

Good morning. May the Lord bless you and give you peace.

Have you wondered how certain parts of the Bible could ever apply to us? Think of the Bible stories that you were exposed to in your childhood, and in your personal study of God's word. We can recount the stories of Daniel in the lion's den and determine some ethical and religious application, but realistically, can I really ever expect those kinds of circumstances to challenge my life? So it is with the story of David and Goliath, and Esther, and Elijah with the prophets of Baal. Yet, as society leaps further away from what can be known about God and His truth through simple and honest observation, and what can be known about Him in His word, we can see perspectives arise that will challenge God's people in such difficult ways. Just take, for example, the admonishment by Paul to be the husband of one wife if you are to be eligible for eldership. For generations in our society we have looked at the biblical implications of that teaching to the mind and heart precisely because we never had to deal with a person in the church who was a polygamist. And yet the cultural and legal perspectives are trending towards any relationship that is deemed consensual. The issue that rises to the fore with our text is that of the Christian responsibility to government, and how far that responsibility is to be taken. It is certainly an apt word for our cultural reality as we reel in anarchistic expression and philosophies, as well as absolute hatred amongst and towards political leadership from all perspectives.

As we approach this teaching from Peter, we cannot forget that Peter is couching all of His teaching on the distinction of what we have now that we are in Christ. Peter says of true Christians in **1 Peter 2:9** "But you are a chosen race...that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Everything that we do must be filled with a commitment to broadcasting the amazement of God who called us in Christ.

How do we broadcast, proclaim, declare, the excellencies of God who called us out of darkness to light? Peter distinguishes that it is done through personal and corporate holiness in the previous passages we have studied. In our text as a means of distinguishing the personal and corporate holiness that is demanded of our Christian life, Peter highlights our responsibility to governing authorities; **2:18-3:7**. Peter also highlights our responsibility within family structures, especially as experienced within the Greco-Roman world. Let me just note that **2:18-25** addresses household slaves for the purpose of revealing Jesus Christ even there. The gospel underscores our freedom in Christ and rejects any presumption that it somehow encourages slavery. Stay tuned for the message on **2:18-25**. Today we are considering our exhortation towards governmental authorities.

How is this exhortation made by Peter? Peter introduces the same imperative applicable to governing authorities, servants, and husband and wife relationships – that is how we know that these are tied together. Let's consider our responsibility to be subject to governments.

**.I. Responsibility to Governments.** Peter begins in **verse 13** with the imperative form of the Greek verb for subordination. Literally, be subordinate. It's a command as much as it is a command to be holy and to put away sinful pleasures and actions. **One commentator brings out that this is a military term which directs the arrangement of personnel under the commander.** (MacArthur Study Bible App, 1 Peter 2:13) This is important because it focuses on *authority structures, not whether someone is better than another*. Biblical subordinationism is never diminutive of a person's equal value before God, rather it underscores something of the divine relationship. Seeing as we are created in His image, we must anticipate that every sphere to which we are called as individuals is a sphere that reflects the nature and character of God in some measure. To continue with our illustration of the private in the army, a private in the army is as much an image bearer of God as the most distinguished general, but a private's authority does not outrank the authority of a general. Jesus Christ submits to the Father, though Jesus Christ of equal essence and power with the Father.

Peter goes beyond the concept of reflecting the image of God for in our submission. Another reason that we are to be subject to governing authorities is for the Lord's sake. In other words, our commitment to honor authority structures within society is directly tied to our affections and responsibilities towards Jesus Christ. We cannot be faithful Christians and anarchists at the same time. *If you support the violence and disrespect for authority structures in our current climate you are in direct violation of God's command to you as a Christian.* We serve under a different ethic than the ethic of this world which is passing away.

This gets to one of the key issues of the Christian life, that salvation is not simply a path to heaven, but a relinquishing of my authority and desires to God because He alone is worthy to lead my life. Paul admonishes us like this, your bodies are not your own, you were bought with a price, therefore glorify God with your bodies. (1 Cor. 6:20) I cannot say I am a Christian and at the same time reject submission to God's commands. **If all you want from God is eternal life, and not only that He will rule and lead your life according to His good pleasure, then I wonder if you are a Christian at all. Submit, for the Lord's sake.** Is Jesus that important to you that He can command such authority in your life? Christians may struggle with this, but ultimately, we will surrender to, submit to, and obey the voice of God. Now you might be tempted to say that no one has that kind of authority over your life except you. But see, that is the whole reason for coming to Jesus. Deep down as human beings we know that even the best of us is sinful. Christianity is a recognition of our inability and God's ability.

