

Our question this morning is how should Christians act towards the government? Now, Christians have different theological and biblical ideas when it comes to politics. Especially when it comes to one particular policy or another. We will agree murder, stealing, and adultery are wrong, but we might disagree about the best ways the government should punish or discourage those practices. And generally that is okay and fine. We can disagree about plenty and still be faithful followers of Christ. But there are some things we cannot disagree about. And this morning we will see the Bible gives us clear and convicting teaching on what our basic attitude as Christians towards the government should and must be. It is not up for debate.

I am not a controversial preacher. Some preachers love to make people angry. They intentional try to be provocative to get attention or anger people outside of their tribe. I don't like to do that. My problem is I can tend to be too gentle. But we need to read this passage because it is going to step on our toes. It is going to make us uncomfortable and it is not gentle. Our temptation is going to be to dismiss it. Our temptation will be to ignore it. Because politics is an idol for many Christians and some of you. It is our entertainment. It dominates our thought life and what we meditate on. We spend much of our days reading, listening, and watching things that talk about it. It can control our moods. And so preaching about idols is always dangerous business. But we must heed God's Word. We cannot allow our politics to dictate how we interpret God's Word. We must let the Word of God dictate our politics. Even if it means we have to change our minds.

The theme of 1 Peter is that we are exiles here. But if we are exiles, how should we act towards the government? Are we free to ignore them? Should we try to become them? Is our goal to conquer them and make them Christian?

1 Peter 2:13-25 will give us the answer.

I. Submit to the government as witnesses to Christ (v. 13-17).

The primary attitude of a Christian towards the government,
And not just the government, but every single human institution,
Is submission. We are to submit.

Verse 13, **"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution,"**

I did not hear any amens or clapping.

I know we aren't a charismatic church, but I didn't see any headnods.

I don't think this is anyone's life verse.

No one has this one tattooed in greek on their body.

What does it mean to submit?

It means we follow the laws and rules of the institutions over us.

We submit to them.

We obey them even if we do not like them.

We submit to them even if we disagree with them.

We are to acknowledge their authority over us.

Not just in our actions but in our hearts and attitudes.

Why are we to do this?

"For the Lord's sake."

We submit to the government for God's sake.

We do not do it because we want to.

We do not do it because the government demands it.

WE do not do it because it is the law and we must.

We do not do it for altruistic reasons.

We do this for the Lord's sake.

We do it because God has commanded it.

Because our Savior has asked us to.

And we do it because He wants us to.

This should be the driver behind all of our actions.

It should be our supreme motivation.

And it must be our motivation here.

But what kind of institutions?

Surely just the part of the government right?

He can't mean every institution with authority over us.

The rest of the verse **"every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme or to the governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good."**

This is meant to encompass all of them.

From the highest office in the land, which for us would be the President.

To the lowest officials who are over us.

The mayor, the police, the DMV or tag agents, the tax accessor, any one else you can think of.

We are to submit to all of them.

Now we do get a glimpse into what God has instituted the government to do.

They are to punish the evil and praise the good.

They are to pass laws to forbid evil.

And they are to reward righteousness.

It is meant to be a general restraint on the wickedness in the world.

Now, we are going to object and think of plenty of instances where our current human institutions gets that wrong.

Our next point we will talk more about when they fail.

But for now, we have to be subject to them.

Verse 15, **"for this is the will of God"**

This is God's will.

We often look at the news and wonder what God's plan is.

We wonder what God's will is.

Sometimes we even pray and ask for Him to show us His will.

To explain the plan.

I have great news.

God has explained part of His will to us.

God's will in our local elections coming on this week.

God's will in our national elections coming in November is that we would submit to all human institutions.

God's will is that we submit.

No matter who He has allowed to take that place or who wins elections.
We don't need to know His other reasons.
The only reason we need to know, is that He wants us to obey.

"That by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people."

Part of why we are to do this, is so that we can be witnesses for Christ.
That we would be a people who do good.
That we would follow the laws and the leaders.
Even when we do not like them.
Even when we think they are dumb and don't apply to us.
Even when we disagree with them and think they are bad policy.

