

*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. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 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. 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. 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. 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. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:13-25*

How many of you remember when our cars and trucks didn't have seatbelts? How many of you didn't like it very much when seatbelts become mandatory in 1968 (US) and 1976 (Canada)? I do remember it was a struggle for many people who considered seatbelts to be nothing but a hassle. And for some, so much so, they just don't want to be bothered even when the law required them to buckle up. And for one, a New Zealander named Ivan Segedin, took it to an extreme which ultimately caused the police to ticket him 32 times over five years for failing to use his seat belt. Even though this was costing him big money, Segedin refused to buckle up. Finally, instead of obeying the law, the man decided to rely on deception. He made a fake seat belt that would hang over his shoulder and make it appear that he was wearing a seat belt when he was not. And his trick worked for a while – until he had a head-on collision and was thrown forward onto the steering wheel and killed him. Discussing the accident, the coroner described the fake seat belt: "Though his car was fitted with seat belts, an extra belt with a long strap was knotted above the seat belt on the driver's side, providing a belt to simply sit over the driver's shoulder – which made it look like he was buckled in his seat belt, but he wasn't."

If Ivan Segedin had obeyed the mandatory law set by the government of New Zealand to use his seat belt, he still might be alive today. In our text for this morning the apostle Peter addresses the issue of what our Christian response should be to the laws of the governing authorities of the world that we live in. This is an extremely relevant subject for us today in the midst of the legalization of killing unborn babies and murdering adults who no longer want to live; and the legal authorization of allowing people to decide their own gender - and the legal condemnation and threat of punishment to come for those who fail to affirm and embrace that gender; as well as the legalization of marijuana, which threatens the future of the health of our youth, which then threatens the future of our world.

Providentially, today's sermon is being given the context of the Annual Celebration of the British Columbia Baptist Conference we hosted last week – where Dr. Jan Hettinga spoke of biblical concept of the Kingdom of God, where true followers of Jesus Christ submit their hearts, lives and souls to the authority of Jesus Christ – so he might reign in their hearts, lives and souls. During the celebration we also hosted a pastor's forum to talk about all of the cultural issues and the laws against the things we believe in - that we are facing in our churches, our communities, our countries, and our world today. Today's sermon is also in the immediate context of our previous text, where we learned that true Christians are to shine as stars in this morally dark world by living holy lives of obedience to the word of God. In today's text we see that - while we as followers of Jesus Christ are to be a holy people who live out our lives for God's glory – we are also to be living out that in the world as true witnesses of Jesus Christ by living our lives in submission to the governing authorities in the world that we live in.

*“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”* (1 Peter 2:13-14).

Peter begins his exhortation that we are to be witnesses, by living our lives in submission, by using the phrase *“be subject.”* This is one word in the original Greek, which means to “obey, to subordinate oneself, to be under authority, to submit to another’s God-given authority. In this context *submission* is a divine word. We are to submit to God and resist the devil, as Jesus himself did. By doing so, Jesus pleased his Father and defeated the devil (James: 4:7). Without submitting to God, we cannot resist the devil who, like a roaring lion, seeking to devour us. When we sin, we are submitting to the devil, who comes to steal, kill, and destroy us (John 10:10). Everyone submits and obeys, either to the God of the Bible or the devil, the father of all lies. No creature on earth is autonomous. It is a lie to think that any creature is a self-governing being. Adam refused to obey God by obeying the devil. As a result, in Adam, all humans sin and die. Paul speaks about this in Romans 5:12: *“Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”*

Every child of Adam is conceived in sin, born as a sinner, to only practice sin and die eternally. Only Jesus can save us from our sin because he alone was without sin. In his perfect righteousness, he died in our place and for our sins. Paul declares, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 6:23). There is no other Savior! Because Christ died for our sins, we can enjoy freedom from sin – *in the sense that we have freedom to obey Jesus*, who alone is our Lord. So we are free to submit to God and every God-appointed human delegated authority.

*“Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution.”* This is our Christian call to civil obedience. This can’t be stated more clearly. We are to submit to the authorities at every level, whether federal, provincial, state, or local -- whether we are talking about the Supreme Court or our local court in Port Alberni, whether laws governing income tax or parking regulations. We are to submit as a Christian obligation. This is restated again and again in Scripture – by the apostle Paul in Romans 13:1-2 (*“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God”*) - and by Jesus himself in Matthew 22:21, *“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.”* There are things which are solely God's, and therefore they cannot be given to Caesar. But Jesus is saying that Caesar has a legitimate sphere of authority, and we are to submit to him the things which fall within Caesar’s realm of authority. So we are to obey. Civil *disobedience* by Christians simply cannot be justified in the Word of God.