We are to be subordinate for the Lord's sake to every human institution. Peter then outlines two examples. Submit to the highest authority of the land, in Peter's case it was the emperor Nero, and we are to submit to those who are appointed as extension of that authority, like governors. Why we do so is innately connected with their purpose. What is the purpose of these institutions? They are, in part, responsible to punish evil and honor those who do good. Part of government's divinely appointed responsibility is the retaining of order such that evil is punished and good is recognized and allowed to thrive. In fact, when we function under that mantra, Peter says in **verse 15** that our goodness will silence the ignorance of foolish people. The slander and the lies will come to light because the good works that we do to proclaim the excellencies of God will be in stark contrast to the narrative of the day. Part of that good work is being subject to governing authorities.

Yet Peter says in **verse 16** that even though we are to be subject to these structures of authority, we are free. We **give** that surrender as Christians; it is not taken. But let us be careful not to use our knowledge of what Christ has done for us in setting us free as a vehicle for evil. Peter is concerned for that so in **verse 17** introduces **4 more imperatives**. Honor everyone. Love other Christians (the brotherhood), fear God, and honor the emperor.

Quickly stated, what does it mean to honor everyone? The word honor is used in Greek to underscore esteem, value and to regard. Peter applies that to everyone. What a difficult command! How much regard do you have for Nancy Pelosi, or Chuck Schumer, or President Trump, or Vice President Pence? Do you esteem those who kneel when they play the national anthem and those who stand alike? Dear friends, ***if our culture has shown us anything it is that we as Christians struggle with displaying the Christian ethic that the Lord Jesus Christ employed and demands of us.*** Why do we value others like this? We value them because God has valued them in stamping His image on every soul that is conceived. We value them because God valued them by sending His Son to be a propitiation for our sins, and not ours only but for the sins of the world, as the apostle John says (1 John 2:1-3).

What about to love the brotherhood? How do I know when I am loving Christians universally as God has commanded us through Peter? We can say it like this, what does it mean to love the church in Evansville? Here is a scenario. Let's say that you are best friends with a couple that is also your sister/brother-in-law, or brother/sister-in-law respectively. One day, seemingly out of nowhere, they suddenly split up and are irreconcilable. How much would that affect you? That emotion is the kind of emotion we should have with churches that split because of an inability or unwillingness to reconcile problems within the church. Do we truly grieve when churches are broken and God's people are scattered? Are we truly excited when a faithful congregation begins to see revival and grow in ways that ours is not? **Love should drive the joy of success and the pain of failure in our lives towards other**

**Christians.** If we don't really care that a community of light has lost its way, do we really love the brotherhood as we are intended to love it?

What of the fear of the God? Do we really live in light of His constant watch care and vigilance over us? How does the fear of God inform our actions or inaction? If the fear of God is real it anticipates that God will hold is accountable for the things that we do in this life. As Christians it is not that I lose my salvation for unfaithfully stewarding a gift, but I do lose reward in heaven, and I will incur God's corrective hand as Father. If we don't think God cares, we will not either.

Here we are told God cares about submission to governing authorities. In fact, Peter moves from the fear of God to honoring the emperor. How do we esteem the emperor? Well the fear of God compels me to apply the scriptures that God gives regarding leaders. I pray for them. I do not speak evil of them. I seek their salvation. I accept their direction. We are in an election year. Determine now how you will respond to the outcome or you will be driven to reflect your sinful inclinations, as we all are outside of submission to God.

But the question must be asked, what do we do when the governments are bad? Well, we can consider Peter's example even here in the text, and then we can consider Peter's life. The Roman government could be terribly cruel. It was, after all, the Romans who fulfilled the task of crucifying Jesus at the behest of the Jewish religious leaders. Peter still writes what we read. In fact, in the recounting of the death of Jesus Christ at the behest of the religious leaders, the apostles were simply factual. They did not embellish the story, but rather told it as it was and included an invitation of forgiveness from God even for that sin, if they would but repent and embrace Christ. As we speak about our governing authorities, what are we saying about them? What good works are we doing as Christians that will shame the perpetrators of lies?

