

Text: 1 Pt 2.13-16

We are still in our two weeks of “all Peter all the time.” Next week, Christmas begins!

On Wednesday evening, I pointed out that Peter’s focus turned in our new section from instructions that focused inward (to spiritual growth) to instructions that focus outward (for spiritual living).

Our messages today start with a very blunt instrument, this word...

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution

And here we are, once again considering our relationship to government.

Peter is writing around AD 63 or 64. Paul is in Rome, in prison, as far as we know. Some think Peter is in Rome as well.

Eight years (or so) earlier, Paul wrote on the Christian political ethic (as some scholars call it) in Romans 13.

Paul also wrote about it in Titus 3, roughly contemporary with Peter’s writing in 1 Peter. One wonders if the two apostles discussed the subject. They lived in an environment of growing government oppression of Christians.

Nero came to the throne in AD 54. The first six years of his reign saw the “good Nero.” He ruled responsibly during those years. In AD 60, he got rid of his mother and descended into personal debauchery and misrule.

The fire of Rome occurred in AD 64, either just before or just after 1 Peter. Nero blamed the Christians for the fire. As noted previously, he mistreated Christians severely after this.

The reason we mention this is that Paul’s words in Romans 13 (“good Nero” period) and Paul’s words in Titus 3 along with Peter’s words in 1 Peter 2 (“bad Nero” period) express **a consistent Christian political ethic**.

The apostles taught the same message, whether times were good or bad.

So, let’s read our passage and get into the message.

Read 1 Pt 2.13-17, text 13-16

Our title comes from v. 16

Live Free, Be a Slave

Proposition: Real freedom means voluntary submission to God and His will.

We could organize our message in several ways, but I am going to try to follow the logic of the passage and build up to the proposition, not down from it.

I. The default Christian view of government (13-14)

A. The driving imperative of the passage: “submit yourselves”

1. A very blunt opening
2. A “decisive imperative” (rather than “continuous action”)
3. In other words, a “make up your mind” command

“Peter’s readers should fix it as their permanent mind that they are in submission to governing powers.”¹

4. But not a matter of law (we will see the spiritual element more clearly later)

“What is inculcated ... is an act of faith rather than a rule of conduct.”²

B. The comprehensive scope of the imperative

1. Every human institution

a. KJV – “every ordinance”; lit. “every human creation”

“Since it is literally impossible to be subject to every human creature, the term is best understood as impersonal and taken to refer to the various fundamental human orders of authority in society.”³

b. Thus, those ordered institutions that rule human society

- 1) Governments
- 2) Government institutions (hospital systems, police forces, armed forces)

¹ Robert E. Picirilli, *Commentary on the Books of 1 and 2 Peter*, ed. Robert E. Picirilli, The Randall House Bible Commentary (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 1992), 149.

² Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London: Macmillan & co. Ltd, 1946), 172.

³ D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1997), 163–64.

3) Business institutions (organized under government, developing internal authority structures)

4) Social organizations ... likewise ... etc.

c. Each may have varied scopes of authority, but all have authority

1) For example, the military is an authority-based institution

2) It has an authority structure, a chain of command

3) Those who are within the military are subject to the military orders

4) Those outside the military are mostly NOT subject to those orders — but are subject to other human institutions

2. Kings

a. Peter uses the word “king” – a term Roman citizens would not like, but well used outside of Rome

b. Regardless, Peter refers to the one person who sits supreme over society

“whether to a king as the one in authority”

lit. “whether to a king as one being superior”

3. Governors

a. Those sent by the king, his subordinates (to whatever level)

b. They are representatives of the supreme power vested in the king

These terms intentionally have a broad sweep, as authority devolves through society from the highest to the lowest official (with varying degrees of authority).

C. The agreeable function of government (as God ordained)

1. Government meant to punish the evildoers

2. Government meant to praise the “right-doers”

“Modern people are not familiar with governments praising those who do what is right. The Romans, however, would erect statues, grant privileges, or commend in other ways those who helped the community.”⁴

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, v. 37 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 129.

