

Sanctification: Civil Society

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[0 : 0 0] If you turn to 1 Peter 2, verse 13 through 17, the tradition of taking three, four, five Sundays to preach Christmas messages is something that is just a tradition, and sometimes I do it and sometimes I don't, and I've chosen not to this time. So we're just tracking right along through Peter. I will say that next Sunday I will deviate from Peter and hit a Christmas message. So you'll remember Peter is helping these churches to prepare for suffering and persecution, and the first part was dealing with their salvation, and now he's moved to sanctification, and we talked about sanctification last week in terms of the internal and external battle of that. Now, from verse 13 through a good ways, he's going to deal with personal relationships.

In other words, sanctification is a nice thing, and often we think of it in terms of tasks that we need to do, but sanctification's test is really in the relationships that we have.

How do we relate to those in our lives? Because how we relate shows whether or not we're really depending and resting and leaning in upon God. And so today has to do with human institutions or government. So with that, let's read verses 13 through 17. He writes, Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Father, we praise you for your word, and we pray that you, by your spirit, would give us illumination, that we would understand it, and that by your spirit you would empower us to live out the truths that are here so that your name is glorified, so that we grow in holiness, and so that the light is spread abroad throughout this world, and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

[2 : 3 6] Maybe you're familiar with the Milgram experiments. The Milgram experience in 1961 was an experiment in which they brought people in to test how willingly they would follow authority. And in this test, you thought that you were a side part of the real test, as your task was to administer electric shocks to a person on the other side of the glass window from you. And you increasingly had to administer more and more and more electric shock. Now, the thing was is that no one was actually getting shocked. The person on the other side of the window was an actor who was acting as though they were being shocked. But they wanted to see how far would people go before they began to question authority. And they found that the majority of people would give up to 300 volts of an electric shock, fatal dose to people because they were being told to do so. They were listening to the authority that's there.

And what's interesting is that, you know, you and I can sit here because we haven't been put into that situation and say, wow, I would never do that. But the fact of the matter is, is that unless you have a Christian worldview, you wouldn't really be able to identify how you ought to react and respond to authority. Because there is this sense in which all authorities should be obeyed unquestioningly.

And there's this sense over here that says there should be absolutely zero authority. And both directions are not a biblical Christian worldview. There is a right and good thing about authority, but it has its limits. It has its sphere that it ought to function in. As Peter is writing to these Christians, they are encountering difficulties and will encounter further difficulties with the governing authorities. So he's trying to help them. How do you live in such a society? How do you live as a Christian in such a society? And he gives them two things to live by. The first is to live in submission to the governing authorities. That's going to be verses 13 through 15. And the second is to live in freedom as slaves to God. That's verses 16 and 17. So let's go to the first one. Live in submission to the governing authorities, verse 13 through 15. Now, when you read verses 13 through 15, to me, it causes me to ask a couple of questions. The first question has to do with what's the scope of this submission. Like, who is it that I'm really being submissive to in this passage?

And the answer is to every human institution. That's what verse 13 says. What that means is governing authority. And we know it means governing authority because he says in verse 13, the emperor.

He says in verse 14, governors. So we understand that he is speaking about government. He's speaking about those who are the officials in our government. We are to live in submission to them, which means we're not at liberty to create a nation of one, right? We're not to be sovereign citizens.

[5 : 52] That is not who we're supposed to be. We're not to be those people who say that I will give approval to every single law that you make in order to determine whether or not I will follow this. No, we are called as Christians. And as Christians, we're called to be submissive to the governing authorities.

And you know, this really, this really begins at birth, right? In the Ten Commandments, you'll notice he says to honor your father and mother. That is the, that is the foundation or that is the garden out of which the seeds of authority grow in our lives. Because from here on, you will always be under some kind of authority in your life. There's authority in your life always. It can go from your parents to, for ladies, your husband, as you get married, for all Christians, as you join a church, there's authority structures in that church. It happens when you send your kids to a public school or you put your kids in some sort of sports thing. You are delegating authority to those adults. And because they're to honor their father and mother, the, the idea of submitting to other governing authorities are right there. Now, the problem is, is that sometimes parents reject the idea that they are to teach their kids to submit to all authorities. But really and truthfully, that's why it's in the Ten Commandments is because it is the seedbed. But you know, we're going to be subject to the governing authorities.

