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# Sermon Notes

July 4, 2021

First Congregational Church of Pomfret

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## Citizenship

1 Peter 2:12-17

### America Then and Now

- ❖ Even if America has never been a pure, Christian nation, God, truth, the Bible, and morality were revered in the early days of our country
  - The Declaration of Independence testifies of
    - a belief in a sovereign Creator (“All men are created equal... endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights...”
    - “a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence”
  - large numbers of people sought God fervently, and God heard them and blessed them with peace and prosperity
- ❖ Today, God is not sought out and God’s Word is not honored
  - militantly secular
  - America’s real god is money
  - a misunderstanding of the relationship between rights and responsibilities
- ❖ The blessings of God still surround His people even in the midst of a godless and fiercely secular environment

### Be Subject

- ❖ Despite persecution, abuse, the marginalization and ridicule of others, Peter calls us to take the high road
- ❖ *Be subject to every human institution for the Lord’s sake*
  - all kings, presidents, governors, judges, etc... rule by the will of God (Romans 13:1)
  - government is God-given
- ❖ We are to be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution insofar as such institutions and rulers do not command us to do anything God forbids or forbid us from doing anything God commands
  - the picture of soldiers lining up under the command of their general
  - this is more than a passive action
    - there is an active intent behind what Peter exhorts us to do
    - in properly relating to those who rule, we are not meant to withdraw, be uninvolved or to disengage
  - for the Christian, neither isolationism or anarchy is the answer
    - active involvement in the world is a fundamental part of the Christian mission
    - this IS the Lord’s work!
    - the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action

- ❖ Living our lives to honor God is the cornerstone of living evangelistically
  - we are to use our freedom in a way that brings positive attention to God
  - we must walk the tightrope between inner integrity and active involvement in a non-Christian world

### But What If...?

- ❖ Historically, rulers have tended to overstep the bounds of their God-given authority
- ❖ How are we to respond when human authority sets itself on a collision course with the revealed will of God?
  - the early Apostles faced this same contradiction (Acts 5:29)
  - there is a place and a time for civil disobedience when governments and leaders attempt to compel believers to disobey God's revealed Word and will
  - we must be prepared for the way such allegiance to God can, will, and often has led to persecution and martyrdom
- ❖ Rulers are intended *to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good*, they are not intended to bind our consciences in ways that contradict God
- ❖ We are to live as people who are free, but we are also to live as servants of God
  - living as servants of God is not drudgery
  - living as servants of God is an honor and a privilege

### A "How To" Lesson

- ❖ How we are to relate to groups of people
  - *honor everyone* (includes those outside the fellowship)
  - *love the brotherhood* (pertains to those inside the fellowship)
- ❖ How we are to relate to individuals
  - *fear God* (it is **only** God whom we are to fear)
  - *honor the emperor* (superior BUT NOT supreme)
- ❖ Using our freedom in these ways contradicts the false perceptions of those who malign Christians and Christianity

### Personal Application

1. In what ways do your attitudes toward government and government leaders reflect the priorities Peter sets before you here? In what way do your attitudes fall short of these standards? What positive, proactive choices and decisions will you make in order to take these thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ?
2. Looking at Peter's "how to" list (*Honor everyone, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the emperor*) which of these actions are easiest for you? With which do you struggle? Ask God to help you in your weakness.
3. Are you prepared for the consequences that may arise if the time comes when you must choose to obey God rather than men? (*cf.* Acts 5:29)