, first, these are exceptions to the command to submit to every ordinance of man. It's okay or it's right and good for you as an individual Christian to acknowledge and to graciously speak against the sins and legal abuse of your leaders. It is right and good for you as an individual Christian to acknowledge and to graciously speak against the sins and legal abuse of your leaders. This is not a violation of what we just read, honor the king because the way that you honor the king is to have an attitude that wants the king to be blessed, you have an attitude of respecting him as a man created in the image of God, you have an attitude of respecting him as a man placed in authority by God, but you also care about him enough to speak the truth to him but you do it graciously and reverently. So it's important to know that it is right and good as an individual Christian to acknowledge and graciously speak against the sins and legal abuse of our leaders.

A couple of weeks ago, Dalton preached on Mark 6, and you saw this if you were here for one of those messages, you saw this laid out before you. What's Mark 6:18? Mark 6:18, John the Baptist tells Herod, we're told that he told Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife," and because of that, he was arrested. Herod had a lot of respect for John in his own worldly sinful way but when John did this, he couldn't stand

that and he put him in jail. But the Scripture is telling that as John was courageous and bold and godly to speak the truth to power and he did it righteously.

So we should speak the truth about our leaders. It's appropriate to say to them in writing or in person, if we had the opportunity, "I believe that the policies you're advocating are dishonoring God and damaging the people that you have been placed over." Things like the way that our present administration is advocating for transgenderism is just astonishing and we can say to them, we could say to President Biden, to others in office, "We respect you. We realize you've been placed in authority by God. We pray for you. But your policies are evil and ungodly in this area. And there are others too, but this area, particularly, you're doing great harm to humanity. You're doing great harm to individual people." I mean, transgenderism and encouraging children to have life-altering operations. Listen, think about this for a moment. This is where we learn how to speak compassionately, but truthfully. You cannot, listen, you cannot change from being a man to being a woman. You cannot do it. I'm not saying you ought not. I'm saying you cannot do it. You can't have a surgery that mutilates your body and may make you appear to be the opposite. You see what I'm saying? But you are not a woman if you were born a man. You will never be a woman if you were born a man, and you will never be a man if you were born a woman. And it's the audacity and arrogance of our present medical community to think they can do that. They actually mutilate and deform people. They can't make anyone the opposite sex. Every cell in your body or 99.9% of the cells in your body are wired in such a way with the chromosomes it's XY or it's XX. They can dig you up 200 years from now, you have whatever surgery you want to have and they will know whether you were a man or you were a woman. Now, so what we would say is we would say that as respectfully as possible, but listen, "You're advocating policies that are devastating people and you're letting children decide that? You won't let a child, you know, until you, you won't let a child decide what he's eating. You won't let a child decide if he goes to school or not. You won't let a child do all of these things, but you're going to let a child decide what sex he is, what you think he can do? That's insane." And we should say that, but we say it respectfully. And we're responsible to do that. That's the first exception.

The second one: it's okay and right for you to request a personal exemption from an ungodly law. It is good and right for you to request a personal exemption from an ungodly law. An example of this would be found in Daniel chapter 1. Daniel 1:8, "Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself." Daniel's been taken into captivity. He and his friends have been captured in the first incursion of the Babylonians into Judah and carried off a number of people and Daniel and his three friends found themselves basically as young promising young men, they were taken into the king's, basically his seminary kind of quasi-university. They're supposed to learn all about the religion of the Chaldeans and also the philosophy and all kinds of the science of the Chaldeans, the Babylonians. And so he's in school, and one of the things he's assigned is every day he's supposed to eat this diet and he realizes as a Jew, in this point in redemptive history, he used to be faithful to God by not eating unclean food and not drinking the particular kind of wine that the king

is offering. And so he graciously asks the captain of the bodyguard. He doesn't, you know, defiantly, "I will not do it." He couldn't say, "I'm a Christian. I'm a Jew. I will not do it." No, he says, "I cannot do it and I'd like to ask you for a possible alternative." He understands that the captain of the bodyguard is in a perilous position. If the captain of the bodyguard were to let him do this and his friends and he show up unhealthy, the captain of the bodyguard might be killed. When you read the rest of Daniel and you see what kind of man Nebuchadnezzar was, you realize it was a serious thing to mess with Nebuchadnezzar.

He graciously goes to the captain of the bodyguard and says, "I want to suggest an alternative. Let us eat vegetables and drink water." And listen, this is not a vegetarian. I always have to point this out. This is not an advocate for vegan. If you're going to be a vegan, you're going to be weaker because this is actually saying God did something miraculous. They weren't eating meat. They were just eating vegetables and water. And yet God made them stronger than they could possibly be naturally with that diet. I'm not trying to tell everybody to eat meat, but anyway, take it as you will. Maybe the Lord wants you to pray about that. No, but seriously.