You're going to be subject to the authority in, in your workplace. And like it or not, you're going to be subject to the laws of nature and the laws of sin and death because we will die one day. We are always under submission. It is the natural course of where we live as humans. It's who we were created to be. And to deny that is to deny that God is a God of authority. And so Peter's point is that every institution established for the governing of society, Christians have a duty to submit to those governing authorities. And let's just remember this one thing. Who was the emperor Peter was talking about? Nero. Nero. Do I need to remind you of Nero and his baseness and his cruelty and his indulgence and his wickedness? Peter says to submit to the governing authorities. The second question that I ask is, so what's the purpose of the submission? In other words, what good could come from submitting to the government? And there's two things that are listed here. The first in verse 14 says that governors are sent by the emperor, which by the way, this is totally aside. It's a rabbit that I won't chase, but I'll label it and you can go chase it. When the emperor sends the governor, it's the establishment of the concept of the lesser magistrate. And as Christians, you ought to understand the doctrine and the concept of the lesser magistrate. So now go flee and look that up on your own.

So he's got this guy who he has sent to have authority over a particular area, and his job is to punish and to praise. He is to punish those who do not submit and praise those who do. So being a good citizen, submitting to the governing authorities ought to be something that comes with reward.

If you're a good citizen of your country under your government, it ought to be something that comes with praise and reward from our governing authorities. And when that is not there, then that's a problem.

[9 : 49] The second thing is more to Peter's point in verse 15, that by doing good, you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. You see, here's the thing. The Christians in the Roman Empire were charged with atheism. Now just let that sink in for just a second. Now why might they be charged with atheism? Because they refused to worship the Roman gods. That's why. And most of the society saw this as a disruption in the social order. And so Christians were viewed with suspicion. So if they would submit to all the laws that were just laws, all the things that they could obey from the governing authority, then they could put to silence the people who would make charges that there are going to be a disruption to society. Because listen, if you and I as Christians obey the governing authorities, and we'll talk about how far they can go in just a second, but as we obey just laws that are established by the governing authorities, we put to silence people who would say that what we want is to disrupt society. That is not what we want at all. And so we need to put to silence people who would accuse us of wrongdoing, but we don't do that by forced coercion, manipulation, or even argument. We do it by a life that's lived in submission to the just laws of the state. Well, the third question that comes to my mind is this. Why should Christians be worried about this at all? Why should we even be thinking about this? Why should this be a part of our discussion? I mean, aren't we as Christians citizens of heaven? Aren't we strangers and aliens in a world that doesn't belong to us? Aren't we just passing through with treasures in the heaven? What's the motive that we should have for submitting to the governing authorities? And he tells us right there at the beginning of verse 13, he says, be subject for the Lord's sake. For the Lord's sake. What does it mean to do something for the Lord's sake? Something for the Lord's sake is to do something for his glory. To do something for his glory is to do something so that his greatness is demonstrated, displayed, and desired by others.

In other words, to glorify God is to magnify God like a telescope taking that which is glorious and huge and far and bringing it close up so people can relish in it. We're to live in such a way as to glorify God.

And what's interesting is that God is pleased to be magnified by our submission to the governing authorities. Let me say that again. God is pleased to be magnified in our submission to governing authorities.

The way that we treat the governing authorities over us is one way that God has decided he wishes to be glorified. And so here's the big principle then for us as Christians, as we take this and we try to apply it to our lives. As a Christian, I should be driven by God's glory and driven for God's will. I should be driven by God's glory and be driven for God's will. And what I mean is that God's will is that which I ought to seek to do. And so the thing I should seek to do is to be submissive to the governing authorities. And the reason that I should do it is so that God gets the glory. Not so that my pocketbook ends up where I would like the balance to be.

So how do we, in a society that has crazy, crazy actions and officials and things, how do we glorify God in our submission to the governing authorities? Let me give you three things and then we'll move to the next point. Number one, God is glorified in your motives. God is glorified in your motives. Why? Why be submissive? Why learn about our government?

