

Authority (In an Election Year)

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[0:00] Amen. Now, one can't help but think that Peter's admonition for believers to honor those in authority must have been a lot easier before the days of social media and 24-7 news coverage.

Now those who are in authority bear the scrutiny of what they say and the details of their personal lives being broadcast on the news, sometimes in an instant.

And as far as social media goes, they have the same problem we all have. Every stupid thing we say or do can be thrown out there for everyone to see. And that's not all, though.

So how many of us have been drawn into that awful trap of debating politics on social media?

Who's been there? Getting pulled into that is most often a torturous fate, but it's one that some of us can't resist.

So we praise our leaders of choice and slam the opposition. Then others do the same. No one has a change of mind and everyone gets mad.

[1:53] And then we repeat from step one. I saw a meme on social media a while back that depicted a man sitting in front of a computer screen.

His wife asks when he is coming to bed, asks if he's coming to bed. He responds with, no, this is important. Somebody is wrong on the internet. We're to respect and honor those in authority.

And that is sometimes hard to do when all of their flaws are broadcast. And when there is endless opportunity to insult them and argue about them. Throw a rather heated presidential election season into the mix.

And it gets taken to another level. So is the instruction to honor those in authority a thing of the past?

Something that's outdated? That belongs to the days before we became more enlightened and started shouting at each other over the internet? No. And the reason is this.

[3:01] Peter's instruction to honor those in authority is rooted in the gospel message itself. We are to honor those in authority because of what Jesus did for us.

Because we're supposed to live as examples, as God's holy people in this world. Really, our passage for this morning can be divided basically up into two parts.

The what and the why. And the gospel is the reason why. Let's look at our verses and see what we can learn about how God's holy people honor those in authority and why.

In verses 13 and 14 we read, 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.

As we've talked about our status in our first Peter series, as exiles and sojourners, as citizens of heaven, we see an important corrective here because that line of thinking could perhaps lead us to believe that the laws of this world, the authority structures of this world, don't apply to us.

[4:23] So that we would always be expected to fight the man, so to speak. Do we have any former hippies in here who, uh, once, once, I'm looking at you, Raymond.

Well, that turns out not to be the case. Oh, it does turn out to be the case that we have hippies, but it turns out that it's not the case that we are expected to fight the man.

We're to honor and respect our leaders, both at the national level and at the local level. Why is that?

Is it because the emperor is inherently better and more important than everyone else?

Or is it because political leaders never make mistakes? Or is it because political leaders never do horrific things? No. But, speaking generally, the authority of government is something which God has put in place for the sake of supporting order and virtue and punishing evil.

Now, we only have to watch CNN for a couple minutes to see that it doesn't always work that way.

And Peter knew that to be the case. The same man who was telling us to honor the emperor ended up being unjustly killed by an emperor.

[5:36] His subjection to the emperor came into conflict with his loyalty to Jesus. So, he did disobey those with earthly authority by refusing to renounce Christ.

So, we should remember that our loyalty and service to God do come first. Sometimes, those in authority will reward evil and punish good, even though they shouldn't.

That said, we are to be subject to those in leadership, not because they're inherently of more worth than we are, not because they're perfect, not because they never make mistakes, but as Peter tells us, for the sake of the Lord.

When we do what is right, as believers, God is glorified, even if we suffer for doing what is right. We show honor and respect to other people, even at our own expense, God is glorified in us.

We see that idea picked up and fleshed out, starting in verse 15. For this is the will of God, that by doing good, you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

[6:52] So, we should strive to do what is good and what is right, because it's honoring to God and brings glory to his name. Now, there's a long history of the world responding to Christ and Christians scornfully.

In the first few centuries of the church, the Romans accused the Christians of atheism, cannibalism, and practicing incest.

I kid you not. Now, obviously, these accusations are ridiculous. If something that outlandish is the only criticism that someone has, it means he can't find anything real to criticize.

Peter is telling us to live in such a way that those who would speak against our faith are either silenced or have their foolishness shown for what it is.

He's telling us to live above reproach to the glory of God. So, serving God and bringing glory to his name by willingly obeying the authority and place over us for the sake of the Lord.

[8:05] Peter goes on in verse 16. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Now, we are supposed to live as people who are free because we are.

We're free from the captivity of sin. We're free from the fear of death because of what Jesus has done. Free to love God and our neighbor. And because we're free, we're also free not to have to always insist on our own way, to always insist on our own honor, insist on being served by others. We're free not to live according to the sinful patterns of life that held us captive and still holds the world in captivity. Serving God is freedom.

Doing what is honoring to him is freedom. Using freedom as an excuse for evil means that we haven't yet fully understood what freedom is.

Using freedom as an excuse not to serve and honor others means that we haven't yet understood what Jesus did for us. See the section on honoring those in authority, on honoring others, summarized in verse 17.

[9:24] Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. Now in case we're tempted to think that Peter is instructing us only to show respect to imperial bigwigs, he begins verse 17 by telling us to honor everyone.

Peter, of course, has already told us that God is impartial. We should treat everyone with respect and dignity. Now I'm reminded here of what I consider one of the best compliments that I have ever received.

Someone told me once that they had never seen me deal disrespectfully with anyone. And I would say that probably didn't see me at my worst moments.

