

April 3, 2016

Sojourners

Be Subject For the Lord's Sake

1 Peter 2:13 – 17

The title of this series in 1 Peter is called Sojourners, and it's taken from a couple of places in this letter where Peter reminds his readers of their essential identity in the world. They, and we, are sojourners, aliens and strangers in the world. And the entire thrust of this letter is to help his readers know how they ought to live as sojourners in the world. And here again, just ahead of the passage we read this morning, Peter tells his readers, *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.* And in the rest of this chapter and into the next, he focuses on what that looks like. And what it looks like is a life of being in submission. Submission to God, submission to His word, and submission to the authorities in our lives.

Peter could have talked about a lot of things here, but he chooses to focus on the biggest battle we have – our relationship to authority. *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.* [1 Peter 2:13-14] The problem from the beginning has revolved around our attitude toward authority. In the beginning God said to Adam and Eve, 'Don't touch.' And so they did. Rebellion is **the** root problem of sinful men. We are by nature disobedient. We don't like anyone telling us what to do. Rebellion is essentially the attitude of 'reserving for myself the right to make the final decision'. When Malcolm Muggeridge was working with Svetlana Stalin, the daughter of Josef Stalin, on a BBC production of Stalin's life, she told him, that as Stalin lay dying, plagued with terrifying hallucinations, he suddenly sat halfway up in bed, clenched his fist toward the heavens one last time and fell back on his pillow, dead.

And so the first word of this command strikes terror into the hearts of rebellious men – 'Be subject' or 'be submissive'. Now a lot of people have spent a lot of time trying to make this word say something it doesn't. We hear this word in the context of husband and wife relationships as in Ephesians 5 – 'Wives, submit to your own husbands...' and we find out that it doesn't really mean submit. It means something else – value highly, honor, respect, submit so long as your rights are respected, and so on – because there is something in our souls that shrinks away from the plain, unadorned concept of 'be subject'. But I've done extensive study on this word in the Greek and while it may involve things like honor, respect, value highly, it actually means '**subject yourself**'. The word is *hupotasso*, and it means an ordered submission to authority. It is a Greek military term meaning 'to arrange troops in a military fashion under the command of a leader', and in non-military use it simply means voluntarily arranging yourself under authority. It means arranging your attitude and thinking to correspond to the will of the one over you. The word carries with it the idea of relinquishing your rights to do as you please because you are under authority.

This concept is so important that Peter spends the rest of this letter telling us what this looks like. In 2:18 it is '*Servants, be subject to your masters...*'; in 3:1 he says '*Likewise, wives be subject to your own husbands...*'; in 3:5 we have the example of the holy women of old who wore submission as adornment; in 5:5 Peter speaks to the young men, '*Like wise, you who are younger, be subject to your elders..*'. Submission is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. When we come to faith in Christ, we are submitting to God and to the authority of His word, and to Christ who is our salvation. The call to believe in Jesus is also a call to follow Jesus. You cannot really be a follower unless you really do what He says. *"Jesus did not say discuss me; He said follow me." We do not make terms with Christ; we surrender to Christ. We do not compromise with Christ; we submit to Christ.'*¹

1 William Barclay, *The Apostles' Creed for Everyman* (New York: Harper & Row, Pub., 1967), 68.

First of all we need to understand the command is '**Be subject for the Lord's sake.**' Not '*be subject so things will go better with you*', not '*be subject so you will be praised rather than punished*', not '*be subject because the ruling authorities are wise and wonderful*', but rather '**Be subject for the sake of the name and fame of the Lord Jesus Christ**'. Citizens of heaven, [*though on earth we are strangers and aliens*], should be the best citizens on earth – not for the sake of the institution, or for the sake of the king or the governor, but **for the sake of Christ**. It is submission to Christ that leads us to be subject to the authorities. Again, Peter doesn't give us any qualifiers here. And we want qualifiers. 'But what about those immoral and unjust and brutal rulers?' What about those in authority who don't fear God and trample our rights?'