[14 : 24] Why struggle against unjust laws that get established in our governments, right? Some states have unjust laws. What do you mean by an unjust law? Well, when you allow for the murder of unborn and pre-born children, that is an unjust law that ought to be fought against. Now, I'm not saying that as Christians, we take up arms to fight against that, but we must call the legislatures and the people within our sphere of influence to account for their rejection of God's standard. And so we need to have a motive as we do that. And that motive cannot be not having someone tell me what to do. I remember when there was the big hubbub in Texas and the high school football games, you know, you can't pray using the public address system of the school system. And there were so many people who were up in arms.

And part of the up in arms for some people is that you're not going to tell me what to do. But that is not a Christian motive to anything. The Christian motive is I want to live in such a way that God is glorified in all things. And so as we live out our life, the way we glorify God is making sure that we're motivated by God's glory. Secondly, we're glorified by, God is glorified by our actions. When we obey laws, and particularly laws that maybe they're not in the land of just and unjust, but maybe they're just silly. Maybe they're things that we just think are ridiculous, or maybe they think these are things that we just don't like. How can you obey that law and do it with the right motive?

Only by the power of the Holy Spirit. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, sometimes then our actions are in that obedience, but sometimes our actions is to call the governing officials to correct them for what they're doing that is wrong. They have a sphere authority. We talked about this several weeks ago, sphere authority. That is, as a husband, I have a certain sphere of authority. As a pastor, I have a certain sphere of authority. As a father, I had a certain sphere of authority. As my children grow and they become adults, that sphere of authority shrinks in their life, right? I'm no longer that particular authority. Within the church, I have a particular authority by God's word, but I don't have the authority to tell you that you can only buy Chevy trucks. That's funny. I don't know what you're doing sleeping, but that's funny. So, so here's the thing.

I don't have that kind of authority. I don't have the kind of authority that says you can only eat beef. Stop killing deer. You know, I don't have that kind of authority. There's no, there's no way that I have that kind of authority, right? Because there's a limit to the things that I have authority to do. I can't tell my wife that she can't go to church. Like, if I, if I were just a husband who was unsaved and didn't go to church, I do not have the authority to tell my wife that she cannot go worship the Lord. I don't have that authority. That is stepping outside the bounds of my authority.

Our government many times will step outside of the bounds of its authority, and when it does, it must be called on the carpet. It must be confronted, and it must be told that it's doing the wrong thing, and we must use the levers of power that we have in our particular system to vote those people out and put people in who will follow and stay within the bounds of what they ought to do.

[18 : 12] And just so you understand what I'm saying, you think, you got to think about people like David being confronted by Nathan, Herod being confronted by John the Baptist. It is something we as Christians, part of our action is not just to obey the laws, but to call laws into question when it is time. The third way that God is glorified in us is glorified in our words. He's glorified in our motives, glorified in our actions, glorified in our words, and how we talk about governing officials.

Are your toes ready? How we talk about governing officials is a way that God gets glory or not. And when we say things that are disrespectful of the person in the office, when we show that we have no care, concern, or compassion for that person, it may be a president that you don't like, that you can't stand, that everything that they do is contrary to what you think is good and right, yet they are created in the image of God and need you to pray that God would rescue their souls, convict them of sin, and save them and change their heart and mind.

We glorify God with our words in the way that we talk about the governing officials. Well, that's living then, that's living in submission to the governing authorities, but Peter doesn't stop there.

He goes into this idea of living in freedom as slaves to God. Now, these two are going to get tied together when we get to the end of this. You'll see how they get tied together. But let's talk about this. Look at verse 16 again. He says, live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil. Now, we need to talk about the fact of this freedom and try to understand what Peter's saying and meaning by this freedom. This freedom that Peter is talking about is very similar to what I think Paul's talking about in Romans when he speaks about that when we are no longer having dominion of sin over us. Part of the reason for that is because we're no longer under law, but under grace. And so a part of being free is being free from sin, being free from the law.

But here's the problem. The problem is, is we don't understand what that means. And so I want, I'm going to, I'm going to step aside. I'm going to try to talk about something. This, you, if you're going to get confused in what I'm saying today, this is where it's going to be.

[21 : 01] So I'm going to try real hard to make it clear. Okay. We, as human beings, relate to the law of God in two ways. And you're either under one or you're under another. And here they are. The first has to do with understanding the law of God as a covenant, understanding the law of God as a covenant. Now, for our purposes today, a covenant is a contractual agreement with everyone in that agreement abiding by the terms of the contract. In other words, as you live under this contract, this contract says, you must obey God if you're to have righteousness at all. It is something all of us are born under.