God's will is that we submit and are good citizens here.
So that other people will see our righteousness.
The ignorance of foolish people here is those who would criticize our faith.
Those who would say Christians are all hypocrites and terrible people.
Those Christians just want power and control over others.

We are to live faithfully.
And to abound in good works, like submitting to human institutions.
So that we can be good witnesses.
So the people who would say such things about believers,
Would be able to look at our lives and see that it is not true.

On Wednesday nights we have been studying the Apostolic Fathers,
Who are some of the earliest Christian writings we have outside of the Bible.

2nd Clement is the earliest sermon.

There the pastor said "For when the pagans hear from our mouths the oracles of God, they marvel at their beauty and greatness. But when they discover that our actions are not worthy of the words we speak, they turn from wonder to blasphemy, saying it is a myth and a delusion."

There are some unbelievers who blaspheme the name of God because of our behavior.

Especially because of how some of us act and talk about the leaders God has placed over us.

May it not be so of us.

Verse 16, **"Live as people who are free not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God."**

We have freedom because of Jesus.

But what is the point of freedom?

As good Americans we believe freedom means we get to do whatever we want.

We can do what we want and what we believe is right with no one stopping us.

But the Bible, and our faith has a slightly different view of freedom.

Our freedom does not mean we get to do whatever we want.

Our freedom means we get to do whatever Jesus wants.

No longer are we slaves to sin.

No longer are we slaves to the world.

Now we get to be free to be servants of God.

We are not free to act towards government however you want.

We are not free to say whatever we want towards the human institutions.

We must not use our freedom in Christ as an excuse to sin.

Or as an excuse for our own evil.

Being a follower of Jesus, being free in Christ does not mean you get to do whatever you want.

We must still honor and serve Christ.

And He asks us to serve Him, by serving those He places over us.

Verse 17, **"Honor everyone, love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."**

He gives us four commands that are all placed together.

And they parallel each other.

We are to honor everyone.
Because everyone is made in the image of God.
We are to love and cherish the family of Christ and the church.
Which, also means the church is an institution.
We are to honor and submit to the leaders placed over us.
We are to fear God.
And we are to honor the emperor.
Really this comes down to honoring everyone.

Do you honor the emperor?
Do you honor our leaders in our institutions over us?
Do you honor them in how you talk about them?
Do you honor them in what you post on the internet about them?
Do you honor them in how you disagree with them?
It is not about never criticizing or disagreeing.
But we have to do so while we honor them.

Remember Peter is saying this about the Roman emperor.
A supremely wicked institution that requires people to worship him as god.
An institution and man who will have him killed.
The institution that crucified our God.
But you will never see any of the apostles dishonor him.

I always think of Augustine in passages like this.
He said people like to claim God's Word is confusing and difficult to understand whenever they don't like what it says.
This is our temptation.
We want to think this passage is hard to interpret.
It isn't.
It is pretty easy and straight forward.
We submit to every human institution.
It means what it says.

[Transition] The big objection many of us will have is this. What if the institution is corrupt and evil? What if the government is mistreating us? Surely then we have an out and a reason to not submit.

II. **Submit even to injustice for Christ (v. 18-20).**

The context takes a subtle shift here.
He moves away from talking about emperors and governors.
Now he talks about lower relationships.
He talks about servants and masters.
But he has not changed principles.

He just takes the idea lower.
We have to submit to the highest authorities over us.
We also have to submit to the lowest.

Verse 18, **"Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust."**

Now, none of us get off the hook here.
We do not get to say that we are not servants.
We can't say that we aren't slaves so these verses don't apply to me.
They all apply to you.
They all teach ups about life and godliness.
They give us spiritual principles.
They tells us how to follow God.
This one tells us that we have to obey those placed in authority over us.

Because if we are supposed to submit to the highest authorities,
We also need to submit to the lowest authorities that way.
And if this passage applies to the lowest authorities.
How much more does this apply to the highest?

Even when those authorities are unjust.
Even when those authorities are ungodly.

Even when those authorities are opposed to God.
We still have to be subject and submit to them.

"With all respect."

We have to be respectful.
We do not submit begrudgingly.
We do not do it sarcastically.
We are to do so with the utmost respect.
Even to the wicked.
Not just to the godly and the ones we like.
Not just to the good ones who do things the right way.
Even when corruption is rampant like in Rome.
Even when the whole system is unjust like slavery.

