

Christians as Good Citizens

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[0 : 00] Let's turn once more again this evening, once again, to 1 Peter, the first letter of Peter, and chapter 2.

And tonight, as we follow through in our studies of this letter of Peter, we've come to chapter 2, verses 13 to 17. Just read through these few verses.

1 Peter 2, at verse 13. 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. Christians are citizens in a two-fold sense.

[1 : 17] In the highest sense, they are citizens of heaven. God has made them citizens of that heavenly country that they believe in and hope towards.

And so, spiritually, they have citizenship of heaven. As children of God, he has given them that privilege and that right.

But they are also citizens of the state in which they live, whatever state that may be, in whatever country or nation. We are referring to it as the state, such as our own nation and the state politically that we belong to.

And it is very interesting how both Paul and Peter, we read in Romans 13, verses very similar to what you have in these verses in 1 Peter 2. It is very significant that both apostles sought to instruct those they were writing to of their relation to the state.

They did not think of that as an unimportant matter. Yes, they emphasize citizenship of heaven more often, understandably. But nevertheless, they don't neglect teaching about our relationship to the state, our duty and privilege as citizens of the state, and how as Christians we have an obligation to the state or obligations, some of which we find in these verses.

[2 : 47] You recall verse 12. Last time we looked at it, we saw the emphasis there. And in a sense, that theme is carried through into verses 13 to 17, because he's still talking about doing good and about putting to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

In other words, it's part of the Christian's witness or the Christian church's witness, not just to be submissive to God, but also to be submissive to God-appointed authorities where that is required and where that does not avoid sin against God.

The theme of these verses is very much one of submission. In fact, that theme of submission, as we'll see, runs through into chapter 3 as well, as it brings in other relationships, such as in the family and in employer-employee relationships.

Apostles didn't shirk from giving teaching about that because they saw how important a proper Christian behavior was in relation to all of these facets of living in this world, whether it be in relation to the state itself or in relation to our parents or in relation to our employees or employers.

But here he is looking at this in terms of submission to the state. And, of course, for Peter here, as indeed for Paul, but more specifically of Peter here, the controlling or the governing submission is dealt with, as we'll see later near the end of the chapter in another study, the submission of Jesus Christ himself.

[4 : 39] Because what he says is, he has called you to this, to this submission, to this being in subject, being subject to authority, to rightful authority.

For to this you have been called, in verse 21, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

That's to God the Father. He didn't retaliate when he had cause to retaliate. He committed himself and kept doing so to the Father who sent Thomas a servant into this world.

That's really, in many ways, the governing, the controlling submission that really governs all the other submissions that you find referred to in the chapter. The submission that is proper to a Christian life.

[5 : 43] The submission that we have to one another, to rightful authorities, and most of all, of course, to God. So the two points that come from that that we're looking at this evening in these verses, first of all, we're going to look at submitting to authorities as these are appointed by God, and secondly, silencing the foolish.

Submitting to authorities and silencing the foolish. Verse 13, Be subject, or be in submission, 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.

How are you saying there? Be in subjection, be in submission to every human institution. And that means, really, to people. It's not just thinking of an institution as, as it were, an abstract entity where people are not involved.

The apostle is thinking of institutions such as government nationally or government locally, as appointed by God, such as the civil magistrate, the judiciary, the police force.

All of these institutions, if you like, are, that are peopled or made up of people to whom certain authority has been given.

[7 : 07] And as Romans 13, and this makes clear, that authority has actually come from God. Yes, they are appointed in a human fashion. They are appointed sometimes. They are elected or appointed to positions.

But overall, and ultimately, as God is the king, as God is in sovereign control of everything, they are appointed by his will. They are appointed by him through these other agencies.

So he's saying, be subject to the Lord, for the Lord's sake, to every human institution, to people in levels of authority as God has placed them there.

In other words, these are God's, God-given structures. And it's so important that we understand this as the people of God's church, as Christians, because we're living in a society that really doesn't want to know about submission very much.

