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Godly Living, Part 2

From the very beginning, “Authority” — or rather, the call to submit to authority — has been a big deal. God is the ultimate authority (cf. Romans 13:1), and as such in the beginning He established three spheres in which His authority would operate in the world.

1. There is Familial Authority- the authority God gives to dads and moms in a family (cf. Exodus 20:12).
2. There is Ecclesiastical Authority- what Christ called “the chair of Moses” (Matthew 23:1-3). This is the authority God gives to the leaders/shepherds of His people in the context of His Kingdom.
3. There is Civil Authority- the authority God has given to the state (Matthew 22:21).

In terms of the latter, according to Romans 13:3-4 God appointed Civil Authority for three primary purposes:

- The restraint of evil, v. 3a.
- The promotion of the public good, v. 3b.
- The punishment of wrongdoing, v. 4.

Now the big question that has seriously challenged God's people throughout Redemptive and Church History was/is: What do you do when the Civil Government becomes rogue? What ought we to do when rather than punishing evil, Civil Government applauds it? Promotes it? Encourages it?

No doubt it was this question that rested in the hearts of God's people when Peter wrote this epistle. At the time Rome was completely out of control! Rather than punishing evil doers, the State was persecuting any and all *in the Kingdom of God* who did good! And so, Peter wrote 1 Peter 2.

1 Peter 2: 13-14, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right."

Talk about irony! What was going on in Rome at the time was the exactly the opposite of Peter says here! Rome was NOT punishing evildoers, BUT persecuting God's people who on the whole were their best citizens. Recall the words of Christ:

Mark 12:17b, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

On account of this command (and the many more like it in God's Word), God's people at this time were the best citizens that Rome could have ever wanted:

- They did their work.
- They paid their taxes.
- They did NOT rebel.
- They prayed for the King (1 Timothy 2:2a).
- They sought to live a quiet life (1 Timothy 2:2b)
- They upheld the law of Caesar knowing that it was the law of God (cf. Romans 13:1)!

And for this, Rome took their homes, imprisoned the most faithful, and beat, tortured, and executed many! It is as Christ predicted.

Luke 21:12, "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute

you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake."

So, what were God's people to do? (Because what they were doing clearly was NOT working!) How were they to live? Ought they to pull away from society, form monasteries, and completely separate themselves from the world? Dr. John MacArthur put it this way:

As citizens of heaven, Christians submit wholly to divine authority, but the potential misapplication of that truth is that they can become indifferent and even disdainful toward the world in which they live, 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. (MacArthur, 2004, p. 143)

1 Peter 2 gives God's answer to the question: How ought the godly to live as citizens of a state that is hostile to them? We pick it up in v. 13 with the call.

[The Call, vv. 13a, c-14a.](#)

1 Peter 2:13-14a, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors..."

Talk about a contrast! This is the exact opposite to what we might expect God would have us do in the face of a rogue government. Submit? How could this be God's will? The answer is found in the theology of governmental authority in the Scripture.

Romans 13:1-2a, "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities [this is generic and so references all governing authorities: Civil, Ecclesiastical, and Familial]. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God..."

This is an important statement. Every lawful authority serves in the place of God. They NOT ONLY are established by God, BUT the authority that is exercised is an authority delegated by God!¹ This is what Jesus told Pilate.

John 19:11, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."

In this regard and as an analogy, we have little if no control over the diseases we might contract, the injuries we might sustain, and so the bitter providences with which we will be confronted in life. Yet biblically speaking, we take them all as from the hand of God! Recall the words of Joseph to his brothers:

Genesis 50:20a, "And as for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good..."

Philippians 1:29, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him,

but also to suffer for His sake.”

When it comes to tragedy, sickness, or disease, though they are bitter and difficult, nevertheless we understand that they have been ordained by a good God to bring about His perfect will in our lives. And so, we submit!

In light of God’s sovereign rule over every king (“The king’s heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.” Proverbs 21:1), ought we NOT submit to the civil magistrate in the same way we submit to any and all bitter providences: *As Coming from the Hand of the Lord?* Most certainly!

In this context notice that Peter began rather broadly. He calls us to submit to “every human institution” appointed by God. And so, we take this command “to submit” in reference to our parents, our pastors, as well as all civil authorities! But then by the end of v. 13, Peter takes the discussion and brings it exclusively to the realm of civil authority, specifically the state.

Romans 13:13c-14a, “...whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors...”-

Here he is talking about Caesar and every governmental official of Rome — which would include procurators, proconsuls, and even those who collected taxes!

In this regard, it is imperative that we understand the command to “submit”. The word is ὑποτάσσω (*hypotassō*) which was a military term which meant “to place or rank under.” It carried the idea of mentally ranking yourself beneath another person such that their wants, desires, or needs were of a higher priority to you than your own wants, desires, or needs. As the object here is the civil magistrate, that means, provided their command is lawful, we understand that it is God’s will that we obey. In this regard, if they should command us to sin, we of course would NOT obey as that would contradict the authority of God which they themselves are wielding. And so, when the religious leaders of Peter’s day commanded the apostles to stop preaching in Jesus’ name (clearly contrary to God’s will), they said this:

Acts 4:19b-20, “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 [will not] stop speaking what we have seen and heard.”