So he's saying, "I cannot defile myself," because to eat the wrong kind of food according to Leviticus 11 would have been to make himself unfit for the presence of God and he says, "Listen, I understand that you have this legislation or this rule, but I'm going to ask you to give me an exception." It's appropriate for us to do that, to say, "I cannot do what you are saying needs to be done in this circumstance." But we can do it graciously. And God let Daniel have that exception and he saw God work.

I mean, there's a situation like back not just pick on this one area, but it's just such a prevalent area right now, if the state is to come to say, and it has done this in Canada, it may do it here that should not use someone's preferred pronouns is hate speech. That's actually the law of land in Canada right now and if you don't use someone's preferred pronouns, you are propagating violence against them by not choosing to use their pronouns. As a Christian, I think that the Christian perspective would be to say, "Listen," and to say the individual who's asking you to do that kindly at first, "I'm a follower of Jesus Christ. What defines my life is my relationship with God and He has given His word and it's the God of my life, and the Bible teaches that God has made two genders. male and female, and for me to acknowledge another gender would be to violate my core religious beliefs. So please understand that I care about you and I want to honor you in every way I can that's appropriate, but I cannot compromise my core religious beliefs. I hope you'll respect that." That's how we would say it to an individual. That's also how we would say it to the government. The government says you're guilty of hate speech, we'd have to explain that. "Now, I don't believe it's hate speech. I appreciate that you've got to enforce the law that you have to enforce but this is what I believe. The Bible says this, that God has made man and He's made woman and He says that right at the very beginning of the Bible. It's core doctrine and I cannot deny it."

So we would ask for an exception from that, "I ask not be required to do that." In this situation, I mean, you might agree to use a person's chosen name, even if it's not normally

something that would go with the gender, this might be one way that you operate. "I'll use your name, but I will not, I cannot use the wrong pronouns. I'll try not to, you know, use pronouns very much if I can but this is what I must do. I must honor God first, even though I care about you." And then later you can have a conversation where maybe you get even a little deeper into, "Hey, listen, I hope you understand that I wasn't trying to hurt you when I said this. I really care about you and I want to be your friend. I want to be a help to you. And I really believe, I found that following God and following His word is the way to live and if you ever want to know more about that, I'd be happy to tell you about it." You see, to be winsome, but to be immovable, that's the goal. But it's the winsomeness and that's what Peter is getting at when he says submit, because if you're not submitting, if you're having an attitude of hostility toward the government, continual anger toward the government, then you do appear to be the enemy of the government, the enemy of people who want a peaceful world.

So anyway, the second exception if we said it's okay to to speak out against the abuse of leaders number 1, and number 2, to request a personal exception from an ungodly law, number 3: you can use all legal means of redress provided by the existing laws of the country. It's appropriate to use all appropriate redress in accordance with the laws of the country. This is actually beautiful how you see this in the Scriptures. You see it in a number of places, but I'm going to mention some from, let's just turn to Acts for a moment. You see this in the life of the Apostle Paul. He makes use of the laws of the land to provide appropriate protection for himself and the ones he cares about, and also to advance the gospel.

In Acts 16, you remember Paul is imprisoned in Philippi, and the jailer is converted and and anyway, so but the jailer would be killed if they all... remember they got out of prison the Lord, wait, they didn't get out of prison. The Lord opens the gates The jailer thinks they've escaped and they said, "No, we're all here." They were praising God. God opens the gates all the gates miraculously open. The jailer is about to kill himself and he says, "Don't harm yourself. We're here." He preaches the gospel to his family. They get saved They get baptized and then they go back to jail with him because they know they've got to stay in jail with him. They don't want this guy, this new believer, to get in trouble. In verse 35 of chapter 16, "Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, 'Release those men.' And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, 'The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace.'" Hey, good news, you're out of jail now.

Look what Paul does, verse 37, "But Paul said to them, 'They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out.'" They were not allowed to beat a Roman citizen without a trial. They thought these guys that are preaching the gospel are just, they're just Jewish, you know, of the Jewish sect, they're not Romans. And so they beat them without a trial and they put them in jail and Paul says, "Listen, I want those guys to come and own up to what they did. It's against the law, the Roman law, to beat a Roman citizen without a trial. He must be tried before he is punished. So let them come."

So you see, he's operating within the law and so they come, verse 38, "The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city." They're basically, "Hey, don't tell anybody about this. We're sorry. Please just leave the city." That's Paul using the system appropriately.