That thinks it's all right to exert their own independent authority against the authorities that God has appointed, against the relevant structures in society that are appointed by God to keep law and order and social order throughout our society.

[8 : 21] And you and I have to insist on the fact that we as Christians, actually, for good order, as God has imposed these structures or appointed these structures, we are required to be in submission to them.

Now look at verse 14 here. He's saying here, to the emperor as supreme in verse 13, or then verse 14, to governors under the emperor as sent by him to punish evil and to praise those who do good.

And you go forward to chapter 3, verse 1. Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands. And he gives a reason for that, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives.

But then, before you think, well, that's all there is to it, and wives are to be subject to their husbands, and there's no sense of subject on the husband's part of the wife, well, that's not the case.

Verse 7, He's not saying live with your wives in such a way that looks down upon your wife as the weaker vessel.

[9 : 36] Give her the honor. Exalt her. Pay in submission to her, in a sense. Because that's the order that God would have us. Yes, the husband has a certain headship in the relationship.

Nevertheless, he is to honor his wife as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life. And then verse 8, Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

In other words, be in submission one to another. So that submission is required for us at work, in the home, in the church, in regard to national government, in regard to local government, in regard to the judiciary, in regard to the police force, in regard to our school structure, for example.

They wouldn't find it proper for a pupil in school to reject the authority of the head teacher, or even the teacher of the class, by rebelling against that authority for no good reason, except that they want to insist on having their own way.

These structures, the apostle is saying, are God-appointed, a rightful authority, so as to keep good order and peace in society.

[10 : 53] And there are few more important emphases than that in the society that you and I live amongst, because all too often you find that structures of authority are despised.

Structures of authority are simply not acceptable to many people. And you find anarchy and wanton violence and all kinds of nasty actions on the part of people despise the police.

And you find, sadly, in some homes that young people are brought up to hate the police and to treat them as their enemies. What is all that indicative of? It's indicative of a lack of understanding, of course, of rightful authority and of an authority that God has appointed for our overall good in human society.

And he goes on from that, where he says, in a wider sense, be subject, for the Lord's sake, to every human institution, to the rightful authorities that God has appointed in his providence.

And now he takes it down to the next level. He says, to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish evil.

[12 : 10] Now, that's really interesting and very significant that he says, to the emperor as supreme. The old translation had king, but it really meant the Roman emperor. Why is it significant?

Why is it interesting? Because the Roman emperor, when Peter lived in this world and wrote this, was Nero. And Nero was one of the cruelest emperors.

Something of a madman. Someone who raged against the gospel and against the church and who caused many Christians to be put to death. And yet here is Peter, who himself we understand from, not from the Bible, we don't have a record of his death, but we have a record outside of that in historical records elsewhere that tell us that, at least in the eyes of those who wrote these records, that Peter was put to death under the tyranny of Nero at the time when Nero was still emperor and that he was put to death by being crucified.

Crucified upside down, so the record says. And yet here is Peter saying, be subject for the Lord's sake to the emperor as supreme. Peter didn't agree with the kind of emperor morally that was actually presiding over the Roman emperor.

He wasn't going to give that emperor his approval in every sense of his life or his lifestyle or even his commands or even his requirements as they were carried out throughout the empire.

[13 : 40] But he still says, even as an emperor who is very, very different to what he should be, still he is appointed by God as head of the government at the time.

So be subject for the Lord's sake to the emperor supreme. You see, it doesn't actually tell us we are to be in subjection or be submissive to the authority that governs us, whether nationally or locally, only if we agree with all their policies.

There will be governments whose policies we don't agree with. There will be governments we did not vote for, but who by majority vote have come to occupy government.

