

Do Christians Have to Submit to All Authorities?

By Rev.D. Earl Cripe, Ph.D.

I Peter 2:13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;

I Peter 2:14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

In this passage, St. Peter wants to talk to the Church about how we are to live so that we can be sure our lives are honest and real, that we are presenting a good testimony to the world, and that we are accruing glory against the Day of Judgment. The things that he says are not dramatic, sensational, or highly desirable. They are very practical matters that have to do with real life.

Obey the Laws

He starts out with something that is grievous to the mind to Adam's children in general (and to us here in the West in particular). *Obey the laws. Do it because Christ wants you to do it. Do it because obedience to Christ depends upon it.* If the lawmakers in your part of the world, in your state, or in your town do not deserve to be obeyed, Christ does. Submit yourself to every ordinance of man *for the Lord's sake.*

St. Peter goes on to define what he is talking about so we cannot claim that we did not understand. Submit yourself to the King; not reluctantly and halfheartedly because you think you must. Submit yourself to him as to a supreme leader who has the rule over you. Do that because that is in fact the position that God has put him in.

Submit yourself to members of law enforcement. This passage is not telling us that there are any perfect systems that are free from abuses. We are being told that God has sent these people out to punish evildoers and that they generally do not bother those who abide by the law. Anyone who thinks that

they would be better off if there were no policemen or law enforcers is simply being dishonest. Therefore, because that is why God has sent them your way, honor them and obey them. Be thankful to God for providing you with people who can protect you against hoodlums and mayhem.

I Peter 2:15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

It is God's will that you do this so that you can silence the mouths of ignorant people who are looking for an occasion to be critical of you. What exactly does this mean? It is telling us that the non-Christian world around us knows something about what we profess to believe. We say that this world is inferior, that life is short, that men should give up on the kingdom of Adam, come to the Cross, be born into the family of God, and look for their life and reward in that world to come. However, if that person sees you fighting with the authorities, whether it is the King or the police officer, because "your rights are being denied you" (at least in your eyes), they will know that your claim is hypocritical. Your interests and your values are in and of this world — just like theirs are. All your talk about not caring too much about this world and focusing your attention and your passion on the world to come is hypocritical. The only way you can avoid that criticism is to do exactly what God tells you. Submit yourself to the king as supreme and submit yourselves to the law enforcement agencies that God has sent out to protect you. Do it whether they are just or unjust. Do it because that is what people do who are pilgrims and strangers in this earth, just passing through, and whose treasures are in the world to come. If you do that, God will bless you and men will have no legitimate thing to criticize you for on that account.

Are We Strangers?

We are pilgrims and strangers in the earth. We are just passing through here. Our eternal reward and our eternal home are in the future and the physical New Creation. Only in fellowship with Christ is there any fulfillment

in the present time. We cannot escape the worry, the fear, the discouragement, and the frustration of mortality unless we die to it spiritually. Only when we live on the eternity side of the Cross, can we have the honest and rewarding assurance that the work of our lives are free from the curse of the first Adam and are being immortalized in the world of the Last Adam.

More Precious Than the Gold That Perishes

St. Peter has told us that the joys and the values of this new life in Christ are far greater than anything that this world has to offer. He has reminded us that all that is of Adam's world — and that involves these physical bodies that we inherited from Adam — are still under the curse and must suffer and die. Yet if that suffering is for the cause, then that death is redemptive (in the Sanctification sense) and we are able to rejoice, no matter how severe the trials become. We know that Christ will be with us to the end of the world. He will see us through death to physical immortality on the other side. To the extent that our souls (that is, our lives) have passed through the principle of death and resurrection, they are free from the curse that will victimize all of those who are of Adam's world only.

For this reason, the Christian is to avoid the pitfall of getting caught up in the desires and ambitions that drive those who are not living for the Lord. The important thing to remember is that we are servants of Christ and all of the issues of the present and the future are comprehended in doing what He tells us and in pleasing Him. The fleshly lusts that preoccupy the minds and ambitions of carnal men are weapons that the enemy uses to make war against our souls and try to destroy us. If we understand what is going on, if we obey the words of the Apostle and weed those fallen ambitions out of our lives, we are protected against the enemy.

