

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Christian Submission to the Government

1 Peter 2:13-17

Part Two

The readers of this epistle were suffering greatly in a very hostile world. This epistle was written to help them to respond righteously to their suffering. A righteous response was not to be characterized by rising up against their antagonists but rather as we saw in **VV. 11-12** they were to live lives that were “excellent” amongst the gentiles. They were to live lives that were “excellent” in front of the very people who were persecuting them.

But exactly how would that be done? We have begun to answer that question in **VV. 13-17**. Let us take a few moments and read these verses.

This passage teaches us a great deal about a proper response to authority. If we would as the followers of Christ appreciate the lessons of these verses we would have taken a significant step forward in righteous living. What have we learned so far?

V. 13 “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution.” Obedience is not an option for us. We are to submit to those in authority over us even as a soldier would submit to a military commander.

If the authority over us tells us to go 55 miles per hour we will say, “yes sir.” If the authority over us tells us “wear a helmet when riding a bike” we will say, “yes sir.” This is our obligation.

Acting in ways which would threaten the authority over us should be avoided. **Prov. 24:21** is very pointed. **“Fear the Lord and fear the king; Do not associate with those who are given to change.”** Why? **V. 22** gives the answer **“for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin that comes from both of them” (the Lord and the king).**

But someone may ask, “Are there no exceptions?” Isn’t there a time when we might righteously oppose authority by refusing to be subject? Actually there is one exception. And that is when we are being told by our government to do something that clearly violates the clear teaching of God’s Word. Consider the story of Peter and John, disciples of Jesus Christ. They had been commanded by Christ to preach the gospel to all creatures. And yet we find in **Acts 4** Peter and John being arrested for preaching in the name of Jesus. After having been taken before Jewish authorities they were commanded not to preach any longer in the name of Jesus. What was their response in **Acts 4:19** **“But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge.”** Peter and John refused to submit to these Jewish authorities. The only time a lack of submission to authority is acceptable is when we are being directed to do something that is in clear violation of God’s word.

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We see the very same thing happening in the Old Testament story of Shadrack, Meshach, and Abednego in **Dan. 3**. These three friends of Daniel were loyal subjects of Nebuchadnezzar, law abiding citizens but there came a time when the king established a law which said that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigo, psaltery, and bagpipe, and all kinds of music, was to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had erected. The friends of Daniel refused. They refused to submit to this law because for them it would have violated the clear teaching of God's word not to worship any image. As a result of their refusal they were brought before the king and these are the words recorded of this encounter. **Daniel 3:13-18** **“Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrack, Meschach and Abednego; then these men were brought before the king. (14) Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my Gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? (15) Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigo, psaltery, and bagpipe, and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, very well. But if you will not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?” (16) Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this. (17) If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. (18) But even if he does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”** And of course you remember that they were cast into the fire and were miraculously delivered. Were they wrong in opposing Nebuchadnezzar clearly they were not.

We are to submit to governing authorities. However if there is a time we are asked to violate the clear teachings of God's word then we must hold our ground no matter what the consequence.

Let me ask you a question. Is there any law at this present time that is compelling you to personally do something that is clear contradiction to God's Word by any civil authority? I can't think of a single law that would fall into that classification in the country we live in. We are not being commanded to steal, cheat, or murder. There is not a single law that I can think of that I would have to disobey on grounds that it is violation of the clear teachings of God's Word.

Therefore if you or I would choose to violate any law we are choosing to rebel against God. **Romans 13:1** **“Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”** Opposing authority by violating the law is to oppose God. Opposing the laws that are established by the authorities that are established by God is opposing God.

Operation Rescue I believe has been a blight on the cause of Christ. Many well meaning Christians, having fallen prey to Operation Rescue's sinful practices. Their willingness to trespass and block access to abortion clinics in violation of the law is sin. Their willingness to resist arrest by law enforcement officers by passive resistance is sin. Certainly abortion is sin and our government by it's laws has given permission for people to commit sin, but two wrongs do not make a right. The end does not justify the means.

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It is my opinion that the conduct of this group and others like them performing acts of civil disobedience in the name of Christ has contributed to acts violence against abortion clinics and abortion doctors. All this is an abomination and we must seek at every opportunity to convince our Christian brothers and sisters that these activities is not what the Lord would have us to do. If they do not hear our voice then **Prov. 24:21-22** might become very real to them..... **“My son, fear the Lord and the king; do not associate with those who are given to change (22) For their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin that comes from both of them?”**

We should not only not act in ways that threaten the authorities over us we should be acting in ways which contribute to their success **(Jer. 29:4-7)**.

. But then you might think well how are we ever going to bring about positive change in our society if we are in effect take on as a church such a passive posture in respect to immoral governments and immoral laws?

How about the church becoming politically active? This certainly is better than civil disobedience, but still far short of what I believe God has called us to as believers.

God has not called us to clean up the fish pond of our society. We are here to fish fish. We have been called to “go make disciples of every nation baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” This is our work! The government has a job let us let them do it while we get about doing our job.

I don't want you to think that by my saying that our mission is not to clean up the fish pond but to fish fish that we cannot be an effective agent of change. I believe that the church of Jesus Christ when obedient to it's mandate and going into the world in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit to make disciples is by far the most effective agent of change this world has ever known.

What does **2 Cor. 5:17** tell us **“Behold if any man is in Christ Jesus he is a new creature old things have passed away behold new things have come.”** We were at one time dead in trespasses and sin but we have now become **“a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that we might proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.”** Our work of making disciples will positively impact society and that is good, but don't let us think that this is why we are doing what we are doing so that society might be positively impacted.