Peter wrote this epistle during the reign of the Emperor Nero – one of the worst rulers in history, with a name synonymous with brutality. His mother, Agrippina, was married to the Emperor Claudius, who had a son, Britannicus who was to inherit the throne. But in A.D. 54, Agrippina arranged for Claudius to be poisoned to death so that Nero, her son, would be Emperor. Nero in his turn had Britannicus killed the very next year, and in A.D. 59 had his own mother Agrippina executed. In fact no one was safe around this guy. He later had his first wife killed and then forced his trusted advisor, Seneca, to commit suicide. So Peter was not naïve about the vicious nature of the world around him, and the corruption and moral depravity of its rulers. He was not saying that our submission to the ruling authorities was on the basis of their wisdom, or moral behavior, or ability to rule. Rather it is on the basis of our submission to Christ.

Secondly, it is recognizing that '*...there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.*' [Romans 13:1b] If you do not find yourself submitting to the authority in your life, rest assured that you are not submitted to Christ. This is a battle. It is a battle for godly behavior among the world's inhabitants. Just as there is a battle against the fleshly lusts on the inside, there is this battle for an attitude and behavior of submission on the outside. Because this is the central problem in the heart of man, for the glory of God and His name's sake, we must be those who live submitted lives, submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ firstly, and then to the worldly authorities in our lives. This speaks the majesty of God to those still in rebellion around us. In fact, if you understand Peter's thought here, submission to authority is submission to God, and obeying the speed limit becomes an act of worship, because we are obeying for the Lord's sake.

Thirdly, it is understanding that it is in losing that we win. Christianity is counterintuitive in that way. It is in dying we live, being weak we are made strong, in surrendering we are victorious. There's an ancient document from the second century called the "Epistle to Diognetus". It's a letter from a Christian to a prominent pagan named Diognetus, in which the author, who is unknown, is describing and defending this strange new religion of Christianity: [*Christians*] *present a wonderful and confessedly paradoxical conduct. They dwell in their own native lands, but as strangers. They take part in all things, as citizens; and they suffer all things, as foreigners. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every native land is a foreign. They marry, like all others; they have children, but they do not cast away their offspring. They have the table in common, but not wives...They live upon the earth but are citizens of heaven. They obey the existing laws, and excel the laws by their lives. They love all, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown, and yet they are condemned. They are killed and are made alive. They are poor and make many rich. They lack all things, and in all things abound.*¹²

Having said that, we need to understand as well that there are times when we cannot be subject. I don't think Peter addresses this because this was one of those things these Christians assumed. We know that because hundreds of thousands of them lost their lives precisely because they wouldn't submit to some things which were ordered by the lawful authorities. Nero and many other Roman rulers fed Christians to the lions, burned them at the stake, beat them to death, covered them with pitch and lit them on fire, and crucified and hung them, because they refused a lawful order to worship the genius of the emperor. They would not submit. They believed, as we believe, that if the authorities order you to do what God forbids, or forbid you to do what God commands, you must resist. You cannot submit. There is a higher, ultimate authority to whom everyone is accountable, and the ruling authorities ignore this at their peril. This is what motivated the Hebrew midwives to disobey the order from Pharaoh to kill all the male children at birth. This is what motivated Daniel to defy the order to only pray to the king; and this is what motivated Peter to tell the high priest, 'We must obey God rather than men!'

Peter tells us to be subject to all human authority, because not only is submission commanded but submission is a means of grace to the unbelieving world. *He says 'Be subject for the Lords sake...For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.* The sense of the verse here is that by our submission to Christ and the governing authorities, our behavior as submitted followers of Christ, would silence or muzzle or make speechless those who slander the people of God in their ignorance. This does not mean that there will be no charges brought against us as Christians. In fact Jesus said, *'Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me.'* [Matthew 5:11] People will always find ways to persecute and slander those who honor God in their word and deeds. But it does mean that evil men must invent charges to put us behind bars, because there should be nothing in our behavior that warrants the punishment of the State. And it does mean that we should live in such a way that there could be no charge against us but that we love God and follow Christ. When Daniel's godly behavior stirred up jealousy and hatred among his peers in the government, the only thing they could hang him on was his devotion to God. And his submission to God was a means of grace to the king.

