

Subject: *Biblical Truth about Government – Part 3*

Scripture: *1 Peter 2:13-17*

The Bible has a lot to say about the role of government and the role of its citizens. On the one hand the Bible speaks about the authority and responsibility of those who govern, and on the other hand it speaks about the responsibility of those who are the governed.

The Authority and Responsibility of Government

1. God delegates His authority to government officials
2. God authorizes government to promote good and punish evil
3. Government officials are the ministers (servants) of God

The Submission and Responsibility of Citizens

1. Every citizen should submit to government authority
2. Every citizen should pay taxes to the government
3. Every citizen should respect and honor government officials

Like the passage in Romans 13:1-7, this text stresses the importance of submission.

1. The command to submit – vs. 13, “Submit yourselves”

It is a clear command. This is a voluntary, willing submission. Submit is a military term that means “to arrange or line up under authority.” The concept of submission is a distinctive Christian virtue. Peter introduces the idea of submission here and gives three areas where it is essential: submission in the government, submission in the workplace, and submission in the home. In each case, it is voluntary and willing submission.

2. The extent of submission – vs. 13, “to every ordinance of man...the king...or governors”

It is a comprehensive command. This refers to every God-ordained creation or institution. God has created and ordained three human institutions: the family, the government, and the church. We are to submit to every institution of government and to people in every level and form of government. Peter refers to the king (emperor), who at that time was Nero, an ungodly ruler and a madman. Governors were those who served under the king’s authority.

For us, it means we must submit to every institution of government and to government officials at every level, the president and those in national government, the governor and

those in state government, the mayor and those in county and city government, also judges and police officers at every level of government. God ordained government to do two things: to punish evil and promote good

This is the difficult part—we are to submit to government officials regardless of their political party, their moral character, their competency, or their personality. The only time we must not submit to the government is when we are forced to do something that God forbids or when we are forbidden to do something that God commands.

Acts 4:18-20 ¹⁸ *And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.* ¹⁹ *But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.* ²⁰ *For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

Acts 5:28-29 ²⁸ *Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.* ²⁹ *Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.*

But even then, we must not try to overthrow the government. We simply do what God says and then accept the consequences whatever they may be.

3. The motive for submission – vs. 13, “for the Lord’s sake”

It is a matter of honoring the Lord and bringing Him glory. Why are we doing this? It’s for two reasons basically. First of all, we submit in obedience to the Lord. Since all government authority is given by God (Rom. 13), we submit to authority for His sake.

There's a second reason we submit: we also follow Christ’s example. Look at 2:21-23 Jesus lived under unjust government all of His life, yet He never attacked those in authority. He never led a protest or took part in civil disobedience. He never led a demonstration against the corrupt Jewish leaders. He never led a demonstration against the corrupt Gentile leaders. He never even protested when they violated every law of justice in His own trial. If anybody had rights, Jesus had rights, yet He chose to submit.

Jesus put His responsibilities ahead of His rights. He spoke only of the Kingdom of God. He called sinners to repent. He simply entrusted Himself to the God who judges righteously. Jesus knew His Father was in control.

4. The outcome of submission – vs. 15, “that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men”

When we submit to government authority, we silence the critics. The whole point of the passage is to remind Christians to live in such a way that we stop the mouths of those who criticize our faith. There is no greater way for people to see the power of the gospel

than to see the life of a transformed person. The world needs to know that Christians are not just nice people, they are new creatures.

Peter is saying that it's essential to live in such a way that your testimony becomes believable. That the transforming power of Christ is made evident not only by what you say but by what you are. The ignorance of verse 15 is not just lack of information, but hostility and rejection of the truth. It is willful ignorance. By doing well we can silence the critics. As we read and study this text we may think about the life and character of someone like Billy Graham, Charles Stanley, John MacArthur, or R. C. Sproul. They lived in such a humble, respectful way. What can you say against men like that?

5. The attitude of submission – vs. 16, “as free...but as the servants of God”

As Christians we have spiritual freedom. We are free, but we are not to use our freedom to do what we want. We are free to do what we ought. We should never use our freedom as a cover-up for doing what is evil. We are free, yet at the same time we are servants (slaves) of Christ. We're free from the world and we're free from the bondage of sin and Satan. Christ made us free by redemption (1:18). We are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, but our liberty must not become a license to do wrong.

Peter closes this section with four short commands in verse 17. These four commands are a summary of Biblical truth about government: Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

We should give proper honor, respect (esteem) to all people, no matter what their race, nationality, color, or background. The other commands naturally flow out of the first. We are to have a special love for our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. We are to have a healthy reverence and respect for God. And we are to honor the king, no matter who he is. Notice that fearing God and honoring the king go together.

Proverbs 24:21-22 ²¹ *My son, fear thou the LORD and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change:* ²² *For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?* (NLT) “My child, fear the Lord and the king, and don’t associate with rebels. For you will go down with them to sudden disaster.”

We are to honor government leaders and honor the Lord by being good, submissive citizens. Now we are citizens of heaven and earth, and we have an obligation to both. To be a faithful child of God and citizen of heaven is to be a faithful citizen on earth.