We have something of this, as “right-doers” have buildings named after them. (ex. H. W. Pickup Junior High in DV)

Note: this is to the good; we want our society to function this way, we want good order

“True religion is always the friend of order as well as of liberty.”⁵

D. The rationale for obedience: “for the Lord’s sake”

1. Parallel to Paul, in Rm 13.5 “for conscience’ sake”
2. “That is a distinctly Christian motive for obedience.”⁶
3. Selwyn: contrasts this with the Greek motive for submission to authority, for the sake of the polis (the city)

“the phrase, like St. Paul’s “for conscience’ sake” (Rom. 13:5, cf. 1 Pet. 2:19, Tit. 3:1), provides a motive for civic duty very different from that of Greek thought which claimed as of right to sacrifice the individual to the community.”⁷

My Comment: Not the polis, but the kurios (the Lord).

This **default Christian view** is “living free” – or living as a free man, as per our title.

How is submission living free? Stay with me.

II. The divine will for Christian behaviour towards government (15)

A. Doing good is the will of God

1. “Doing good” means paying taxes (Jesus - Mt 17.24–27, 22.21; Paul - Rm 13.6–7)
2. Doing good is NOT “pious deeds” but “good citizenship”

⁵ Charles H Spurgeon, *Spurgeon Commentary: 1 Peter*, ed. Elliot Ritzema and Jessi Strong, Spurgeon Commentary Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 1 Pt 2.13.

⁶ Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 165.

⁷ Selwyn, *1 Peter*, 172.

B. Doing good has an additional objective

1. Doing good is the right thing to do on its own merits
2. But also, on its effect: putting a muzzle on critics

The language here quite strong

- a. Silence = lit. muzzle, as one would a vicious dog
- b. Ignorance = “not predominantly in the intellectual sense but, ... a lack of religious experience or *lack of spiritual discernment*”⁸
- c. Fools = the word frequently occurring in Proverbs for “the fool” — willful ignorance, spiritually culpable

“The enemies have their mouths open rather than their eyes.”⁹

“An empty drum makes a loud noise when it is beaten; and empty men, like empty vessels, often make the most sound. How then are we to silence this noisy ignorance? By argument? No, for it is not amenable to argument. Ignorance is to be silenced ‘by doing good.’”¹⁰

This **divine will for Christian behaviour** is “living free” – or living as a free man, as per our title.

How is submission living free? Stay with me.

III. The spiritual disposition of Christian response to government (16)

A. Translation details

1. Note that “Act” in our version is in italics
 - a. Other versions supply “Live”
 - b. Literal reading of the text: “as free, and not having the freedom as the cloak of the evil, but as servants of God” (YLT)

⁸ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁹ Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 168.

¹⁰ Spurgeon, *1 Peter*, 1 Pt 2.15.

2. No main verb in this verse, one must be understood
3. Thought actually goes back to v. 13, word to be supplied should be “submit”

1 Pt 2.16 ~~Act~~ [Submit] as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but *use it* as bondslaves of God.

B. What does “~~Act~~ [Submit] as free men” mean?

1. One can submit in a servile way, like a slave, because one has to
2. Peter calls us to submit as free
3. Recall that many of these believers were (quite literally) slaves
4. A free man in a free society *voluntarily* submits to the social order; he is a *good citizen*
5. Regardless of one’s status, this is how we respond to government — voluntary submission

We are free because we are citizens of heaven

C. The manner of the free submission qualified

1. Not as a cloak for evil
 - a. How could my voluntary submission be a “covering for evil”?
 - 1) Most of the commentators suggest some kind of antinomianism (anti-law)
 - 2) That is, someone acting as a free man might go to far and “do whatever he wants”
 - 3) Yet government is a restraint – you can’t both be submissive and dismissive at the same time
 - b. My suggestion: this is a qualification to total submission
 - 1) Yes, I voluntarily submit to government ordinances (that’s my freedom)
 - 2) But I don’t submit when the government commands evil (something contrary to the will/law of God)

So, for example, in WW2, citizens had to report Jews, not hide them.

One could say, "well, I am a citizen, I have no moral responsibility, if I obey and turn in the Jews, I am still good with God"

Wrong! That would be using my freedom as a cloak for evil.

2. But as a slave of God

a. Here is the bottom line

b. I am free to do what is right, and what is right is what pleases God

Conclusion:

Proposition: All real freedom means voluntary submission to God and His will.

Or,

Live Free, Be a Slave