There will be governments that bring out laws that we know are unbiblical and contrary to the Bible, that are dishonoring to God, that uphold practices which we know are abhorrent in the eyes of God, that come to redefine what human relationships ought to be like so that you find the kind of conditions and situations that you and I live amongst today where, in fact, relationships such as marriage are redefined and where laws are brought out to protect what is essentially sinful in the eyes of God.

That's the kind of situation, and even worse than that, that Peter faced in the days of the Roman Empire. But he says, be subject to every human institution.

[15 : 20] Show them respect as far as it goes as God's appointed governments, authorities. That does not mean that we are required to sin against God in that subjection.

If a government tells you that you must do something that you know is sinful, you don't do it. You protest against it. You say, I can't do that. As a Christian, I must honor God.

If the government brings out a law, maybe it's not that far away. For all we know, the way things are going, we pray it won't. But if the government were to bring out a law within the next few months that forbade me to say Christ is the only Savior of sinners, Christ is the only way of salvation by which people can come to have salvation and be right with God for those who believe in God, I could not do that.

I'd have to resist that. I'd have to say, I can't comply. I can't submit to that commandment because it asked me to sin. But other than that, other than where we are called on to sin against God, we are required to show submission to those that are in government.

To the emperor supreme, or he says to governors, are sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. So there's every human institution to people in different places and levels of authority.

[16 : 58] And he narrows that down by beginning with the emperor as supreme, and then he comes to governors. Now, governors in the Roman Empire were people like Pontius Pilate, for example, or Felix that you read of in the Book of Acts.

They were governors over a certain territory in the Roman Empire. They were given that authority and people under them to rule in the name of Caesar, in the name of the Roman Emperor, to actually carry out his mandates in that area.

And he's calling here on us to be submissive to governors as sent by the emperor or appointed by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

And you note the twofold purpose there of their government, as it ought to be. It's both punishment of those who do evil and praise of those who do good.

And that's a reminder to ourselves, too, that we need to hold governments to this quality of government where it is lacking. That we need to hold them to account if they're not actually dealing with evil the way it ought to be dealt with, and if they're not praising the doing of good the way it ought to be praised.

[18 : 18] And you think about that in the twofold purpose that it has there. It says very clearly, they are appointed, they are there, they are set for the punishing of those who do evil.

That doesn't mean, in the punishment of those who do wrong who do evil, and there will be various grades of that, of course, sometimes even, as you know, including imprisonment for some lengths of time.

It doesn't mean that there is no restorative or helpful counsel or programs that they can go to, hopefully, to actually improve their lives, and that they will not go back to the life of crime that they once had, and for which they've been incarcerated.

It's not just simply punishment, as if they're saying, well, that's you, you're now going to spend ten years in prison, and that's it, all you'll be doing is sitting in a cell, you'll be laid out for some exercise, and that's the end of it.

There's nothing else for you. That's, of course, what you don't want to see. You want to see restoration and rehabilitation and education. You want to see all of that, too, in its own place, but it doesn't replace the element of punishment.

[19 : 29] There is a punitive side to the consequence of wrongdoing, of crime, of whatever degree it has to be.

And he's reminding us here that government has that responsibility. Just as Paul said in Romans 13, these authorities are appointed by God, and they don't bear the sword in vain.

It's not for no reason that he actually, the magistrate or the government of the time, the judiciary, they are required at times to punish.

And if punishment means taking away your freedom by imprisonment, that's how it has to be. But it's a punitive element in the consequences of crime. But there's also the other side of it.

And also to praise those who do good. And that's equally important, though not as often carried out, is it? We're very used to the punitive side of it.

[20 : 33] And some people will say that that's sometimes doesn't go far enough. Others will say it goes too far. But there's this side to it as well, that the government ought to praise those who do good.

Those who carry out their work in the way that they ought and help others and help the government to. They are to praise those who do good.

Of course, in every society and in every generation, there are degrees of corruption, degrees of sinfulness in the way that governments go about their business, just as we individuals are ourselves personally sinful.

