

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**June 24, 2018**

**The Power of Submission**

**1 Peter 2:12-18**

**Prayer:** *Father, once again, we do thank you that we are here to worship your holy name. We just praise you and thank you for who you are and for what you've done for us, for the many gifts that you've given us. And Lord, this is the time of the service where we open up the gift of your word, where we pray again for the presence of your Holy Spirit and where we ask that you would make this of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well once again, we are looking at 1 Peter's command to live beautiful lives, and our scripture for the last couple of weeks has been 1 Peter 2:12, which says: *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.* And we've seen that the primary reason as to why we lead these beautiful lives is so that we might glorify God. We spend a lot of time looking at developing the fruits of the Spirit specifically for the purpose of infusing our lives with the very qualities that define the beauty of Christ. Our goal as bearers of Christ's image is to

have people look at us, see Christ, and glorify God. And Peter begins to flesh out this beautiful life when it comes next to the issue of authority. This is *1 Peter 2:13-18*. He says: *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor. Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.*

Peter is telling us something that's highly counterintuitive. He's telling us that beautiful lives are lives that submit to authority and that the authority is not limited to good people. Submit yourself for the Lord's sake to every human authority. Now for God that includes kings and governors and fellow believers and even slave owners. And as if to emphasize the point Peter says not only to those who are good and considerate but also to those who are harsh. For many folks those words alone are enough to make them put down the Bible as just hopelessly out of touch or even somewhat complicit in the ongoing struggle against oppressive governments

worldwide. But understand something, understand that Peter is not writing from a position of comfort or power when he's insisting that we submit to earthly authority. I mean when Peter wrote these words, his chief authority was a vicious lunatic by the name of Nero. In AD 64 terrible fire broke out in Rome and it wound up destroying almost three-quarters of the city and the people put the blame squarely on Nero and Nero decided to put the blame squarely on this new sect called Christians. The historian Tacitus describes it way back then, he describes what took place this way. He says: "But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor and the propitiation of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration -- which was a huge fire -- was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called 'Chrestians' by the populous. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the

crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as nightly illumination, when daylight had expired."

You got to understand, this is the authority that Peter is under. I mean it's astounding to me. He says honor the emperor. This was his emperor. This is what he had done. Furthermore Peter's congregation was made up largely of Jewish converts to Christianity and they were already hated and routinely falsely accused. I mean we make this big deal out of fake news today. Folks are all kinds of upset because the truth is mangled on all sides but understand what your brothers and sisters in Peter's day put up with when it comes to fake news. The historian Apion characterized Christians to the Greeks by saying this: "In the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Jews every year fattened a Greek, and after solemnly offering him up as a sacrifice on a fixed day, in a certain forest, ate his entrails and swore eternal hostility to the Greeks." This is what they put up with all the time. So now in the face of such lies and hostility, what could possibly prompt Peter to command brothers to submit to authority that was not even remotely benevolent, honest or trustworthy? Well, it's 2,000 years later, and we still struggle with that command as well. And so this

morning I want to look at this whole counterintuitive idea of submission to authority. I want to look first at the problem of submission, the purpose of submission, and then the power of submission to see why God values submission so highly.

So first let's take a look at the problem of submission. *Submit yourself for the Lord's sake to every human authority.* Now if that's a hard pill for us to swallow, imagine what it must have been for them. Let's face it, we do not like authority. We don't trust it because it's often abused, we don't respect it because it's often mistaken and we don't obey it, because oftentimes it's not what we want to do. Truth be told is that that more than anything else is the problem we all have with submission to authority. We resent it. I mean it's an attitude that we have inherited from our original parents Adam and Eve. If you go all the way back to the very beginning, you realize they had a real problem with authority. They didn't trust it, they didn't respect it or obey it even though it was perfect. And when Adam and Eve fell, they passed that attitude on to all of their progeny which is you and me. You see, we are all of us rebels at heart. We all have this same attitude buried deep within us that says don't tell me what I can and cannot do. Ever since the fall of Adam we have been born with this disobedient attitude which we call the sin nature. *Ephesians 2* says: *And you were dead in the trespasses and*

*sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience -- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. God is telling us that all of us were born and are by nature children of wrath. And that means that we, all of us, have within us this bent toward disobedience and that it's there attitudinally from birth. And having had lots of kids, I was always struck with amazement at people who thought that mankind was essentially good and that it was the environment that shaped good or bad into children. And I've said this many times before, I used to tell those folks I've never had to sit my kids down and teach them how to lie, how to punch, how to pinch, how to trip, how to bite each other. Somehow or other all of that came to them naturally. See the job of any parent is to train a child away from his natural inclinations, away from the fallenness that all of us are born with. And the theological reason for that is simple, we are all born sons of Adam with a predilection towards sin. That means that sin always, always is wresting within our heart as an attitude. Now an attitude can certainly be sinful but attitudes are not transgressions of law. And God says it is law breaking not attitude that is counter to sin. Romans 5:13 says: *For sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted**

*where there is no law. So why did God give us the law? He gave us the law to bubble out our sinful attitude by coalescing it into an action.*

Let me just explain the process here. *Galatians 3:19* says something that's kind of strange at first. It says: *Why then was the law given? It was added because of transgressions until the seed to whom the promise was made would come.* What? Paul said the purpose of the law was to add transgression. Now that may seem bizarre, but understand the process that God is identifying here. What God is telling us here, listen carefully, this is what he's trying to say, he says, we all carry around with us this attitude of resentment towards authority and that it lies buried deep within us and we've had it from birth. And what God is saying is when that resentment encounters the law, it refuses to submit even if it doesn't even understand why. Our resentment starts as an attitude and it ends up as a violation of law. And the reason why law adds transgression is because the law forces attitudes into actions. Paul made that obvious in *Romans 7*. Listen to how Paul describes it. He says: *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet had it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.*

*For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.* What Paul is saying is I never had a problem with coveting until I found out you're not allowed to covet. He said as soon as I learned that, then this sin attitude inside me, this sin attitude leapt into action and it produced in me coveting such as I've never known before. Again *Romans 4:15: For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.* And what God is saying here is that a sin attitude is enough to make you an enemy of God but it's not visible, it's not palpable enough to constitute a transgression. For that you need a law. So what God is saying is all I have to do is make a law and your rebelliousness instantly will make you want to disobey it. Make a law saying coveting is forbidden, suddenly Paul finds himself coveting like crazy. He says: *But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.* I mean this is what Paul is saying, he's saying rebellion was already there, it was already in him, the law simply brought it out into the open.

Let me give you an example of how our attitude towards authority expresses itself even in something that we're probably going to consider pretty trivial. Here's a question for you. When was the last time you understood a speed limit as the actual limit of the

speed you're allowed to go? I mean when was the last time you understood that the fastest speed you could go is posted on the side of the road and if you go past that, you're breaking the law? My guess is it's been awhile. Let me put this in the context of God's law. What we are saying here is that every one of us attitudinally want to break the law simply because it's there. And having a sign telling us what speed we can go is an actual declaration of what the law is. Now our attitude towards that declaration is exactly the same as Paul's attitude towards coveting. We see the speed limit signs and the attitude within just kind of coalesces into an action, and we decide that whatever speed it says on that sign it is simply not fast enough. I mean we know that 65 doesn't really mean 65. I mean 65 really means up to but not including 72, right? I mean have you ever wondered why going 65 miles an hour in a 65-mile-an-hour zone feels so...so inadequate? I have mean do you really think an extra three or four miles an hour is going to make a difference in the long run? Or is it just a way we have of flouting authority? Don't tell me what I can and cannot do. I mean last time I was in Colorado, I was shocked to see that the speed limit at Colorado on the highway is 75 miles an hour. I'm sure you know exactly what that means for Coloradans. It was perfectly borne out, it means that 80 is perfectly okay, 82 to 85 is kind of pushing it. I'm telling you if you go 70 miles an hour on a Colorado highway there are going to be

people flying past you giving all kinds of dirty looks to you. See, we just don't like to be told what to do. So we codify and unify our disobedience and that seems to make it all right.