You see it usually changes.
Depending on which leaders are in charge.
If we think they are godly and on the right team then we happily do so.
And we want to correct others on their lack of respect.
But then when it is the ungodly.
And it is people from the wrong party.
Or people who are truly wicked.
Then we don't show them all respect.

But God does not give us an out.

And we are to do this.

Verse 19 **"for this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly."**

We need to do this while being mindful of God.
We only get credit for it when we do it because of God.
Only when we are mindful of trying to follow Jesus.
Of trying to be obedient to His Word and commands.

But also, God calls this a gracious thing.

Suffering and being treated unjustly by unjust leaders is a gracious thing.
You see, we seem to have it backwards.
We usually see godly leaders as a blessing.
And ungodly leaders must mean God is punishing us.
Maybe we have it wrong.
Because Peter says it is a gracious thing.
To have ungodly leaders and to be treated in unjust ways is a blessing.

Suffering in the Bible is not a punishment.
It is a gift.
When we do it being mindful of God.

Verse 20, **"for what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?"**

Sometimes we suffer and are mistreated because we sin.
Sometimes people hate us for being Christians because we have behaved in ungodly ways.
That does not count as persecution or suffering for Christ.
If I knock on a strangers door and say, "Hey pagan, God hates you and you are going to burn in hell unless you repent of your sins right now."
And they scream at me and slam the door.
That is not persecution.

"But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God."

It is only when we truly follow Jesus.
When we do good and obey Him.
When we do that and suffer for it, then it is gracious.
Then God is pleased with us.

We should suffer for our holiness.
And the suffering itself is not a hinderance.
It is a blessing.
And there is a reward for those who suffer for Christ.

This also means suffering is meant to be endured.
We do not run away from the suffering.
We do not complain about the suffering.
We are not to go around trying to stop the suffering.
We just endure it in the strength of Christ.

The question may come what do we do when the government or those who are over us like bosses pass unjust laws.
Or they ask us to do things we disagree with?
Or maybe even things that are unjust.

Now we do have more freedom than servants or slaves.
We have more freedom in our country than the Christians in Rome.
We have the ability to vote and have a voice.
We have the ability and right to protest policies that are unjust.
But how should we use this freedom?

We should not use this freedom as a cover for evil.
It does not mean we no longer have to submit.
It means we have a greater chance to serve God.

Now not all unjust laws are created equal.
And most laws we disagree with are not unjust.
You may believe something is a bad policy decision.
Maybe it is even foolish, but that does not make it wicked.
Some laws are unjust and wrong, but they do not ask us to sin.
Maybe it infringes on our freedom and is wrong, but following and submitting to the law does not require you to sin.
Well, then we are to submit.

During the covid lockdown the government asked people to stop meeting in groups.
As a church we submitted.

You might think it was dumb, waste of time, but it wasn't asking us to sin. Now, if the government said everyone else can gather in groups and meet, but churches can't gather for worship, then that would be asking us to sin. And it would require a different response.

Some laws may ask us to violate God's law.

Those are the only laws.

Those are the only times we are allowed to resist.

But we still do even that while submitting to the authority over us.

If you are in a job, and your boss asks you to sin.

They ask you to deceive or lie to a customer.

You have to say no.

And you say you cannot do that as a follower of Jesus.

And if you get fired, then you are fired.

If the government passed a law that said churches had to allow gay weddings.

I would say no we cannot do that because it violates our faith.

But we will willingly endure whatever punishment the government chooses.

This is what the apostles do.

There are times they are placed in prison for preaching.

And they are told to stop.

And they say that they cannot.

They must obey God and preach the gospel.

But they willingly go to prison.

They endure the suffering.

And even in those conversations with the Pharisees they treat them with respect due to them as rulers.

Even as they submit to unjust laws.

I think of John Bunyan.

He was a puritan preacher.
He was arrested for holding church services outside of the Anglican church of England.
It was only to be for 3 months as long as he promised to stop preaching.
He endured prison.
And he ended up staying for 12 years.
Because he wouldn't stop preaching.
But he submitted to the chains.
And in his prison he wrote Pilgrim's Progress.