On the other hand, when these same religious leaders went rogue and began placing upon the backs of God’s people all sorts of ridiculous, foolish commands, what was Christ’s exhortation?

Matthew 23:2-3a, “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds...”

From this we understand that Peter’s call to “submit to the governing authority” would encompass any lawful command which is any command that does NOT require us to sin against God!² So “The Call” when it comes to civil authority is to submit to and obey their

laws/commands provided they do not require us to sin.

Now in the context of the first century, this would have raised a massive question: How can we do that? The State just abducted my brother and I'm supposed to take it all lying down? No rebellion? No getting even? In the face of such wickedness, how am I to do that?³ That brings us to the motive for our submission.

The Motive

1 Peter 2:13b, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution..."

What an important qualification! Our "submission" to "every human institution" is to be as "unto the Lord." What does this mean? Paul gives a fuller expression of this command in Colossians.

Colossians 3:23-24, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."

As children of God, all that we do, we do mindful that we are serving a higher cause and so a higher purpose. Even in such things as "eating and drinking" (1 Corinthians 10:31) we do it "unto the Lord"! And so, it is with civil obedience —we obey to honor Christ! Robert Culver put it this way:

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' (Romans 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... (Culver, 2009, p. 47)

In this regard think of Christ. Our Lord lived under the unjust and unrighteous rule of the Jewish and Roman authorities, yet He never opposed their right to rule. While He denounced the sins of the Jewish leaders (Matthew 16:11–12; 23:13–33), He never sought to overturn their authority! Why? Because His focus was on matters which pertained to the Kingdom of God and so loving, serving, and honoring the Lord! C. H. Spurgeon wrote of this:

An Englishman may happen to be in Spain- he wishes a thousand things were different from what they are, but he does not trouble himself much about them. He says, 'If I were a Spaniard I would see what I could do to alter this government. But, being an Englishman, let the Spaniards see to their own matters. I shall be back to my own country by-and-bye, and the sooner the better.'

So with Christians here; they are content very much to let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Their politics concern their own country; they do not care much about any other. As men they love liberty and are not willing to lose it even in the lower sense. But, spiritually, their politics are spiritual. As citizens they look to the interest of that divine republic to which they belong, and they wait for the time when, having patiently borne with the laws of the land of their banishment, they shall come under the more beneficent sway of Him who reigns in glory, the King of kings and Lord of lords. (Spurgeon, 2014)

This is NOT to say we shouldn't endeavor to co-reign with God on the earth. However, it is to say that in all that we do, we live according to a higher standard: the longing and passion to please the Lord! In this regard, consider with me the glorious consequence of such a mindset.

The Consequence

1 Peter 2:1, "For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men."- by "the ignorance of foolish men"

Peter had in mind the accusations raised against Christians at this time in the Roman Empire which came from a total lack of understanding (ignorance)! They charged Christians with such things as

- Murder, on account of the Lord's Supper.
- Incest, since Christians referred to each other as "brother" and "sister".
- Cannibalism, since in communion Christians are said to eat the body of the Lord.

This may seem silly, but at the time of the writing of this epistle, Christians were losing their lives because of these accusations! Truly, such claims arose from "the ignorance of foolish men."⁴ Peter Davids wrote of this this way:

In their rebellion against God they are ignorant of his ways and thus perceive the behavior of Christians in a warped manner. But the blameless behavior of Christians will indeed put them to silence... (Davids, 1990, p. 101)

Speaking of this "silencing" (which literally refers to the "muzzling of them"⁵), as in v. 12 this can be taken in one of two ways: The "silencing" of "the ignorance of foolish men" could be in reference to

- A temporal silencing. Or...
- A judicial silencing that will occur at the Last Judgment.

Now while in 1 Peter 2:12 the focus clearly is on the Last Judgment,⁶ this text isn't so clear. Accordingly, commentators take this in reference to both! By submitting to a lawful

command (even if that command involves our injury), and doing so “unto the Lord” — NOT with anger, bitterness, or reviling, BUT with gentle/humble submission — we demonstrate the face of Christ when He was so treated (remember, while suffering Christ did NOT open His mouth [cf. Isaiah 53:7])! This always has a “silencing” effect! Recall Paul’s exhortation.

Romans 12:19-21, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. ‘But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

This is the exact opposite of how the world addresses those who attack them. They endeavor to crush them... to wipe them out! Yet because we know there is a Day of Judgment when all will stand before God, we are free to allow God to execute vengeance. Until then, our call is to epitomize the face and affections of Christ⁷- such that...

- Where there is hatred, we endeavor to bring love.
- Where there is offense, we endeavor to bring pardon.
- Where there is discord, we endeavor to bring harmony.
- Where there is error, we bring truth.
- Where there is doubt, we bring faith.
- Where there is despair, we bring hope.
- Where there is darkness, we bring light.
- Where there is sadness, we bring joy.