It's a contractual agreement that says your perfect obedience is where your righteousness will come from and salvation will come from. We're all born under that particular contractual agreement. And the problem is, is that none of us can keep the terms. That contractual agreement is not anything that any of us can keep. And so when we're saved, we're set free from that. We're set free from that contractual agreement, from that covenant of law. And so we go to the other relationship to the law. And that is not as a contractual agreement, but as a method of expression. You understand the difference? A contractual agreement versus a method of expression. Because when we're born under this contractual agreement, but when we hear the gospel and we believe, we're taken out from underneath this law of contractual agreement and we're put under Christ in the new covenant. So we come out of the law covenant, and we go into the new covenant. And here the law of God is not something we're under that's terrifying and threatening to us, but instead it becomes a method of expressing the gratitude and the love we already have in our hearts. What is it that the new covenant says? He says, I will write my law upon your heart. I will write my law upon your heart. So when we obey the commandments here, it's not to get anything, but it's to express everything.

Okay. So I hope that you, I hope that you got that because we, we are free. The danger comes now because he says, he says, don't use your freedom as a covering for evil. Because what happens is that a lot of Christians who understand that we're not here anymore have a tendency to think, and also we don't have to do this either. They'll turn to this method of expressing by obeying the law and say, we don't have to do this either. And so now they have no law that helps them understand how they ought to live. And so they will do just anything. So he says, don't use your freedom as a cover up for evil.

We are still supposed to do what it is that he's called us to do, not to gain, but to express. And so what's the solution then? What, how do we, if, if, if we're free from this, we're supposed to do this, and we can't use this as a covering for evil. Like how are we supposed to manage this? And I think Peter gives us the solution in verse 16, when he says this, consider yourself a slave of Christ. The word servant there is the word slave. You're, you're to think of yourself as needing to be completely, entirely dependent and obedient to Jesus Christ as your master and your king.

Matter of fact, Jesus said it this way in John's gospel. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Now I want to say two things about that passage. One, Jesus has commandments. That's pretty amazing.

[25 : 37] And so which commandments do you think Jesus is talking about? Well, let's just think about this for a second. Who is Jesus? Well, he's the second person of the Trinity. He's the eternal son of God. He was there when he set his people free out of Egypt. And he was there as he wrote with his own finger on stone, the 10 commandments. Do you think that Jesus is saying, listen, what I wrote with my own finger, throw that away, forget that. That's old stuff. Just, just do the commandments that I've been telling you for the last three years. No, he has commandments. And then he says this, this is the second thing, that to obey is love. That if you want to love God, then you must obey God. In other words, obeying God is acting in love towards God. It is an act of love. It's an act of devotion. It's an act of deep joy. It's an act of abiding satisfaction when we willingly, completely, fully, by the Holy Spirit, obey his commandments. You want to love God more? Know his commandments and obey. Not so you can put yourself back under this contractual agreement, but as an expression of what is already in your heart.

Now, I think he says all of that in verse 16, because of what he's going to come to in verse 17, where he's going to give us the actions that as slaves we need to have. Honor everyone, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. Now, what do these phrases mean? They're, they're, they're pretty easy to grasp, I think. Honor everyone has to do with valuing. The word honor means to value. So you're to place a value on everyone. Every human being is to be treated with dignity and respect, including those who do not respect you, including those whose ideology is completely opposite of yours. We're to treat them with dignity and respect, whether they deserve it or not, whether they treat us with that dignity and respect or not. We are to treat them with that dignity and respect because they're made in the image of God. Honor everyone. Then he says, love the brotherhood. So he takes the big umbrella idea of honoring everyone. And he becomes, he kind of narrows it down to talking about the brotherhood.

That is the Christians, the church. As we honor everyone, we're supposed to make sure that we love the church, that we love other Christians. And this love for Christians is something a little bit different from just simply honoring everyone. We're not told to love everyone. We're told to honor everyone and love Christians. And there's nothing wrong with my love for Christians being different than my love and honoring of everyone. I should have an affinity and an affection for Christians that doesn't necessarily transfer out to the larger public. We're called to love the brotherhood.

