

1Pet 2.13-17—Submitting to Civil Authorities

It is Our Duty to Submit

- I. The three most important words in 1Peter are *way of life*, *be subject to*, and *suffer*. The word *be subject to* comes into the forefront in this section (2.11-3.12). See 2.13; 2.18; 3.1.
 - A. At the heart of this new section is this truth: there's no such thing as a God-honoring, Christlike life of holiness without godly, Christlike submission to God-given authorities.
- II. What is it *to be subject* and to *submit*?
 - A. Essentially, it means to yield to authority, to give obedience to a person or institution that God's placed over us. But it also means respecting and honoring the persons who hold those offices, cf. v.17; Acts 23.1-5; Ex 22.28; Jn 19.11.
- III. We're to be subject to *every* human institution.
 - A. God has told us what church government is to look like, but He's left civil societies to form their own governments. And whatever they may be, He calls us to submit to it.
- IV. There are a lot of questions as to how this works out *practically* in every society and government, but Peter sets forth a fundamental principle of Christian obedience in this text: Christians are called to be government-supporting, law-abiding, citizens.

The Motives in Support of It

- I. God has appointed our governments for our good, v.14
 - A. God has ordained human governments for the good of society. He's put a sword into the hand of every magistrate (Rom 13.4) giving them the right and authority to govern. And regardless of how well a government governs, our duty remains the same.
 - B. There's a real comfort under this motive in that it means our governors are accountable to God for their governing. One day, every governing official will have to answer to the Lord for how he governed.
- II. By doing good we'll silence our foolish accusers, cf. Ez 4.15; Acts 21.28; Lk 23.5.
 - A. This reminds us of our Lord's charge to His people in Babylon, Jer 29.7: do good, be good, and pray for good to come upon it. It also reminds us of Paul's charge in 1Tim 2.1-3.

- B. Part of our gospel witness in the world is found in our honoring those in authority over us: respecting them, speaking kindly and honorably of them, praying for them, and obeying their laws—insofar as they don't call us to disobey the laws of our God.
- III. Because we should live as those who are free in Christ, Jn 8.36.
 - A. In Christ we enjoy a spiritual freedom from sin, and it's a freedom unto obedience. It's a freedom to obey God and this is His commandment: that we be subject to every human institution as being from Him for our good. Thus, we submit to governing authorities *because* of our freedom, not in contradiction to it.
- IV. Three more motives:
 - A. For the Lord's sake, v.13. What are we not willing to do for His sake? If He asks/commands us to do it, then however hard it is, should we not do it—for His sake?
 - B. Because it's the will of God, v.15.
 1. This is the strongest and most binding reason that can be given to a child of God who's heart is resigned and resolved to live for God: that it is God's will for him.
 - C. Because you're a God-fearer, v.17.
 1. If you fear God, then you'll strive by His grace to please Him. And in this context that means submitting to civil authorities for His sake—as part of what it means to live honorable lives among men (v.12), and as part of what it means to proclaim the excellencies of the God of our salvation (v.9).

Conclusion

- I. Obviously, if we're to submit to our governing authorities for the Lord's sake, then we can't submit to them in anything against the Lord's command.
 - A. When our magistrates and rulers command us to sin against God, then they've overstepped their bounds and we must obey God rather than men, Acts 5.29.
 - B. And if that means suffering the wrath of men, then we can do so with a clear conscience before God, assured that He'll give us the grace to submit ourselves to the very sword He put into their hands.
 - C. But short of sin, we must honor and obey our civil authorities for the Lord's sake, for this is His will, and His example, Jn 19.17.