Then chapter 22, when an uproar happens in the temple, in chapter 22 where Paul is preaching the gospel at the temple and the Jews are ready to kill him and the Romans have to step in to save him. They're not trying to save him, they're trying to stop a riot and part of stopping that riot is getting him out of the way. Verse 24 of Acts 22, "the commander," they've gotten Paul, "the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging," I love that, examined by scourging. "We're gonna see what's up with him, and we're gonna beat him so we can see what's up with him, so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him and why. But when they stretched him out with thongs," so they tied him up, they're ready to beat him, "Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, 'Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?'" Do you see that? He's using the law. "Is it lawful for you to beat a Roman?" When the centurion heard this," verse 25, "he went to the commander and told him, saying, 'What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.' The commander came and said to him, 'Tell me, are you a Roman?' And he said, 'Yes.' The commander answered, 'I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.' And Paul said, 'But I was actually born a citizen.' Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains." You see, using the law. It's appropriate to do that. That's the third point. You see it again later in Paul's ministry as well, but we'll stop there on that point.

Number 4: it is appropriate to flee unlawful and unjust arrest and punishment. You don't have to sit by idly and wait on them to come get you, according to the Scriptures. Matthew 10:23, Jesus, when he was talking to the disciples about going out, he says, "whenever they," that is, the religious authorities of that town, "whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes." He instructs the disciples, "When they persecute you, flee from them."

Also in Acts, we read Paul did the same thing. In Acts 9:23 to 25, when they were wanting to kill him, the Jews plotted together to kill him, remember? They were going to kill him because he had become a believer and we read in 9:23 to 25, "When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, but their plot became known to Saul." This is before his name is changed. "They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket." So it's appropriate to flee unjust arrest or punishment.

5. You can disobey the government only when they require you to break God's law. We talked about this a little bit last time. Exodus 1, the midwives disobeyed Pharaoh. He had ordered them to murder every boy baby, and they would not obey that wicked and evil law. They feared God. Daniel 3, Daniel 6. Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will not bow down to the king. They said, "Let it be known to you, O king, that we're not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up," and they're thrown in the fiery furnace. Daniel 6:10, the Persian ruler, or actually the Median ruler, Darius, made a law, was enticed to make a law that you could not pray to anyone except through him for a period of time. They were doing this to trap Daniel. Daniel went right on with his daily ritual of praying at an open window in his home toward Jerusalem. He disobeyed that ungodly command.

Sixth, I'm going to just wrap these next three up pretty quickly. Six, seven, and eight, you can vote. It's appropriate as a Christian to vote for a less evil government. And let me just say this, whenever you vote, every election you've ever voted in, you were voting for the lesser of two evils. Sometimes you get tripped up on this. You worry too much about the character of the person and if you looked at the heart a little more carefully, you realized that the very best man you ever voted for was a wicked man before God. So you're voting for the lesser of two evils but it's right and good as a Christian to vote because we're showing love for our neighbor by trying to bring about a more orderly and righteous society. We vote for men who call evil evil and good good, who punish evil and who reward righteousness. That's what government is supposed to do. And so we should vote for people who are less wrong about that.

Number 7: it's appropriate for Christians to encourage lawmakers to enact righteous laws. I mean, this is lobbying. It's appropriate. I mean, I think churches should not lobby and Christian organizations need to be careful about it. But Christians, we can lobby the government. We should appeal to them to make righteous laws.

And number 8: it's appropriate as in a free society where we vote, it's appropriate to try to persuade other people to vote for the lesser of two evils and to reason with people. So we don't just sit by idly and let the world, you know, rush off the cliff, but we understand we do all of these things we're doing lightly because we realize that this is not our home. We really don't have an ultimate stake, a lasting stake in this world. Ours is in heaven.

We're going to have to stop there. We'll have to pick up next week with where we are because we need to move on to the Lord's table. But just to wrap up, to think about, you know, the point is that we are to in our lives prioritize the gospel, and that means in our citizenship we're to prioritize the gospel, that whatever happens in any election isn't going to matter as much. It's only going to be a little degree of better or worse. But when we see someone come to faith in Jesus Christ, that is eternal. They have been delivered. They have been saved forever. And you and I are to live like we believe that in the way we relate to the government and in doing that, we know that Jesus Christ and our message to unbelievers who are hating us is, "Listen, I know you don't understand where we're coming from, but we love you, we care about you, and we want you to know Jesus because He can deliver you."

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank You for Your word. We thank You that it is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We know that we live in, Lord, in many ways, relatively speaking to what we lived in a few decades ago, a darker time in our country, more confusion, more evil, and yet we know, Lord, that in truth, even when things were a little better, the issue is whether someone knows Jesus or not. That's the only thing that's really going to matter. Help us rejoice that we are in Christ. Help us be so filled with that joy that we are able to give a reason for the hope that is within us in the midst of a dark and decaying world. For Jesus' glory we pray in His name. Amen.