From the beginning of this letter, Peter seems to see Christians as being in much the same position as the ancient Israelites before them. Just as the Jews had found themselves as exiles and strangers in Babylon, so too Peter seems to believe that God's people were always going to be sojourners on this earth, and they needed to live as exiles and strangers. And just as the Jews in exile were commanded to seek the welfare of the city to which they were exiled³, so the Christians ought to do the same, wherever they found themselves in the world. Thus the command to 'do good to silence the ignorance of foolish people'. Peter has just told them in verses 11 and 12 that their excellent public behavior would constitute not only a powerful defense against unfounded accusations, but also be the means by which critics became converts. And here he seems to elaborate on this theme.

To understand what Peter is getting at, we have to look into a little history. In Peter's day, people could earn the title of public benefactor by providing some sort of public service at their own expense. In his book, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*, Bruce Winter says, *'There was an established procedure by which the particular gift of a benefactor was recognized with the erection of an inscription commemorating the event, and by the public praising with words of commendation, and by being crowned with a crown of gold, and by being allocated a permanent seat of honour in the theatre'*.⁴ Peter seems to get at this idea when he notes that the governing authorities are sent by God to punish those who do evil and **to praise those who do good**. We have all kinds of archaeological evidence that testifies to the praise of such public benefactors in cities all over the Roman Empire.

We hear of civic minded Christians in that day saving their cities from famine by providing food at deflated prices, paying for water projects, underwriting road widening projects, building theaters and other public buildings, and otherwise providing for the needs of their communities. And the public praise of these Christian benefactors by the authorities, declaring them 'good and noble', would have silenced the ignorant slander of a malicious accuser that the Christians were doers of evil and not good. We need to remember that Christians were under enormous social and cultural pressures because of their faith. Unfair and unfounded accusations were not uncommon. Christians were viewed in many communities with suspicion, particularly because they didn't conform to the religious or moral norms of the day. And Peter is saying, 'Live in such a way that the grace of God flows from you to your community. You are aliens, yes. You are exiles and strangers. You are sojourners on this earth, but never forget that you are to be a blessing to the nations'.

He goes on to say, **16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants [bond-slaves] of God.** The freedom here is the freedom from doing evil, and the freedom to follow Christ. Our submission to Christ means that we are free to choose the right things, and to reject the wrong things; free to abstain from fleshly lusts and free to behave in such a way that God is glorified in the eyes of those around us. Here again is a paradox – free men and slaves. We are free on the one hand from the corruption that is in the world through lust by the precious blood of Jesus – and we are slaves of Christ Jesus on the other hand to do His will. We submit in freedom for the Lord's sake.

3 Jeremiah 29:7 - *But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.* ESV

4 Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*, (Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich., 1994) 22.

Peter says, 'Live as servants of God'. And we need to stop here a bit because as good as the ESV is, I think that here it is not helpful. The word translated servant is a word used many, many times in the New Testament, *doulos*. And D.A. Carson makes the point that there are many words that could be rendered as servant or slave in the New Testament, but this word must be rendered as slave. And more particularly, bondslave. This idea comes from Deuteronomy 15 where the Lord is giving the ordinances for the Sabbath year, and He begins to talk about how those who have been enslaved due to economic hardship must be released in that seventh year. *"If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him...But if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you, then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your slave forever."* [Deuteronomy 15:12-17]

A bondslave is a literal picture of submission. It speaks of one whose will is swallowed up in the will of another. He is a slave who is bound to his master till death. A bondslave only has the will of his master in mind. He doesn't belong to himself and he has no rights and no authority. In fact if you arranged all the social orders of Peter's day from least to greatest, at the bottom of it all would be the bondslave. Oswald Chambers echoes that thought: *'The passion of Christianity is that I deliberately sign away my own rights and become a bond-slave of Jesus Christ. Until I do that, I do not begin to be a saint'*.⁵ The Psalmist, writing prophetically of the atoning work of Christ in Psalm 40 says, *'Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired, My ears You have pierced...I delight to do Your will, O My God.'* The question here is, 'Have you gone to the door? Has the awl pierced your ear? Do you wholly and utterly belong to Jesus? Or are you reserving something for yourself? Do you reserve the right to be offended? Are you reserving the right to pay someone back? Or have you signed away your rights? Christians are those who have signed away their rights to Christ.