The Mission of the Church

The reason that time is still going forward is the Mission of the Church. Christ has died to make salvation possible to all of those who will hear, believe, and accept that Gospel. Inevitably, time must come to an end. A point will be reached where God is not willing to put up with it any longer. But that point

has not been reached as of today, and the long-suffering and patience of God is holding back the end of the world in order to give a few more souls the opportunity to come to the Cross and be born into the family of God. In the enterprise of seeing that that mission is carried out successfully, God does not want those who are His to do anything that works at cross purposes to it. If we were to take the attitude (which many in professing Christianity have through the years) that the things and the rights of this world are worth fighting over, then we are tacitly denying the philosophy of the message we preach. This is what St. Peter has told us not to do, and he continues on with those instructions:

I Peter 2:16 As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

God is not a slaver. He has given us great leeway to live and move and have our being in the process of carrying out the Mission of the Church. This is very different from the way it was under the Old Testament, and the way it has been with most kings and powerbrokers in the history of the human race. Those who have the ability, rigidly control the actions of their subjects. God does not do that. Even so, He expects us to appreciate the freedom that He has given us and to understand why He has extended it to us. It is so that we can use our desires and our enterprise in becoming involved in this great commission in ways that fit our gifts and calling and that seemed best to us. This is certainly not to say that we have liberty to cross swords with the Scriptures; it is telling us that within the framework of the Scriptures there is a lot of leeway. As a result, many who profess Christianity have misused the freedom that God has given them and spent their lives and their energies upon themselves and their own carnal and greedy ambitions. We must not do this, the Apostle says. We must use our liberty wisely as servants of God and not as a religious garment to cover up evil thoughts and ambitions that are driving us.

Truth is Not Cultural

The principles that must govern the life of every faithful Christian in this world do not change with the passing of years and the rise and fall of civilizations. The principles of godliness are not cultural; they are timeless and immutable.

I Peter 2:17 Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

At all times it has been the Will of God for His children to respect those authorities that God has placed in society for our good. Because God does not follow us around with a whip and crack us every time we step out of line, that is no excuse for developing a bad attitude toward our Christian brothers and sisters. The love and the freedom that God has given us should cause us to fear Him and not to grow contemptuous. At the end of earth's final day when Christ returns and those things that comprise the end of the world take place (among which are Judgment Day), God will hold us accountable for what we have done with our lives. The freedom that He has given us is because He is a loving and gentle person, He wants to see His children have the opportunity to live and move and have their being, He wants them to use their initiative and their own thoughts and plans to carry out the Great Commission. Yet God has sent His apostles and prophets to warn us time and time again that we will be held to accounts for what we have done with our lives. If we do not live today in the fear of God for what He is going to say in that day when the books are opened and our works are judged, then we cannot serve God. Anyone who is not afraid to get crossways with God does not know who God is. And anyone who has that kind of contempt for God does not understand what the Kingdom of God in this world and the mission of the Church is all about.

Rebellion against authority was original sin, and because the greatest attributes of Christian character are submission and humility, God wants us to fear the King. We do in fact fear the authorities in this world. If we have been subpoenaed and we have to go down to the court and face the judge, do not be

bothered to tell me that that does not strike any fear in your heart. That is the way God wants it. He does not want hardened and rebellious children who have no regard for the authorities that He has put in society and no fear of the consequences of getting crossways with them. That type of attitude is foreign to the Kingdom of God and its righteousness.

I Peter 2:18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

It has often been taught that the word *froward* means *forward*. This is not the case. *Froward* is the Greek *skolios* (*skol-ee-os*) and it means *warped*, *twisted*, *perverse*, and *crooked*.

If life is to be lived in a godly and acceptable manner in the remaining years of our mortality once we have made the decision to walk with Christ, then we must develop the submissive and obedient attitude. Christ does not bother to try to make the argument with us — at least in this passage, though it may be different in the Romans 13 — that these authorities deserve our respect and loyalty. What God is telling us is that anyone who will be a profitable servant in His Kingdom must be respectful of authority and obedient to it. It is a matter of the character of the individual child of God and of his respect for God and His Word. It does not matter that this king or policeman or master may be a hard, crooked and perverse person. Obedience is a matter of our character and our submission to God and it has nothing to do with the person to whom we are submitting ourselves. Truth is not situational. We do not have an excuse to get out of it if the person to whom we are supposed to be submitted is a no good. That is because it is not really that person to whom we are submitting, but to God.