I heard a story once about a Christian who was caught speeding and he got pulled over and the cop came over and did the license and registration thing, and the cop noticed that he had one of those Christian fishes on the back of his car and he said, "Are you Christian, sir?" The driver said, "Well, yes, sir, praise the Lord, I am." And the cop handed him a ticket and a pocket New Testament, and said, "You need to read 1 Peter 2:13." *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority.* But here's the problem. What if this was a crooked cop? I mean, what if it was a crooked cop or an inept supervisor or even a murderous soldier? I mean if you read *The Voice of the Martyrs* magazine, you know that stuff happens to Christians every single day. How are we to understand why God would have us submit to that kind of authority? See, our problem with submission gets worse and worse when those in authority are obviously abusing their power. But then we look at Peter. And Peter while under the oppressive thumb of a murderous power hungry monster says: *Submit yourself for the Lord's sake to every human authority.* Why? Well the first reason has to do with our own understanding of what power is. I mean there are two radically different types of power in this world and

there are two completely different kingdoms organized around those two different powers. The Bible says in *Revelation 12:7* that there was a huge conflict between these powers. It says: *Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who was called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world -- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.*

Well, first thing we see is that scripture is clear, the devil lost the first battle he ever started. And it was a power versus power thing, the power of Michael and his angels was greater than the power of the dragon and his angels and God's superior power cast him and his angels down to earth. Satan is now on earth and he now represents the power of power itself. Whether it's political, military, spiritual or personal, it is the power to dominate, it is the power to intimidate. Whoever has the most or whoever has the most clever use of it wins. Jesus himself identified the source of that power as Satan and he told us he's fueled by lies and murder.

Speaking of Satan, Jesus said: *"He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."*

All right. Understand what I'm going to say right now. Here, this is really what our problem with submission actually is. You see, you and I know all about the power of power itself. In fact we are very, very comfortable with it because most of the -- most of us have been raised by it. We live in a world with the highest degree of legal sophistication in history but it is still a world governed by the power of power itself. And it's a world that you and I live in quite comfortably each and every day. Consider the words of Jesus. This is what Jesus said at one point, he said: *"If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."* I can tell you that if somebody slapped me in the face, my first reaction probably would not be turning the other cheek and my guess is it would not be your reaction as well. My guess is we would select one of our power options. We would slap the person back, call the cops, hire a lawyer, threaten to sue. Those are power options. Turn the other cheek is probably the last thing we would think of because we, too, have been raised with the power of power. Now we don't go around blatantly lying and murdering our enemies like Jesus says Satan does, but if you listen to Jesus's sermon on the

mount, you will hear him describing our anger at our brothers as murder and our refusal to simply let our yes be yes and our no be no is the equivalent of living with the little lies that we're comfortable with when we're living with the power of power. You see the reason why submission to all authority is so counterintuitive is because it goes against everything we're familiar with. But understand, in that very same passage in which God describes Satan's ouster from heaven and his casting down to earth, he also describes a completely new and different power that God intends to use to counter Satan's power. Again he says: *And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who was called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world -- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come."* This is not the same power as Satan has. In fact this power would stand in complete opposition to the power of power itself and it is the power of love. I mean simply put there are two very different powers, it's the power to either kick butt or melt hearts. You can exercise one or the other but you can't exercise both. And there's really only one power that God wants us to employ. See, the problem of submission is that we live in a world that doesn't begin to understand this alternative power that God wants us to employ. So God has to go

about the task of instructing us constantly because we want to take charge, we want to rely not on God but on ourselves. We're afraid to even admit that we are way, way, way too scared to have to rely on God. So consciously or unconsciously we understand things in terms of power, not in terms of submission.

Now the purpose of submission, the purpose of submission is to step back and to let God demonstrate this power and he demonstrates it through our powerlessness. Paul was desperately seeking the power to conquer a messenger of Satan when God flat out told him in 2 *Corinthians*: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* God told Paul he could choose to fail in his own strength or succeed in God's strength. And when Paul fully grasped the enormity of this alternative power that God was describing, he signed on immediately. He said: *"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* Two very different powers. Paul goes on to say in *Ephesians 3*: *And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have -- again -- power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. And God is telling us through Paul you need power to understand the depths of*

the love of God in Christ, you need power in order to live like we understand that power, and God wants this unique power, his power of love to dominate our lives. I mean God certainly could have used the power of power to eliminate Satan, I mean, after all, God was Satan's creator. He could have just said, "Done." I mean but that would have proven only one thing, that he was more powerful in the arena of power itself. To choose the power of love over the power of power itself would cost God greatly, and it costs those who exercise it greatly, but it's worth the price.