This is true even when government is unjust. The Roman government at the time Peter wrote was anything but just. Peter is not saying that civil government, or any political regime, will always conform to the will of God. They won’t. And Rome didn’t. But Peter is saying that at the core of all civil governments there is justice. And that is what keeps things stable. The stance that Scripture takes is that some government is better than none, that anarchy is not God's way. Revolution is not God's way, because it sets in motion the dark forces in society which will tear and destroy it. Therefore even a bad government is better than no government at all. Because we live in a fallen society, and fallen men and women would otherwise devour one another, there needs to be some agency to maintain law and order and justice. And civil government provides that. Therefore, for Christians to rebel and try to overthrow the government, is to rebel against God. God has established this authority. That is a hard thing for us to accept in our independent, entitlement-minded, rights-saturated culture we live in. It is particularly hard when you have no respect for your government. It is hard for us in these days of Donald Trump and Justin Trudeau. But Peter says we are to obey, nevertheless.

*“Every human institution . . . as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.”* Civil government is instituted by God. Peter tells us that God is the one who sets in motion these forces in society on a national and local level - as an extension both of the wrath and of the righteousness of God. Government exists to punish evildoers and to reward those who do right. That is what a just king does. In the Old Testament, God's kings loved righteousness and hated iniquity. And the Messiah, who would be the just King par excellence, is said to be One who will love righteousness and hate iniquity. That is what government ought to do. It ought to reward those who are obedient, and it ought to condemn greed and injustice and violence wherever it appears. Even bad governments do that to some extent. This is God's way of dealing with the depravity and rebellion of fallen human beings.

*“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.* Peter also tells us as believers are to also submit to every God-established, delegated authority because it is the will of God that by our doing “good” by our obedience, we may silence the ignorance of foolish people who oppose and persecute followers of Jesus. Those without Christ are sinfully ignorant of the knowledge of the one true God of the Bible. They constantly suppress the knowledge of God that comes to them from creation, from conscience, and from hearing of gospel. So Peter is saying that it is the will of God that we do good works, so that by our godly character we will shut the mouths of those who oppose, slander and persecute us. We are foreordained to do this. In Ephesians 2:10 Paul writes: *We are his workmanship, created In Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*” In 1 Peter 4:1–2 Peter also says, *“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.”*

Peter says, *“Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God”* We are to obey not because we are coerced or forced, but as free men. That’s why Jesus said: *“If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles”* (Matthew 5:41). Under Roman law, a Roman soldier could command a citizen to carry his pack for one mile, and the citizen had to comply. Jesus said at the end of that mile, *“go with him two miles”* Why? To show we are free. We take the initiative to act. We are not compelled to do it, but we do it willingly--for our community, our country, our God. We are God’s servants. We are free in regard to the laws of a country, yet we are aliens who obey out of a sense of responsibility to our Lord Jesus. *“For his sake,”* Peter says, “Submit!”

Now, all of this doesn’t mean that civil government has ultimate authority in our life. Peter tells us in this passage that are to be *“servants of God”* not servants of Caesar. And there may come a time in our experience, as has occurred in history past, when men and women will have to disobey -- respectfully -- the ruling authority, because their laws violate some clearly stated principle of Scripture. Should there ever be a law passed in our land which prohibited something God himself commands, or should the law of our land command something God prohibits, we would have to disobey respectfully, as the apostles did in the first century when they were told not to preach the Gospel. They refused to comply. And they did it graciously. They did it knowing the state had the right to punish them. But they went out on the streets and they preached. They were thrown in prison because of it, and they submitted to that, because they knew government has the right to punish those who disobey the law. But they disobeyed only because that law clearly contradicted a principle of the Word of God.

*“Honor everyone.”* We must honor every human being because we all bear the image of God. Millions of slaves lived in the Roman Empire. They were treated not as persons with rights but as things. In fact, most people in the early church were slaves. But in God’s family, in the church, there should be no discrimination. How dare we despise any person who is in Jesus Christ? Our countries murders millions of unborn infants in the name of women’s rights, while the unborn babies are treated as non-persons, having no rights. We are also putting people to death who don’t want to live. We should be living out a gospel that makes people want to live! Christians should show respect for all people.

*“Love the brotherhood.”* We are to love our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. The early church consisted of all kinds of people of all backgrounds, mostly poor people. Yet God in his wisdom chose the foolish, the weak, the lowly, the despised, the nothings to shame the mighty and to nullify those that are. We are to love one another and each other deeply, because Jesus loves us and died for us. *“Fear God.”* We must keep on fearing God, who is our infinite, personal, holy, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Creator, Redeemer, and Judge. The fear of God will keep us from sinning. Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 says: *“Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”* Amen! *Honor the emperor.”* We called to honor, and keep on honoring, the *“emperor.”* The *“emperor”* here stands for all delegated authorities. Children, obey your parents. If you don’t, you’ll pay for it in due time. Christians, obey your church leaders. If you don’t, God will deal with you for despising Christ’s authority. Employees, obey your employers. Students, obey your teachers. And citizens, obey the president, the prime minister, the police, and all other authorities, because all delegated authorities are appointed by God.