Further, Peter shows us in his example in Acts, that when the rulers forbade them from proclaiming the excellencies of Christ they simply said, they must obey God rather than men. Here is one of the most crucial points in Christian ethics regarding civil disobedience, ***it isn't until we are told to disobey the commands of God that we are free to reject the direction of leaders***. There were a lot of sins in Babylon that Daniel was not compelled to participate in. But when Daniel is commanded to stop praying, he disobeys the command and maintains his spiritual disciplines before God. Another example comes from the slavery of Israel in Egypt. Hebrew midwives, you must kill all the male children. Response: no. We can fight appropriately for the termination of abortion, for biblical sexual relationships, and for the right to practice our religion, but as Christians we do so while seeking to honor and obey the authorities above us. But the minute **we are commanded** to abort, to proclaim a different view of sexuality than the scriptures teach, and are forbidden from practicing our faith, we obey God, not men. Submission might be hard, but it never demands that **we** follow to the point of sin, and it always makes room for seeking deliverance from evil subjugation. Christians fled from persecution, Peter himself was miraculously delivered from prison, and so Christ admonishes that we be ready for those kinds of days.

But consider as well that God's people ***never sought to violently overthrow the governments***. Daniel went to the lion's den for disobeying the law. Shadrack, Mishak, and Abednego ended up in the furnace. Peter, Paul, John Luke, Mark, all these and many, many more all experienced physical abuse and incarceration because they kept preaching Christ and Him crucified and risen again. David did not fight against Saul's Israel until Saul was dead. Jesus Himself refused to adhere to the unrighteous laws of the Pharisees and took His cause all the way to the cross. As Christians we prepare ourselves to honor God above all others, and to honor others as God has given them authority. But God is always first.

Let's apply this to our current situation. Thankfully, our church has had the freedom to meet as essential business in Indiana. We adapted as the church can since we worship God in Spirit and in truth and are not bound by location. But other churches in our nation have been told that they cannot meet and worship, or if they gather their expressions of worship, like singing, must not be exercised. There are many things abundantly clear, one is that the government over those areas has directly commanded disobedience. They cannot obey. We are commanded to

gather together as believers. It doesn't have to be in this room, and not everyone has to be together to honor the teaching of scripture, but to ban our meetings to worship in some form *together*, not just virtually, is to command us to disobey God, as it is a call to disobedience not to sing. We can show deference for a moment as we were concerned for the wellbeing of our brothers, but corporate worship cannot stop, even if it is in smaller gatherings. Though the secular world doesn't believe it, I still remind them of this, God brought severe judgment upon Egypt for their refusal to let God's people worship. God will have His praise from His people.

I also remind you of the Supreme Court's decision this week not recognizing a church in Nevada's appeal to function as other businesses in regard to the amount of people who could gather in one place. The court rejected the church's position and upheld a mandate restricting gatherings though they were celebratory of casinos continued function on a greater capacity. It was, as anyone who can understand can see, absolutely unconstitutional. What is our response? If we think that we are safe here because it is Indiana, we better think again. Satan will do anything to diminish the church's function of worship and its visibility in culture irrespective of our location. So, apathy is not only stupid, it will destroy us. We can be angry, after all, the scriptures say, "be angry and sin not" and "let not the sun go down on your wrath," implying that we have to be angry sometimes. But what are we angry for? Are you angrier that the constitution, which is not inspired, is blatantly ignored, than you are about disobeying God's inspired word?

Here is an example. God commands us to pray. We are to pray individually. We are to pray corporately. His Temple was called a house of prayer. Why are we not angry for the lack of prayer in our lives individually, and corporately? As authority goes, it should be worse that we disregard adherence to the word of God more than to disregard for the constitution. Yes, it is a significant problem to ignore a document like the constitution. But it is abject sin and pride to ignore the word of God. So, think of an application that I gave a few weeks ago to make time for corporate prayer, and to suggest some times when you were available where we could facilitate corporate prayer. We've not only not heard from anyone, but last week we had only one prayer request submitted for the leadership to pray over.

It might also be raised that this sickness is deadly and that we have to go to work in order to survive, but we don't have to meet with Christian people in worship settings, like moments of prayer or moments to consider the word of God together or sing together. What are we saying with that statement? We are saying that worship is less necessary than work. We are saying that obeying God's command to worship is not worth the risk to my health but going to the store or office is worth the risk. We are saying that we are living for this world, and we love this world. Loved ones, your walk with God is the most important aspect of your life. Oh, dear Christian, you have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. Let us repent for times when we act like He is worth so little.

To our governing bodies we say this: we want to be good citizens. Consider all the work that churches have done for society when the church is allowed to function freely and without impunity. Food banks, shelters, hospitals, educational facilities, human trafficking recovery and prevention, care and outreach for those caught in the sex industry. Please let us be faithful to our calling without impunity. But know also that we will honor our God above any human law.

May God be gloried in Christ Jesus above all. Amen.