See, the problem of submission is that we are rebels at heart. The purpose of submission is to take us out of our comfort zone that the power of power represents. And finally the power of submission is unique, and it's unique not only to Christianity but to any other type of power this world has ever seen. I mean, in terms of raw power there is nothing on all of earth that is even remotely like it. And it is so foreign, so antithetical to the power we're used to that it's hard to look at the power of love in terms of power or strength or the ability to do things or all of the any other different definitions of what power's supposed to mean to try to even understand it. It's best to describe this power in terms of example because the definition of this power is almost impossible to come up with.

John MacArthur tells the story of missionaries Herb and Ruth Clingen and their young son who spent three years in a Japanese POW camp under the vicious rule of a commandant of Konishi. And Herb wrote a diary and in that diary detailed how Konishi routinely beat, tortured and murdered his captives. Konishi himself admitted that on the day his camp was liberated he had intended to gun down all of the remaining prisoners. He admitted that because years after the war he had been discovered working as a groundskeeper on a golf course in the Philippines. Konishi was captured, he was tried, and he was sentenced to be hanged for his war crimes and he was indeed hung. But before he died, he did an amazing thing. This murderous thug, this monstrous example of the very power of power that Satan loves to emulate, this purveyor of lies and murder converted to Christianity. Grace To You's website says this, says: "Before his execution, however he made a statement. And here was his statement: 'I believe in and I love the Lord Jesus Christ.' And they said to him, 'How did you come to know Christ?' He said he had been deeply affected by the testimony of the Christians he had persecuted. It was the testimony of those Christians in the direst, most horrific possible circumstances that the Lord used to bring him to himself. For him, his hanging was simply his doorway into heaven." See, Herb and Ruth Clingen and their son had submitted themselves to their masters, not only to those who were good and considerate but also to those who were harsh. And in

doing that they unleashed the power of God and the power of God flowed through them and it overwhelmed the resistance of a monster. When you stop and think about the power of the gospel, you have to realize, there was no shortage of power capable of overtaking and liberating this Japanese labor camp where Konishi operated. And there was no shortage of power capable of seeking out the justice that his monstrous acts demanded, and they were all a part, a very good and a very just part of the power and the resources that go to the victors when we are at war. That's the good part of the power of power and that's the good part of what it can do. But you have to understand how limited that power actually is. See, there is no power on earth capable of taking a Christ hating monster like Konishi and turning him into someone who says, "I love the Lord Jesus Christ." The power to do that comes down from heaven but it is exercised right here on earth, and it comes from our union with Christ as we represent him on earth. And make no mistake about it, it is a supernatural power that flows from Christ to us and then from us to the world. And here's where this is a particular problem for us. You see, we live in the greatest example of the success of the power of power in the entire world. I mean we can easily go from cradle to grave without ever having to seriously stop and think about having to rely on God for his power. And so for us in America, that power, God's power, it's foreign. I mean weakness for us is often a choice, not a circumstance, and it's a

choice, quite frankly, we don't like to make. You have to be exposed to people in places where powerlessness is normal to understand how easy it is to grow so accustomed to the power of power that the idea of submission and weakness becomes so counterintuitive you just never even think about it.

I had a discussion with a dear friend awhile back whose adult son had walked away from the gospel. His son was a very bright guy, he was a doctor. And my friend was lamenting the fact that he wasn't able to come up with a sophisticated enough argument to counter his unbelief. I told him there's no power on earth sophisticated enough to do that. I told him he was barking up the wrong tree. I said the only thing that is going to turn your son back to the gospel is the power of the gospel itself, and the only way you can access that is by prayer. I don't think he even thought of that. I don't think it ever entered his mind. You see to say that the power is in the gospel is to take it out of your hands and place it squarely in God's, and we've grown used to thinking that's just not the way we do business. I mean I'd be the first one to say that we have a responsibility to be prepared to give an account for the hope that's within us, I mean, Peter says that as well in 1 Peter, and I'm thrilled to give the gospel whenever I can. But as sophisticated an argument as I can give for the truth of the gospel, it is God's power alone that makes the gospel make sense.