It’s here where Peter gives us an example and an application of the witness of submission in the relationship between slaves and their owners who came to faith in Jesus Christ. A slaves' lot was pretty difficult. They were treated like animals, even branded. Many were kept in filthy barracks and driven each day to the fields. They had no legal rights. Most of them were not allowed to marry. They could only live together. Their children belonged to their master. Slaves were cruelly and harshly treated. Their masters had the right of life and death over them. The truth was, slaves were often a restless and bitter group. Into this layer of society the gospel came, and the question was then raised: “How should we, as slaves, now respond to our masters? What should we do?” Peter answers that question.

*Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 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. 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.* 1 Peter 2:18-21

What does this mean to us today? Well, most of us today are not slaves. We may feel as if we are, but we really do not meet the definition of a Roman slave. Yet, it is true in one sense that for the forty-plus hours a week our employer buys our time - we are his or her slaves. And certainly if slaves are to be obedient to their masters, how much more so are employees to be obedient to their employers. Peter says to obey them, to do what they ask us to do, and to do it with respect not to complain about them during coffee breaks, but outwardly to obey them, and inwardly to show respect and honor. And this not only to the *“good and gentle,”* but also to the perverse, to the wicked, to the one who is unjust, who ignores us, who never thanks us or appreciates us. How should we react? Peter says we are to submit to our employer in a spirit of respect - both the good and gentle, and also those who are unreasonable.

Now, this does not mean we cannot negotiate with an unreasonable employer. We can ask for higher wages; we can ask for better working conditions. We are free to leave if the situation becomes too difficult to stay. In general it is not good to run away from anything that is difficult. God doesn’t want us to run from something just because it is hard. He may want us to stay there in order to learn some valuable lessons. But we can talk to our employer and try to set things right. But Peter's point is, while this is going on, maintain respectful conduct. Do not criticize or complain or get bitter or resentful or talk about them behind their back. Obey them, and do it with a spirit of reverence and honor. Now, this is not a word to employers. There is no justification anywhere in Scripture for employers to oppress their employees. There is a great deal of truth throughout Scripture addressed to masters, to employers. There is plenty of Scripture which addresses itself to that problem. This is a word to employees, and it says that no matter what our master does, we are to respect them and obey them.

*“For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 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”* (1 Peter 2:19-20). Peter tells us here that it is a “gracious thing” to suffer “unjustly.” The Greek word for “gracious thing” is the our word for “grace” that speaks of loving acts toward those who don’t deserve them. The “gracious thing” is to go beyond what is normally expected, and to do loving and compassionate things for people who do not deserve it. It is an act of grace when we patiently do the best we can, but are misunderstood and unjustly treated.

Watchman Nee tells a story about a Chinese rice farmer. There were a number of fields arranged in terraces up the side of the mountain, and this farmer's was located a good way up the terraces. He had to water his rice field by pedaling a bicycle-like device which pumped water from a stream up through an irrigation system to his field. It was quite an exhausting procedure. He had to go down the side of the mountain, get on this contraption, and pedal it rapidly for about an hour in order to flood his rice paddy. To his consternation he discovered that every night when he had finished doing this, his neighbor, whose field was directly below his, would put a hole in the dike and drain the water into his own field. Every morning this poor farmer would repair the break in the dike and pump his field full of water again. And every evening his neighbor would breach the dike and let the water run down into his own field. This went on for several weeks. The farmer then talked to his neighbor and asked him not to do it. The man refused. There was nothing the farmer could do to change his neighbor’s mind. So the next morning the farmer hooked up the pipe to his neighbor's field, pumped his neighbor's rice paddy full of water, and then he pumped his own rice paddy full of water. Now that’s grace! That’s the witness of submission. That is being kind to the ungrateful. Peter says it is truly grace when we do all we can to please our master, and he still mistreats us - but we are still patient and kind to him.

*“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”* (1 Peter 2:21). Peter tells us here that Jesus is our “example” in what it means to show grace to those in authority who mistreat us. We see the apex of that Jesus example in Luke 23:34 when he prayed that God would forgive those who were putting him to death: *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* Peter follows this statement by quoting a number of statements in Isaiah 53 about the Suffering Servant, the Messiah, and shows how Jesus graciously fulfilled them. *“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. 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. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls”* 1 Peter 2:22-25).

In the context of being unjustly treated, and in the face of taking a stand for Jesus in a world opposed to God, Peter reminds us here that before Christ we were straying like sheep – and sometimes we still so do: *“For you were straying like sheep.”* That was the old way we lived our before we knew Jesus. When things didn’t go our way, we did it our own way. But now, in Chris, Peter says, “You were straying like sheep, and doing it your own way. But now you *“have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”* The witness of our submission to God and to those whom God has placed in authority over us – is the patient grace we show those who are against us because we are followers of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. Today Peter is reminding us that there will be times when we encounter, and have to live under, unjust authority. And when that happens, we need to remember that is no accident! God has sovereignly called us and saved us for this purpose. Romans 8: 31-32 says: *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”* We are called to be witnesses of the grace of God that we have received through Jesus Christ by living out our lives in submission to the governing authorities in in our world – regardless of how we are treated!