When we suffer like this, we “silence the ignorance of foolish men” (or in the words of Paul, “heap burning coals on their head”! Thomas Schreiner wrote of this saying:

By submitting to government, Christians demonstrate that they are good citizens, not anarchists. Hence, they extinguish the criticisms of those who are ignorant and revile them. (Michael Lawrence, 2010, p. 130)

Secondly, by submitting to the lawful commands of the state, we serve as a tool in God’s hand on the Last Day when He judges the actions of wicked men who have shamefully mistreated God’s people. At this time, all those who have persecuted us will stand condemned, placing their hand over their mouth. Speaking of the Last Judgment, Isaiah wrote this:

Isaiah 25:1-5, “O lord, Thou art my God; I will exalt Thee, I will give thanks to Thy name; for Thou hast worked wonders, plans *formed* long ago, with perfect faithfulness. For Thou hast made a city into a heap, a fortified city into a ruin; a palace of strangers is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt. Therefore a strong people will glorify Thee; cities of ruthless nations will revere Thee. [Why? Because as fierce as was the persecution of the wicked, notice the protection of the Lord by which He delivers His people NOT *out of* trial and difficulty, BUT *in it*...] For Thou hast been a defense for the helpless, a defense for the needy

in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat; for the breath of the ruthless is like a *rain* storm *against* a wall. [And what will be the result on the Day of Judgment?] Like heat in drought, Thou dost subdue the uproar of aliens; *like* heat by the shadow of a cloud, the song of the ruthless is silenced.”

This is but one of many passages in the OT which speak of the persecution of the godly, the protection of the Lord, and the silencing effect this will have in the Last Day. On that day, the nations will confess that Jesus is Lord, that His people were righteous, and that the judgment that God is about to render (the Lake of Fire) is just! That is the “silencing of the ruthless”⁸- which clearly is in the mind of Peter in the text before us!

And yet for this to take place, God’s people must suffer well! They must NOT revile, curse, or threaten. RATHER, we must uphold the law, maintain our faithfulness, and so honor the king! You must see that through this God closes the mouths of the ungodly! This is shown to us in Job! When Satan was given free access to attack and Job suffered well (cf. Job 1:20-22), God used that to condemn Satan.

Job 2:3, “And the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause.’”

Christian, at any given moment as you interact with the world you have the opportunity to honor Christ the way Job honored God. Do not resort to the flesh, but knowing the glory that is yours in Christ, submit!

In this regard, consider if you were the victim of a crime and yet you knew were being filmed and that film was going to be used in a court of law to condemn the wicked actions of the criminal, how would you conduct yourself during the crime? I think you would suffer well for you would not want to be embarrassed.

Christian, everything that is occurring in your life is being recorded NOT by man, BUT by the Lord. Everything that is hidden someday will be revealed! Accordingly, live with that knowledge as you are attacked, ridiculed, and persecuted. Give God this important tool of justice; a child of God who suffers well under the hand of the torturer!

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End Note(s)

¹ This is one reason for why we need to pray for our governmental leaders. Insofar as they use their position to further their cause, line their pockets, and so promote their agenda, they will render account for it in the Day of Judgment as ones who mismanaged their God-given authority!

² Wayne Grudem wrote, "There are occasions recorded in Scripture when God's people have disobeyed a human government and have been approved by God for so doing (Exodus 1:17; Daniel 3:13-18; 6:10-24; Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-29; Hebrews 11:23). The principle to be drawn from these passages is 'obey except when commanded to sin'. This is the Christian's responsibility toward all forms of rightful human authority, whether the individual Christian agrees with all the policies of that authority or not." (Grudem, 2009, p. 125)

³ By way of note, Christ called His disciples to pay taxes to Rome, a tax which could have been the monies given to purchase the cross on which He would soon hang (cf. Matthew 22:15-22)!

⁴ Spurgeon wrote, "Ignorance, you see, is a noisy thing. An empty drum makes a loud noise when it is beaten; and empty men, like empty vessels, often make the most sound. How then are we to silence this noisy ignorance? By argument? No, for it is not amenable to argument. Ignorance is to be silenced 'by doing good.'" (Spurgeon, 2014, p. 1 Peter 2:14)

⁵ As in, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing" (1 Timothy 5:18).

⁶ I refer you to my sermon from last week.

⁷ The following was taken from the words of Francis of Assisi.

⁸ Cf. also Jeremiah 50:29-30. Speaking of Babylon who took the call that God placed on them to punish Judah too seriously such that they demolished God's people, "Summon many against Babylon, all those who bend the bow: encamp against her on every side, let there be no escape. Repay her according to her work; according to all that she has done, so do to her; for she has become arrogant against the Lord, against the Holy One of Israel. [this is in reference to their ill-treatment of the people of God in vv. 33 ff] Therefore her young men will fall in her streets, and all her men of war will be silenced in that day,' declares the Lord."