And in the rewards that sometimes are given out, they sometimes bear no relation to the work actually done and people rightly complain. Why should so-and-so get a reward? Why should they get such-and-such a reward?

Why should they be paid millions of pounds or whatever or given a social status despite the fact that they've made a mess of things? Now, that's not what Peter is saying. Peter is saying there's a rightful praise due to people who do good.

[21 : 46] And government is responsible to see to it that they are praised. That there are some means by which they're commended for doing good. And that happens, that's to happen at national as well as local level.

And I'm sure it does happen to some extent, but it has to be carried out consistently. And it's part of the Christian's responsibility to acknowledge and accept that as the responsibility of the rightful authority that God has placed in government over us.

And that we actually hold them to account of their failing to carry out that mandate, that two-fold mandate of punishment and of praise. But you'll notice also in submitting to authority, so let's just remind ourselves of what we've gone through.

This is all very brief, of course. This is all just skimming the surface in a sense. But there are important elements in themselves. First of all, be subject to every human institution, every authority that God has placed people in that are over you.

and then to the supreme, the emperor, and then to the governors under him as sent with this two-fold purpose of punishment and praise.

[22 : 58] But you see also he's saying, for the Lord's sake, be subject. He's addressing Christians, you see. He's addressing people who want to live and need to live for God as they are surrounded, as we've seen through these studies so far, by so many people that find fault with them, that ridicule them, that persecute them, that in different ways are actually causing them so much difficulty.

And Peter's reminding them, even if that comes from the authority itself that's set over you, as God-appointed institutions, short of causing you to sin, you have to respect them, you have to pay deference to them, you actually have to submit to them, you have to recognize them as given that position by God to maintain proper order, and you do it for the Lord's sake.

You don't do it for the government's sake, primarily, you don't do it for the emperor's sake, you do it especially for the Lord's sake. You do it because we honor him when we do submit properly to proper authority, and we dishonor him when we rebel against that authority, when we cast off the restraints of that authority, when we say, I don't recognize that authority, because it's not how I would have things, it's not the kind of government that I would have preferred to see.

It's not up to us, it's for the Lord's sake, and in his sovereignty, and in his wisdom, he brings about the governments of the day, and what he's saying to us as Christians, we honor him when we submit and we dishonor him if we revolt or reject that submission.

Now, that carries through into all these other areas that we've said as well in principle, and let me say it carries through into the structures of the church as well, and it's important to remind myself that I am subject to authority as a minister, not just the authority of God, but the authority of my fellow presbyters in the structures of the Presbyterian church I belong to, and if I do wrong, I have to accept their authority to deal with it, and if I have to be examined by them, I have to accept their authority as rightfully carried out by them, we trust, so that they examine what it is I'm accused of and actually come to a conclusion in regard to it.

[25 : 29] That's why we have Kirk Sessions, why we have elders, I know we're all flawed individuals, we're all sinners just like every other person here, but God has appointed a government in His church as well under the headship of Christ in order to maintain as far as we're possibly able the good order and structure of His church in this world, and so submission to that authority authority is also important in its own right, and that's something that we have to carry with us at all times and something we really have to teach in terms of the church and who makes up the church, and sometimes, you know, we think that only those who are communicants are subject to the authority of the Kirk Session for their discipline, for their pastoral care, and for their discipline, it's not right, it's not the case.

Whether you're a communicant member or a member by attendance, you are under the authority of Christ through His appointed government in the church, and we are responsible as far as we possibly can by the grace of God to look after your concerns, to be a government that acts under Christ compassionately, pastorally, but also where required judicially, and you and I are required to accept that authority and to say that's how God has structured it so that His church would live in peace, so that those who do good might be praised and those who do wrong might have whatever punishment, whatever punitive measures sometimes may need to be applied, but let's remember one thing, even the punitive measures, whether it's in church or state, have to be designed and are designed, we understand them and apply them right, for restoration, for recovery, for rehabilitation of the person who's offended.

