

1 and 2 Peter Bible Study Lesson 8

1 Peter 2:13-17 Notes

Honor Authority

Introduction:

Today, more than ever, the idea of being against authority has become normal. In fact, some would say that if you do not question authority, then you are part of a corrupt system seeking to oppress people. From school teachers to police officers to parents, rebelling against the authority of any of these is considered by some to be a fundamental right of citizens in a free society.

As Citizens of heaven, Christians submit wholly to divine authority, but the potential misapplication of that truth is that they too can become indifferent and even disdainful toward the world in which they live in, thereby forfeiting many opportunities for positive testimony. Believers' detachment from the world must be balanced by proper respect for and humble submission to all the legitimate institutions of human authority.

Peter tells us to submit to authorities for the Lord's sake---not for your sake or my sake, but for the Lord's sake. To understand this, we have to see the scope of the biblical concept of obedience, submission, and authority. The universe in which we live is not a democracy; God does not rule by referendum (or ballot). It has been said many times that the Ten Commandments are not ten suggestions. There is a hierarchical structure of authority in the universe, and at the top of that structure is the sovereign God, who reigns and rules. He has delegated all authority in heaven and earth to His Son, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. So, at the top of this hierarchical structure of the universe is Christ.

If we are not in subjection to every human institution we are not in submission to God and also to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Can we be on the fence? Is there an in between? Can we wholeheartedly worship our Savior and Creator, but at the same time not submit to His authority and other human institutions He has laid out for us?

If Not Submission What?

Rebellion is at the root of defiance, resistance, control, rejection, lawlessness, and disobedience. Rebellion against authority is rebellion against God (Deut. 31:27; Neh. 9:17). Rebellion is sin personified in Satan the author of lawlessness (Isa. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:12-19). Satan is intimately identified with lawlessness. Rebellion is the practice of lawless people (Isa. 65:1-5). Rebellion results in death (Deut. 14:4-5; 1 Cor. 5:11-13; Rev. 21:8). The plunge of the human race into disaster came as a result of our original parents' act of lawlessness---refusal of Adam and Eve to submit to the Creator. Therefore, every

time we do not submit to the rules that plague us all, we are casting our vote with lawlessness, and every time we go out of our way to submit, we bear witness to the One whose law stands above every law. Every time we obey our employer, our schoolteacher, and our parents, we give honor to Christ, who reigns over the whole universe. This is where the word honor comes into play.

Man's Natural Reaction to Authority:

The Bible shows us that it is not in the natural inclination of man to accept authority. It began with Adam and Eve in the garden, and continues the same today as long as man chooses to be in charge. But one day man's rebellion will come to an end when Christ brings forth His New Earth, where sin will cease to exist, and all things will be made new (Rev. 21:1-7).

David in Psalms chapter two warns us that *'the nations are in an uproar, that the people are devising a vain thing. The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!"'*

This is nothing new under the sun that the rulers of this earth are set against God and His Anointed, Jesus Christ. We see here that man's natural reaction to the authority of God is resistance. Man does not want to be tied or connected to God. They do everything in their power to make sure they are in charge, but its all in vain. Can you imagine how God must look at them in their arrogance? Its important that we know and understand this natural inclination of rebellion against God. First, so we can be prepared on how to face it in the midst of trials and persecution. Secondly, and most importantly, we also have within ourselves a natural inclination to have a rebellious spirit and attitude against God and His sovereign rule.

When Peter and John were arrested in Jerusalem after healing the lame man the high priests inquired to them saying:

"By what power, or in what name, have you done this [miracle]?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead---by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He [Jesus] is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed

standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, saying "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name." And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed. When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priest and the elders had said to them. And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, 'O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.' Acts 4:7-26

Peter and John had just been put in jail overnight, and the next day interrogated. Today in our society how would we respond to these same actions against us? What would our attitude be like after being treated with that much disrespect? Were Peter and John dishonoring to the high priest and elders? Did they back down from telling the truth of Jesus Christ? Did they bring honor and glory to Christ?

These New Testament believers knew and quoted Psalm 2, to provide them understanding and strength to accept the Jewish leaders' rejection of them but most of all rejection to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and rebellion to the sovereign rule of God the Father in Heaven.

The believers continued to pray lifting their voices to the Father saying, "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." Acts 4:27-30

We see the believers entrusting their lives completely to God's sovereign plan no matter what the outcome could be. How did they proclaim Christ as the risen Savior of the world in the face of persecution? What about the believers' families, livelihoods, or even their own lives? How can we as believers today stand boldly for God's truth, honor all human institutions, and not be afraid?