Brothers and sisters, without that power, there is no hope whatsoever. And God says in *2 Corinthians 4*: *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* That's what the power of power can do. And it sounds hopeless and it is hopeless without the power of God. But can you understand how completely useless the power of power itself is in fighting the one battle that God has us here to fight? You see, with God's power, the power that is made perfect through of all things weakness, we have a playing field that is shaped precisely as God wants it. *2 Corinthians 10* says: *For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.*

You see, Konishi's stronghold was not destroyed by superior military power, nor was his argument destroyed by the superior debating power of Herb and Ruth Clingen. Konishi himself was destroyed and taken captive by the power of God working through the submission of Herb and Ruth Clingen. You see in Christ this monster was reborn as a lover of Christ. That's the miracle. That's the power. Like I said, there's no power on earth capable

of doing that. And when we look to find that power exercised in the kingdom of God, we see it repeated endlessly.

You know, I hope all of you have this, I hope all of you get this, I mean, I read -- this is *The Voice of the Martyrs* magazine. I read this cover to cover every issue I get because I feel it's the very least I owe to our persecuted brothers and sisters. And you read story after story after story of the power of the gospel doing what it does with different Konishis all over the world. You read these stories and time again we read of monsters doing their worst and believers submitting to God's power, loving them with that power and seeing lives transformed by that power, and we find that many of the people in that magazine were also at one time like Konishi, persecutors of the gospel itself, persecutors who have been transformed with the loving submission of others. That's the power that God is speaking of. But we don't live in an area of persecution, at least not yet. For us, weakness, weakness is still a choice.

So how do I know when God is calling on me to demonstrate the power of the power of love *by submitting ourselves to our masters, not only those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh*. Well, the next time you find yourself relying on the power of power itself, ask yourself, what does God want from me in this

circumstance? Is he asking you to let his strength be made perfect through your weakness? Perhaps God is asking you to demonstrate the superior strength of a force and a power you have not yet exploited by submitting to something you might have the power to resist or avoid. See for us, submitting ourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority may well be a choice we get to make. So here's my question: Are you willing to make God's choice? Are you willing to turn the other cheek? See, we have the problem of submission which is our desire to rebel, we have the purpose of submission which is to let God's power flow through our weakness, and we have the power of submission which is the unique life changing power that flows from God's strength through our weakness.

And Finally we have the perfect proponent of submission, that's the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ led the way knowing that choosing the power of love over the power of power itself would cost him his own life. See, he would submit to becoming one of us, he would submit to living the same life that we've been given but he would live it out perfectly. He would submit to be a willing substitute for the sins of his children by taking their punishment on himself. He would submit to be executed in our place for our sins and then offer us by faith the opportunity to be cleansed of that sin. We call that the gospel. The good news. And when Peter tells us to *submit yourself for the Lord's sake to every authority*

*instituted among men, he's simply telling us to imitate Jesus Christ because he's the architect of what willing submission is. Philipians 2:4 says: Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. See from Jesus's standpoint that humbling was the peak of his power. It was a power Peter calls us to embrace, and submission is the key to that power. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Let's pray.*

*Father, I pray this week, all of us know what it's like to be living with the power of power, to be living with my rights, my abilities, my choices. Lord, as it comes in the next week or so, we may well come into circumstances where we have the voluntary ability to choose whether or not to submit to something that we don't need to, whether we can fall back on trusting in you. Lord, I pray that we would even now be prepared, that you would be*

*gearing us up, giving us the ability to practice the submission that you want us to practice, to practice the power of love versus the power of power itself, and that you would give us the opportunity, whether it be minor or major to practice to gain ability in doing it, to learn how to do it, give us the ability to follow hard after you, give us the ability to imitate you in this, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*