These two things are not in competition with each other. We can do both of these. But then he goes to the next part of it and he says, fear God. Fear God. This is the way the Christian lives, is to fear the Lord. Proverbs tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

Fools despise wisdom and instruction. We're to fear the Lord. And when we fear the Lord, what we're doing is we're obeying Him. That's how that fear is demonstrated, right? Fear is something that we both feel and have, but also it's demonstrated by our obedience to Him. So he tells us in Proverbs 24, my son, fear the Lord and the King and do not join with those who do otherwise for disaster will arise suddenly from them. And who knows the ruin that will come from them both. Our fearing God shows itself in glad obedience. And then he says to honor the emperor, Basilea, the word king.

[30 : 07] Again, he starts with the broad, bigger picture, fearing God and narrows it down to the human king. We're to value the king. We're to value the king, the emperor, who is Nero.

I mean, I think it's pretty clear without having to go into lots of details, but when the last president was put into office, there were lots of things that people said about him that were ungodly.

As Christians, that ought not to be anything that we participate in at all. Honoring, then, does not mean remaining quiet and not criticizing.

It means sticking to the facts. It means sticking to the policies and the laws and avoiding hitting the person. So, how do we apply this?

The bottom line is that you need to ask yourself the question, are you a slave to Christ or not? Are you a slave to Christ or not?

[31 : 18] Because if you're a slave to Christ, then the way that we interact with our governing officials is going to look a certain way. If you're not a slave to Christ, then you have no standard by which to be able to say you must submit or any standard by which you must say you also need to call them to account.

several years ago, we had a guy that came by our church. He was looking for a pastor and we got together and he wanted prayer because he had a pretty rough life.

He told me about his life, his military service. He told me about his family, his upbringing. He told me about many of his health issues that he was currently facing. He was telling me about his financial troubles that he was really way underwater with.

And he came by that day to tell somebody that he was planning to take his life that night and he just wanted somebody to pray with him. That was a rough couple of hours working with him, praying with him, trying to convince him not to take his life.

He told me, he committed to me that he would call me the next morning and he did. And from that began a relationship in which he began to come to church on Sunday mornings.

[32 : 37] He began to come to church during a midweek Bible study. Matter of fact, he even came to our house for a Thanksgiving meal. And as we came to this passage, this very same passage right here, and he saw honor the king.

He scoffed at it just a little bit because he served in the military under a particular president that he did not respect. And he came in the office the next day to talk to me about it.

And I had him read it again and I said, do you agree that my interpretation is correct? Because there's no need to get fussy about something if I'm wrong in the way I've read it. If I'm not really capturing what Peter said, then we need to understand what it is that Peter said.

He said, no, yeah, I think you're right. I said, okay. He says, but I'll never show respect to that president. If God doesn't like it, he can just shove it.

And he never came back. Christians, we do not belong to ourselves. We belong to him.

[34 : 01] And what the governing officials do is important. How we treat them is important. And maybe we need to understand more fully why.

And there's this passage in the Old Testament. And it's a passage that we like to read at Christmas. And I want you to listen to this passage for a second.

For to us, a child is born. And to us, a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder.

Now that doesn't mean that the government is after him. That means the weight of governing is his burden. That's what that is. The weight of governing is his burden. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. And on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

[35 : 12] The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. In the promise of the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, of the coming of the Christ, we are promised government.

We're promised his government. We're promised his government would increase. We're promised that his government would increase and would never end.

We're promised that his government would increase and never end from this time forth and forevermore. Not the governments of this world, but his government.

And I ask you this question. Are you ready to live under the rule of Christ as a slave forever?

Are you ready to live in an eternal government system underneath the Lord Jesus Christ who rules and reigns over all things that his government will increase, it will never be put to an end from this time forth and forevermore?

[36 : 28] Are you ready to be in a place where he is calling all of the shots completely, entirely, and fully? Because if you're unwilling to live as his slave here and now, you absolutely will not live as his slave then and there.

Instead, if you refuse his rule here and now, the there and then will for you be suffering and wrath. And your only hope is to turn away from that being the boss of your own life and turning to Christ, submitting to him, and be saved.

Christians, you've already done that. The only question for us is how well are we living out as his slave being obedient to him.

This is what sanctification looks like when it comes to how we deal with an uncivil society. Let's pray.