That's supremely important. Discipline is never discipline for punishment's sake only. In fact, it's punishment only with a view to restoration where punishment is due.

So that's what he's saying. Be subject for the Lord's sake, as one of the Lord's people, as God's people in the world, to every institution of human creation, whether it be the emperor, a supreme, or to governors sent by him, because they are ultimately appointed by God.

But then secondly, he says, there's a matter of silencing the foolish, for this is the will of God. What does he mean by this? Well, he means this submission that I'm talking of, that I'm telling you about, he's saying, this is the will of God, that by doing good, you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

[28 : 43] Now, notice, the equation is important, because what he's saying, by doing good, he's equating that with the submission that he's been speaking of in the previous verse.

This is the will of God, that you live in submission to rightful authority, that you show your compliance with rightful authority, God-ordained, and that by doing good in that sense, as well as other ways, you actually put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

Who are the foolish people? Well, the word foolish is used here and very often in the Bible not for those who lack intelligence, not for those who have a very low intellect.

reject. It's actually for those who deliberately and defiantly reject God and reject his gospel, reject everything that God himself has appointed.

That's the foolish. Psalm 14, verse 1, the fool has said in his heart, there is no God. That's God's definition of a fool.

[29 : 54] I don't have a right to call anyone a fool. You don't have the right to call anyone a fool. The Bible counsels us against that. But God has every right to define foolishness in this way, that this foolishness is in fact the person, this fool is the person who rejects the authority of God.

Wherever that authority is expressed, either directly through his word or through these institutions that God himself has set in place in government, it's the fool that rejects that.

And God is regarding him as a fool or harris a fool in that sense. And that means there are many people in our society, as in every society right now, that have the highest intellectual capacity, that have brains that can take in things which you and I, most of us, can never even begin to comprehend.

Whether it's in the area of science or astronomy or mathematics or whatever, massively endowed with intellect, but sadly, too many of them are fools in this sense that they reject God and don't see any need for God in trying to take account of human life and our life situation and the universe in which we live.

So God is saying you can have the most massive intellect of any human being in this world and you can still be a fool if you don't accept God and his authority.

[31 : 29] You are a fool if you don't and that's God's definition. So he says, this is how he says you actually put to silence the ignorance of the foolish people.

How do you put them to silence? Well, by doing good and living as people who are free and not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil but living as servants of God.

God. Well, that's interesting. He's saying live as people who are free and yet at the same time he's talking of submission. How can you be free and yet be in subjection and submission to authority?

Well, because God's people are free. He has set them free. He has set them free from the tyranny of sin, from the guilt of sin, from the sentence of condemnation that his own law brings about as they are in their sins.

Christ has set us free. from the curse of the law. Is that what it is with you tonight? Have you come to submit to God himself?

[32 : 33] I've been talking about submission, submission to God but mostly submission to God-appointed authorities but it's crucial even before you start thinking about what it means to be in submission to God-appointed authorities that you have really and I have given our submission to God and are in submission to God.

Is your heart in submission to God? Is your mind in submission to God? Is your flesh in submission to God? Because that's what a Christian has to be.

That's the challenge of living as a Christian. You crucify yourself in all its forms. But live as people who are free and yet he's pointing out another danger.

Not using your freedom as a cover up for evil. In other words, he is saying, be careful you Christians. You are free.

God has made you free. but you are servants of God. And God has given you that freedom. Not so that you would say, well I am a Christian.

[33 : 40] I don't owe my allegiance to anyone but to God. I don't recognize the authority or the right of any government or any government agency or any local authority or any of the judiciary.

I don't recognize their authority. I am a Christian. I belong to God. That's enough. No, says Peter, that's not enough. Because as servants of God, yes you are free and it's a great freedom to have.

It's the only true freedom that exists. But he's saying that freedom is never to be used as a cover up for evil. You must never use it so as to hide behind evil or to hide evil from you.

don't use it as a cover up for doing what is wrong. The fact that you're a Christian and I'm a Christian is a tremendous privilege.