The Command for Submission:

Although they are not ultimately under human authority, God still expects believers to submit to the human institutions He ordained. He wants them to demonstrate godly character qualities and a genuine concern for society---a concern that seeks peace and desires to prevent trouble and crime. To that end Christians will obey all laws and respect all authority, unless called upon to do something God forbids or not do something He commands.

There are many examples in the Bible where Israel was in exile, under other pagan rule, the prophets instructed them to obey the law of the land to respect and honor the rulers (Jere.29:4-14). In the book of Daniel they obeyed the king while in exile until they were commanded to worship the other gods or when Daniel continued to pray to his God even though they commanded him not to.

Believers actually obey earthly authority to honor Gods' sovereign authority. Robert Culver wrote:

God alone has sovereign rights . . . Democratic theory is no less unscriptural than divine right monarchy. By whatever means men come to positions of rulership---by dynastic descent, aristocratic family connection, plutocratic material resources, or by democratic election, "there is no power but of God" (Rom. 13:1). Furthermore, civil government is an instrument, not an end. Men are proximate ends, but only God is ultimate end. The state owns neither its citizens nor their properties, minds, bodies, or children. All of these belong to their Creator, God, who has never given to the state rights of eminent domain. (A Biblical View of Civil Government).

Believers also submit in order to imitate Christ's example of obedient submission to His Father (1 Pet. 2:23) revealed in the Lord's modeled behavior. Christ lived under the unjust and unrighteous rule of the Jewish and Roman authorities, yet He never opposed their right to rule. He denounced the sins of the Jewish leaders (Matt. 16:11-12; 23:13-33), but He never sought to overturn their authority. Likewise, Jesus never led demonstrations against Roman slavery and abuse of justice or engaged in any act of civil disobedience. He did not object even when those authorities unjustly tried Him and crucified Him. Instead of being preoccupied with political and social reform, Christ always focused on matters pertaining to His kingdom.

God is pleased when unsaved people associate Christians with spiritual virtue, righteousness, love, graciousness, humility, and the gospel of salvation

(Phil 2:14-15; Prov. 4:18) rather than protests against human institutions. Paul also had the single-minded, undivided commitment required for believers as they minister: *“When I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”* (1 Cor. 2:1-2). He would only engage in the spiritual war for the souls of sinners, as explained in the following text: *‘For though we walk in the flesh [as mortal men], we are not carrying on our [spiritual] warfare according to the flesh and using the weapons of man. The weapons of our warfare are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood]. Our weapons are divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying sophisticated arguments and every exalted and proud thing that sets itself up against the [true] knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought and purpose captive to the obedience of Christ.’* (2 Cor. 10:3-5 AMP)

These “fortresses” are described as “sophisticated arguments” (speculations). The Greek meaning is “ideologies”. The real war saints must wage is against the deadly ideas, ungodly ways of thinking, and any religious or philosophical systems “raised up against” the truth of God. All unbiblical systems of thought that hold people captive must be smashed by the Word of truth and captive sinners set free to obey Jesus Christ. When the Lord said, *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18:36), He defined the sphere of believer’s calling and duty---to focus ministry efforts only in matters related to His spiritual and eternal rule.

The Extent of Submission:

We see in the content of the Scripture taught that there are three essential purposes for government:

1. The restraint of evil
2. The promotion of the public good
3. The punishment of wrongdoing

From Romans 13:1 Paul established the truth also that God has ordained every human institution to maintain peace and order in society. God has ordained them all; to limit or make exception to the command would condone disobedience and disrespect for God’s plan.

The Greek work *Ktisis* meaning of “foundation, from which institution comes from always occurs in the New Testament in connection with God’s creative activities. God has created all the foundations of human society---work, family, and the government. The apostle’s intent was to command submission to every human institution because every one is God ordained. Believers submit to civil authorities, to employers, and in the family. In the latter two areas, the motive is also for the Lord’s sake.

The command does not exclude authorities who make bad or unjust decisions. The Old Testament acknowledges the existence of corrupt rulers but recognizes God has the prerogative to judge them. Despite the evil that occurs because authorities are fallen and institutions are imperfect, believers must trust that God still exercises sovereign and perfectly wise rule over societies and nations (Gen. 18:25).

The Reason for Submission:

The reason Christians ought to submit to every authority is clear and basic--such conduct stops the mouths of the gospel's critics. It is the will of God for Christians to engage in doing right by respecting authority, so as to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

The word "ignorance" Peter used here has a greater connotation than our English meaning. The word can be described as senseless, without reason, and may express a lack of mental sanity. People in the world are in total darkness and without hope, *'for their [moral] understanding is darkened and their reasoning is clouded; [they are] alienated and self-banished from the life of God [with no share in it; this is] because of the [willful] ignorance and spiritual blindness that is [deep-seated] within them, because of the hardness and insensitivity of their heart.'* (Eph. 4:18 AMP)

Integrity, impeccable moral fiber, and purity of life are all effective character tools to muzzle the enemies of Christianity. Paul commanded Titus to tell this to the new believers on Crete (Titus 3:1-3).