III. Submit like Christ (v. 21-25).

Ultimately, we do all of this like Christ.
He is our example.
Because this is what Jesus did in His life and ministry.

Verse 21, **"For to this you have been called,"**

This is not just a command.
It is a sacred calling and mission from God.
This behavior is what pleases God.
This is what God has asked us to do.

I like to give my children special missions.
And they are young enough that they love doing them.
My special mission is usually, bring me my glasses or take out the trash.
But they love to do it.
Not because they are such exciting tasks.
But because they love me.
And they want to make me happy.
And they love to feel chosen and included.
God has given us a special mission and a calling.
And we should want to do it because we want to make Him happy.

"Because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his footsteps."

Christ gave us an example.
Christ suffered.
He endured unjust treatment and death.
And we are to walk in His footsteps.

Verse 22, **"he committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth."**

Jesus suffered even though He was perfect.
No single person in the all of human history has suffered a greater injustice than Jesus.
He is the only one who never sinned.
Who never did anything wrong.
Who was never deserving of any punishment from anyone ever.
And yet He was executed.
The government and rulers in power had Him killed.
And how did He behave?
What did He do?

Verse 23, **"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."**

He did not return the unjust treatment.
When He was cursed and mocked He did not mock and curse back.

I enjoy sports off and on.
And I am fascinated by some athletes that are elite trash talkers.
Guys like Muhammad Ali, Larry Bird, Michael Jordan.
While they are playing the game, they insult and mock their opponents.
There were some of them who got a reputation.
That they would completely destroy you, so you had better not start or talk back.
Because they knew exactly he buttons to push or insecurities to mention to wreck you.

Well, Jesus knows all of those.
He knows the deepest insecurities.
He knows the deepest shame and secrets of those mocking him.
He could destroy all of them with a word.
He could reveal just a portion of His glory and destroy their souls with his own mockery.
But what does Jesus do?
How does Jesus respond?
He is silent.
He does not say a word.
One of the only words He says, is "Father forgive them."

Verse 24, **"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. But his wounds we have been healed."**

Jesus suffered to death.
He took all of our sin.
All of the injustice we have done with our own hands.
And He took them on His own body.
And He was killed on a tree.
He died a cursed death.
He died the death of a slave and a criminal.

He did this that we might die to sin.
That our sins may be washed away.
That we would turn from the former way of life and turn towards righteousness.
That we would be healed by His death.

Verse 25, **"For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and overseer of your souls."**

Do not wander any more.
All of us were lost like sheep.
Or a dog that can't find its way home.

But Jesus came down to find us.
He brought us in to our true home.
And He is our shepherd and overseer of our souls.
He is our caretaker and pastor.

Look at the beauty of the gospel.
Look at the comfort of the gospel.
The script that we follow calls for us to suffer injustice.
But instead of it destroying us, or hindering us, or harming us at all.
It will lead to our redemption and glory.

And look at all Jesus has done on our behalf.
Look at the redemption He offers.
If this is what He has done for us, how can we do anything but act like our Savior?
Do you not read this and want to be like Jesus?
Do you need see the depth of how God has forgiven us.
And it makes you want to do all He commands and asks.
We should.

If Jesus offers us forgiveness for all of our sins and failures.
He offers us new life.
He offers us eternal rewards beyond all comparison.
And all He wants in return is for us to be like Him.
To walk in His footsteps.
To submit to some earthly leaders who will all fade away in the kingdom to come.
How can we not?
How can we complain?

Our politics.
Our political involvement must be shaped by the cross.
And it must be shaped by the gospel.

Jesus commands us to submit so we do.
Not because we think that the leaders here are right.
Not because we think they are holy.

CONCLUSION:

Where have we been?

1. Submit to the government as witnesses to Christ.
2. Submit even to injustice for Christ.
3. Submit like Christ.

Ultimately, all of this must be because of the gospel.

This is not just laws and rules we are to follow.

This is not about an empty legalism where we follow laws and go through the motions.

We are to behave this way towards the world because the gospel has so transformed us.

We are to act this way towards human institutions because we are so enamored with the heavenly institution that is to come.

We are to do this because we so deeply love Jesus.

And we are happy to do whatever He asks us to do.

Even if we don't like it.