But that is something that we should all strive for in an incredible compliment. So I'm reminded as I think on that, as I think on the examples of some of you and the respect and honor I've seen you show to one another, reminded that if we honor everyone, even imperfectly, people will take notice and wonder why we live that way.

And the reason why, of course, is Jesus. And that's not all. We are to love our fellow believers, to honor them, to put them before ourselves and to love them sacrificially.

[10:59] Of course, we're to fear God, to obey him, to not use the liberty that he has given us as an excuse for evil. We're to honor the emperor, or more generally, those in authority.

Sometimes those in authority can be pretty hard to respect. Peter knew this. Honor them anyway, for God's sake and for the sake of our Christian witness.

Now, in our next few verses, Peter talks about authority on a more direct level. These verses are addressed to how servants should respond to their masters.

masters. Now, most of us, I think, have never been servants and had masters, unless we're husbands. Sorry, dear.

But, most of us have had a boss, and most of us have probably had a bad boss. I know that I've been there before.

[12:06] So, we should be able to relate. Peter writes in verse 18, Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust.

That's a hard thing for us to swallow, isn't it? Showing respect to those in authority over us, even if they're unjust. As Peter goes on in verse 19, it gets even more challenging.

For this is a gracious thing. When mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. If we endure sorrows and suffering unjustly, mindful of God, in obedience to God, it is a gracious thing.

It is honoring to God. It is good. Now, it's not honoring to God if we suffer for doing what is evil, but it is honoring to God if we suffer for doing what is good.

That's what we see in verse 20. For what credit is it if when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

[13:19] If we do good and suffer for it, it is a gracious thing in the sight of God. Why? Because in doing that, we are imitating our Savior.

Verse 21. For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps.

We are to be respectful servants to others because Jesus, the eternal, perfect, sinless Son of God, became a servant for our sake. Calls us to follow in his steps.

Serving others and honoring others flows out of a life that is transformed by the gospel. The gospel is the why when we think about how we're supposed to show respect and honor to others.

What an amazing example we have in Christ who committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile and return.

[14:26] When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. Jesus was perfect. In no way did he deserve the injustice committed against him, the sin committed against him, or the violence committed against him.

yet he didn't return evil for evil. He didn't get even. He entrusted himself to the justice of his Father. And Jesus, God in the flesh, submitted as a servant. Why? See the answer in verse 24.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

He was betrayed, beaten, crucified, and he submitted to all of it as a suffering servant. Why? So he could bear our sins.

[15:34] The perfect one, the sinless one, who's perfectly good, suffered for doing good. Not only that, he took the suffering that rightly belonged to us.

Our sins put him on the cross. He suffered what we deserve to suffer so that we might find forgiveness, so that we would find healing in his wounds.

We were rebels. We were God's enemies. We had not shown God the honor that was due him. Yet for us, Jesus came as a suffering servant for those who were his enemies to take the penalty, to take the curse, the curse that we deserved for our disobedience.

Because of that, we're forgiven. We have the promise of eternal life. we who were God's enemies have been adopted as his beloved children through faith in Christ.

We have been reconciled to God. As Peter says in verse 25, For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

[16:54] What Peter has to tell us about living as God's holy people in the world is never about mere moralizing. He's never just telling us just to be good.

The way that we are supposed to live, as Peter explains it to us, finds its foundation and finds its motivation in the gospel message itself and what Jesus has done for us.

We're to live as a grateful, joyful people whose lives have been absolutely transformed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To live as a people who have an eternal hope that the changes and chances of this life cannot take away.

Because of what Christ has done for us, we can honor those in authority and honor everyone, even if they think, even if we think they don't deserve it.

Jesus didn't deserve to suffer and die for our sins, did he? But, he humbled himself for the sake of our salvation.

[18:08] If our Lord can humble and submit himself, why can't we? In doing so, we will bring glory to the name of our great God. Because of what Christ has done for us, we can endure suffering.

He suffered for us so that one day we will enter into his joy where death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. In the meantime, we can endure suffering with patience, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame.

because of what Christ has done for us, we can endure injustice. Following his example, we can entrust ourselves to him who judges justly.

Whatever happens, we know that the outcome is certain, the victory is certain, and that injustice will not stand forever. And I saw a quote from a Greek Orthodox monk recently that really jumped out to me.

he said, what I see around me in the world would drive me insane if I did not know that no matter what happens, God will have the last word.

[19:33] When we're tempted to despair over the injustice or the evil in the world around us, we can remember that no matter what happens, God will have the last word.

So when we're tempted to worry about the state of our nation, for example, and presidential elections have a way of bringing that out, when we're tempted to agonize about the insufficiencies of those in authority over us, let's remember first to pray in hope and confidence when others dishonor us or when we're tempted to seek revenge, let's remember to pray for them, not to seek to get even.

When we suffer for doing good, when we suffer injustice, let's in prayer entrust ourselves to God who judges justly, knowing that he will have the last word.

because emperors are leaders, good or bad. Suffering and injustice can't rob us of our eternal joy, can they?

We are called to live in the world as those who have an unshakable hope in Christ and him crucified. We are called to honor everyone, to love our Christian brothers and sisters, to fear God and honor those in authority over us.

[21:04] In doing that, we will bear witness to the hope that's within us so that others may see the hope that comes only through Christ so that others may believe and be saved.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.