Such virtuous conduct and good citizenship is especially necessary for church leaders. 'The man must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil' (1 Tim. 3:7; Tit. 1:6).

The Attitude of Submission:

The right attitude is imperative if submissive Christians are to maintain their credibility among unbelievers. What did Peter mean by acting as free men? They must realize that, as a result of Christ's redemptive work they are:

1. Free from sin's condemnation (Rom. 6:7, 18; 8:1-2)
2. Free of the Law's penalty (Gal. 3:13)
3. Free of Satan's bondage (Rom. 16:20; Col. 1:13; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 2:13)
4. Free of the world's control (1 Cor. 9:19; Gal. 4:3-5; 5:1; Col. 2:20)
5. Free of death's power (Rom. 8:38-39; 1 Cor. 15:54-56)

But Peter cautions those who are free in Christ to not use that spiritual freedom as a covering for the evil of not submitting to rulers. Covering indicates placing a mask or veil over something; the "evil" here (Kakias) is a term that

means “baseness” and arises from vengeance, bitterness, hostility, and disobedience.

A truly righteous attitude will cause Christians to use their freedom as bondslaves of God. Their freedom has delivered them from the bondage of serving sin into the privilege of being slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-22; 1 Cor. 7:22). A slave defined the lowest level of servitude in the Greco-Roman world, yet for believers it described the joyous freedom to be a servant of Christ and do what was right rather than what was wrong.

When we were strangers to the kingdom of God, we walked according to the course of the world. We walked according to the power of the prince of the air, according to the lusts of our flesh, just as the rest of the world. While we were in that state, the Holy Spirit quickened us, made us new creatures, and called us out of the land of darkness into the land of life. He put within our souls a new inclination, a desire to please God rather than to disobey Him. So, when we offer submission, we are not acting like an incapable soul offering a doormat-like weakness, we are showing our commitment to the King.

The Application of Submission:

Peter summarized his demand for submission to all authority---his citizenship theology---into four practical, applicatory dimensions of life.

1. **Honor all people** –This doesn’t mean we engage in mindless tolerance for everyone’s conduct, but it does mean we show proper respect for everyone as individuals made in the image of God.
2. **Love the brotherhood** – We are to show the world that we love our fellow believers. This is how the world will know we are Christ’s disciples.
3. **Fear God** – Which includes trusting Him in all circumstances, no matter how difficult they are. Christians must worship Him as the sovereign One who orchestrates everything according to His perfect will. Such fear also encourages believers to submit to all earthly authorities, because they have the utmost respect for the One who has commanded them to do so.
4. **Honor the King** – Which brings the issue full circle, back to the basic command of verse 13. This application again echoes Paul’s teaching in Romans 13:7, “Render to all what is due them; tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.” As God’s agent for carrying out the purposes of government, the monarch, president, premier, or prime minister is worthy of the respect God mandates.

When believers obey the principles of this passage, it gives genuine credibility to their faith. Submission to civil authority is an implementation of what might be called “evangelistic citizenship”.

Conclusion:

If we go back to Psalm Chapter two God shows us the plan for man's rebellion against His sovereign rule.

1. Verse 6 – God said, “I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.” God put Christ in charge when He resurrected Him, conquering sin, death, and Satan. Jesus Rules! Believers can celebrate!
2. Verse 8 – God gave to Christ the nations as His inheritance and the very ends of the earth as His possession. Every soul and everything on the earth belongs to Christ. Jesus cares so deeply for every soul!
3. Verse 9 - Jesus will rule the nations with a rod of iron. Revelation teaches us Christ will rule all the nations on earth during the thousand year reign, and He will not go easy on them.
4. Verse 10 & 11 – God advises kings and judges to discern and take warning. Worship the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling. God makes it very clear that because you are a leader, you better take heed to the Lord!
5. Verse 12 – Give honor and respect to Christ. He is worthy of all praise!
6. Verse 12 – If you don't choose Christ you will perish, His anger and wrath will come soon as in the Tribulation. Christ will judge with righteousness (Isa. 11:2-5)
7. Verse 12 – Blessed are those who take Refuge in the Son, Jesus Christ!

As believers we have so much hope in Jesus Christ. The believers in Acts kept their eyes on their risen Savior knowing that their fate and future Jesus had in His sovereign care. Can we trust Him also in every circumstance knowing that He cares so much about every single outcome? Jesus told His apostles the night of His arrest, *“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33)

‘Now to Him who is able to keep us from stumbling, and to make us stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever.’ Amen. Jude 1:24-25

References:

*John MacArthurs New Testament Commentary
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