As new creatures in Christ our hope is not in our society. In fact there is no hope for society. This should be obvious to us as believers. Human society will continue to be wicked and vile and will one day suffer the judgment it deserves. But for the righteous our hope is in the promises of God and a glorious future. This was true of Israel in the Old Testament and it continues to be true of the church in the New Testament. This is why we must continue to keep the emphasis where the Lord has placed the emphasis so that the Church might continue to enlarge and one day be delivered into the glorious presence of Christ. It is not the renewing of society which is our hope but the building of the church and it's future glory.

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Looking to our political establishment to bring about changes in areas that truly matter in the eternal scheme of things is futility. Turn with me to **2 Cor. 10:3-5**. What are these weapons of flesh? Certainly civil disobedience would be a weapon of the flesh and I believe that political activism is another. Are we so naive as to think our battle is with flesh and blood? Our battle is not with presidents, judges, legislatures. We are told as believers that our battle is not that but rather it is against the powers of darkness. Turn with me and read **Eph. 6:10-20**.

Civil disobedience and even political activism are weapons of our flesh. If we really are concerned about change then let us fight the war for the souls of men with the weapons God has put at our disposal. Weapons that are designed not to work from the outside in but rather from the inside out.

If there is any doubt about what I am sharing with you go back and consider the Peter and John again in **Acts 4**. After having been warned no longer to speak in the name of Jesus what did Peter and John do? Did they immediately go out and lead a protest against the Jewish leaders for seeking to suppress them. No! Did they go out and try to use whatever political leverage they had gained with the people to have these Jewish leaders removed from their positions of authority? No! They reported back to the church what had happened and continued to persist their battle with the forces of darkness by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Never do we see any of the apostles or Christ Himself becoming politically active in order to bring about righteous ends. They understood very clearly the battle they were fighting and the weapons that were available to them in waging that battle.

I am afraid for the church of Jesus Christ. More and more churches are being drawn very gradually into the political arena believing that they can make a difference. I am not saying that political involvement cannot make a difference in the way our society functions. What I am saying is that is not what God has called us to either by command or example and the continued involvement of the church in this area only distracts us from where the true battle lies and neglects the truly effective weapons of change. I am not saying that political activism or civil disobedience cannot be well motivated. But I am saying that our involvement with either exposes the church to the risk of being negatively viewed by the pagan world and therefore potentially can potentially undermine the work of the church in making disciples.

WHAT IS THE RIGHTEOUS RESPONSE TO AUTHORITY? SUBMISSION EXCEPT WHEN IT WOULD LEAD US TO DISOBEY THE CLEAR TEACHING OF GOD'S WORD.....
WHAT IS THE RIGHTEOUS WORK OF THE CHURCH? THE MAKING OF DISCIPLES SAFELY DISTANCED FROM ANY KIND OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY OR ENTANGLEMENTS..... WHY? FOR THE LORD'S SAKE.

So what did Peter and John do? Did they immediately go out and lead a protest against the Jewish leaders for seeking to suppress them? No! Did they go out and try to use whatever political leverage they had gained with the people to have these Jewish leaders removed from their positions of authority. No! These leaders were established by God and to oppose them or the laws that they were operating by was to oppose God.

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But their lack of opposition to the leaders and the laws that they had established did not mean that they would then be obligated to disobey the clear teaching of God's Word. They, therefore, having left the presence of these Jewish leaders reported back to the church what had happened and as a result of all these events Peter and John as well as the rest of the church continued to speak the Word of God with boldness.

EXTENT

To what extent is this submission to extend? **“Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution.”** Not just to a few or even most but every. It means “every enterprise of man by which order is maintained are to be submitted to.” This would be not only to the judges and the legislators but even to those who have been assigned to direct traffic or take your ticket. We are to submit. We are not here to operate independently but submissively under every authority.

The word translated “**institution**” is a very interesting word. The word is used in scripture exclusively of the products and activities of God not man. The word is KTISIS and is translated “creation” in **Mark 13:19** **“For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created, until now, and never shall.”** It is also translated creature in **2 Cor. 5:17** **“If any man is in Christ He is a new creature.”** Therefore **V. 13** could literally be translated **“Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human creation.”** The “creation” is then explained by what immediately follows **“whether to a king as the one in authority, (14) or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers.....”** This is why in the NAS, NIV, or KJV all translate the word with the understanding that the word is referring to human authorities.

Submission to authority at any level is what is in view.

BASILEUS means any king The BASILEUS who had been placed by God in authority over Peter at the time of his writing of this epistle was Nero.

HEGEMON means leaders in general..... In this context it would mean all those people who are under the king or the higher authorities.

These human authorities have been established for certain purposes. WHAT ARE SOME OF THESE PURPOSES?

1) **“... for the punishment of evil doers”** The punishment of evil doers is a primary function of government. Our nation is I believe suffering greatly at this present time because of the failure of our governing authorities to be much more active in this area. An area where I believe that are justice system is presently failing is in the area of capital punishment. The scriptures are clear if an individual takes a life then his life is to be taken.

Gen. 21:12 **“He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.”**

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There are no mitigating circumstances. The law is clear. It does not matter whether the child was abused or neglected or had deficient mental capacity. When a life is taken a life is required. Someone might say in arguing against capital punishment that it is not an effective deterrent against crime. That is not the point. What is the purpose of government? They are established for the purpose of **“punishing evil doers.”**

2) **“and the praise of those who do right”** This is an area that has been largely ignored, but an area that could be greatly enhanced. I think of the L.A. riots and the opportunity the government had to identify specific individuals who had taken personal risk to uphold the laws of our state in protecting various individuals. I would have not had any problem with those who could clearly be identified as such individuals not only being honored but rewarded by the state.

What do we need to know if we are going to properly respond to suffering and live a life that is excellent amongst the gentiles? We need to know the commandment, the motivation for the command, and the extent of the command and

REASON

V. 15 “For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men”