Finally Peter sums it up by saying, *17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor*. Peter says we are to honor everyone, and honor those in authority. The word 'honor' used twice in this verse, means to set a price on, to value, to esteem, hold in high regard, or respect. In other words, Peter is urging us to value and respect everyone knowing that all human beings are created in the image of God, even the emperor. It is applying the second half of the Great Commandment to love your neighbor as yourself.

I think C.S. Lewis said it best in his sermon, *The Weight of Glory*, *'It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing...to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal'*.⁶

In other words, this is where a submitted life takes you. If we are in fact living in submission for the sake of Christ – then these things will be true of us – we will honor all men; we will love those of the faith; we will give honor to the ruling authorities; and we will fear God. If these are missing then we should have serious doubts about our submission to Christ. Everything in our Christian life flows from this idea of submission, starting with the submitted life of Jesus. Paul tells the Philippians: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a bond-servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*. Philippians 2:5-8 It was the perfect obedience and submission to the will of God by His Son, that won our salvation.

5 Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest, November 3

6 C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory, Preached originally as a sermon in the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, on June 8, 1942; published in THEOLOGY, November, 1941, and by the S.P.C.K., 1942

There are three reasons submission comes hard to us. The first reason is our pride. The second reason is our pride. And the third reason is our pride. And Peter hits this hard in the fifth chapter: '*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*' [1 Peter 5:5] Humility means to 'make low', and being low is required for submission. It is an attitude and posture of submission. It means that you give up your way for the one in authority. God actively opposes those who insist on their own way – but to those who yield He gives grace. And it is by grace that we are saved. It is only those who submit to God who find this grace.

God will never save a proud person. Why should He? They don't think they need salvation. In the movie, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, there is a scene near the climax of the movie where Indiana Jones is following the clues to the Holy Grail and he enters a tunnel strewn with the bones of those who had tried and failed. As he desperately looks for a way to safely negotiate this obvious death trap, the words of the first clue come ringing in his ears – '*Only the penitent man may pass*'. Precious seconds tick away as he tries to understand this clue and at the last minute the light dawns and he drops to his knees as huge knife blades come rushing out of the walls right where he had been standing. And the meaning is obvious – a penitent man is a humble man, a man in submission and on his knees. And because he got on his knees – he got the grace – he lived.

Submitted people find grace. And grace is the power of God working to do in and through us what we could never do. Ever wanted to find grace and couldn't? Perhaps you have never submitted your life to Christ. Perhaps you haven't given Him all of you but reserved something for yourself. Dear saints, this issue of submission is crucial. This is how we come to faith and this is a key weapon in fighting for our souls to the glory of God. It is only as we submit that we can be saved – saved from our lostness to His presence – saved from the allurements of the world – saved from those fleshly lusts which wage war against our souls – saved to eternal life. If you find yourself in opposition to God this morning – I have just six little words for you – Be subject for the Lord's sake.

Our gracious heavenly Father,

May we be wholly submitted to you, body, soul and spirit in word and thought and deed. May we humble ourselves under your mighty hand and submit all our plans and dreams and ways to You. Grant us we pray the will to fight the suicidal sin that our will desires. Help us to set our faces like flint against the desire for anything but Christ and grant that we would treasure You above everything in our lives. Lord, transform our minds and emotions and wills to want what You want and to hate what You hate, and to think like You think. May the power of Your living word and the love with which You first loved us cause us to say 'I am not my own but Yours forever.' In the precious and powerful name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.