There's no higher privilege but it doesn't excuse us from not submitting to rightful authority when that is due from us.

[34 : 53] And he finishes by again covering some of the same ground. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Just very briefly in closing. Honor everyone. That's similar to verse 13. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution. Honor everyone.

Treat everyone with respect. even if they differ from you in very radical ways. Treat them with respect. Love the brotherhood.

He's taking a step higher there because he's focusing now on God's people. On fellow Christians. Love the brotherhood. Pay respect he says to everybody.

Give them respect. But love the brotherhood. Love them because they're God's people. Love them because they belong to him and they're part of his spiritual family along with yourself.

[36 : 01] Love them. It's a higher requirement than to honor everyone because God loves his people and we are to love his people.

The household of God most of all. And then fear God God. Well that fear of God is not just simply the awe and the reverence that very often you find in this word fear when it's used like this in the Bible.

The fear of the Lord. It does contain that but here it also I think indicates the idea of be afraid of the Lord's discipline. In the sense in which don't open yourself to his discipline because that's going to hurt.

fear God. And that's going to be hugely difficult to contend with even if you benefit ultimately from it.

Fear God. And then finally honor the emperor. He comes back to the emperor but you notice he's using the same word honor as he's used in verse 17 there.

[37 : 11] Honor everyone. Honor the emperor. Why is he saying this? Well one of the reasons could be and it's an interesting point in itself that yes he's saying be subject to the emperor as supreme honor the emperor but in a sense he's saying he's actually just the same as everybody else as a human being.

Remember that the Roman emperors were often given divine status in Roman pagan ideology. So Nero would be treated as a god by many other subjects.

They were required to treat him as a god. But Peter is having none of that. Yes you honor him but only as a human being given status by God.

And so he reminds us of that very important Christian obligation of submission. Submission to God and under our submission to God submission to rightful authority to every institution to the emperor to the governors and to do it for the Lord's sake and to silence the foolish people those who reject God and want you as Christians to retaliate to act other than the way Christians ought and to use your freedom to do that.

No says Peter that's not how it has to be. It has to be otherwise. You live as free people but as servants of God and therefore you treat everyone with respect.

[39 : 04] you love the brotherhood. You fear God. You respect those in authority. Let's pray. Lord our God we give thanks that your word instructs us in so many different facets of life not only for our lives individually but also collectively and publicly.

We give thanks tonight that you have ordained structures to human society that are themselves designed for our good. Lord we pray for those different levels of authority that we ourselves know in our own position in this land.

And we pray for them again and pray that you would be merciful to them when they have strayed beyond the bounds of their authority and when they act as if there was no higher authority than themselves.

Lord we ask that you would graciously show them your own authority over them as the one who has appointed them. Grant that you would bless us now. Go before us and hear our prayer for Jesus sake.

Amen. Well we're concluding our worship this evening singing in Psalm 119 and that's page 403.

[40 : 25] We're seeing verses 43 to 48 and the tune is Paisley. The word of truth out of my mouth take thou not utterly for on thy judgment righteous my hope doth still rely.

So shall I keep forevermore thy law continually and sit that I thy precepts seek. I'll walk at liberty. I'll speak thy word to kings and I with shame shall not be moved and will delight myself always in thy laws which I loved.

To thy commandments which I loved my hands lift up I will and I will also meditate upon thy statutes. These verses from 43 to the end of the psalm.

the word of truth out of my mouth take thou not utterly for on thy judgments righteous my hope doth still rely so shall I keep forevermore thy law continually and sin that I thy precepts seek I'll walk at liberty

I'll speak thy word to kings and I with shame shall not be moved and will delight myself always in thy laws which I love to thy commandment which I love love my hands lift up I will and I will also meditate upon thy statutes still

[43 : 16] I will go to the main door this evening after the benediction and now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be