

Submitting to Authorities that God Has Ordained

1 Peter 2:11-25

1 Peter 2:11-12: *“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,¹² having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*

Background Notes

From 1 Peter 2:11 on, most of the rest of this letter concerns the duties and proper conduct of Christian living in this world.

Verse 11 reminds us that while we are in this world, we are “sojourners” and we are “pilgrims.” A sojourner is one who resides temporarily, for a brief time, in a certain place. A pilgrim is one who is on a journey to another place. We are sojourners and pilgrims here on this earth because **Heaven is our home!** We’re just here temporarily!

So as believers, we need to ask ourselves: Am I living like I’m only a temporary resident here on earth, and like one who is just traveling to another destination? Or am I comfortably established on earth, and entangled in the affairs of this world? Here’s one good way to find out. Take a look at your checkbook or your IRS form, and see where your money is going. Over the past year, did you give more to the Lord - or to your earthly investments?

Satan has many attractions that appeal to our “*fleshly lusts.*” That word “*lusts*” doesn’t just refer to sexual desires - it also covers our strong desires for success or social standing or accumulating material possessions. As pilgrims in this world we are surrounded by all kinds of tempting attractions that can draw us off-course, but Peter warned us to “*abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.*” Fellow-believers – as we travel on our pilgrim path to Heaven, we are involved in ***spiritual warfare!***

Verse 12 tells us to refrain from activities that appeal to our sinful nature – not only for our own spiritual well-being, but also as a testimony to unbelievers. That’s what’s meant by the word “*Gentiles*” (v12). Unbelievers love to tear down and find fault with Christians (“*they speak against you as evil doers*”), but we can close their mouths by our honorable conduct and our good works.

It may be that God will use our good works as a means to convict unbelievers of their sins and bring them to salvation. That’s what is meant by the last part of the verse, that “*they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*” The righteous living and good works of believers may cause unbelievers to turn to God on the day when they have the opportunity to respond to God’s grace.

Verses 13-25 describe why it is very important for believers to show their Christian faith by submitting to the authority structures that God has ordained.

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers should submit to authority in the area of government.

Verses 13-17: *“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme,¹⁴ or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men -¹⁶ as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.¹⁷ Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.”*

When the apostle Peter wrote this letter, Nero was the Roman Emperor. Nero, as you know, was no “Mr. Nice Guy” - not by *any* stretch of the imagination. So this command to submit to governing authorities doesn’t just apply to believers who live in a “Christian” land. It applies wherever there is civil government, because any government where there is at least some semblance of law and order is better than the anarchy and chaos of no government at all.

Christians are to submit to civil authority at all levels – national, state, and local. And we are to submit in all areas, whether it’s taxes - or speed limits. A Christian man once told me that he felt justified in breaking the speed limit because his car ran more efficiently at higher speeds!

Christians are justified in disobeying a civil authority **only** when that governing authority tells us to do something that is directly contrary to the Word of God. Then we obey the higher authority. We obey God.

Acts 5:29 says that we are to obey God rather than man. For example, if the government were to tell us that we must deny Christ and worship the state, we would disobey. (Remember Daniel?) But when we are required to disobey the civil authorities, we are required to submit to the penalty set by that earthly authority. We would go to prison – and we would not shoot the policeman who came to arrest us.

We are always free to do the right thing (v15), and by doing the right thing we may silence the ignorant comments of foolish men. Again, remember the example of Daniel. On several occasions, Daniel’s holy lifestyle and godly conduct silenced his critics. However, when he persisted in doing the right thing, he was required to face the penalty of the lion’s den.

So we are to submit to civil authorities. However, we don’t live in bondage to civil authorities. We are always free (v16). We’re free to do good - to do the right thing. But we should never use our freedom as a cover up for evil. There are

always loopholes and ways to get around civil authority if you want to. You can cheat on your taxes, you can get around some state or local law in some devious way – but this should not be the practice for followers of Jesus Christ!

Verse 17 is a nice summary of Christian responsibilities.

- **“Honor all people.”** That doesn’t mean we should honor their bad behaviors. No. But humans are created in the image of God, and thus we can honor all people in that way.
- **“Love the brotherhood.”** We should have a special love and care for our brothers and sisters in the family of God.
- **“Fear God.”** We should show proper reverence to God by carefully obeying His commandments, and seeking to please Him in our everyday lives.
- **“Honor the king.”** We can “honor the king” by submitting to civil authorities.

Believers should submit to authority in the government.

2. Believers should submit to authority in the area of labor.

Verses 18-20: *“Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.”* ¹⁹ *For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.* ²⁰ *For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.”*

In the 1st century, slavery was the norm across the Roman Empire. Christian slaves were told to submit to their masters, not to revolt or run away. The Bible does not condone slavery - in fact, it was the outworking of Christian principles that did away with slavery. However, in this situation where slavery already existed, Christian slaves were commanded to submit to their masters. They were to submit whether or not their masters were Christians, and they were even called on to submit to harsh masters.

Thankfully, we don’t have slavery in America today, so what should we do with this teaching about slave? We can apply this teaching to the relationship between employers and employees. That’s why our doctrinal point is: “Believers should submit to authority in the area of labor.”

It’s nice to work for a boss who is good and gentle (v18) - but what about those bosses who are harsh and unreasonable? It’s not easy to submit to authority then. In the area of labor, what do you do when the authority above you is unfair and unreasonable? You submit. Fortunately today, unlike the 1st century slave/master relationship, you can change jobs if your boss is unreasonable, or you can take your problem to another proper authority. But we all know that in some situations your hands are tied.

So the biblical teaching here is that we should submit to the bosses at our jobs - as long as we aren't being forced to disobey the Word of God. We should submit and obey if your boss tells you to lie or cheat. We submit, and we take it patiently - even if suffering is involved (v19-20). This would include emotional suffering, too.

Notice that the suffering mentioned here is suffering that is caused by unfair or unjust treatment: "*suffering wrongfully*" (v19). In addition, notice that we shouldn't complain about how unfair the situation is. No, we go about doing good, even under these circumstances (v20). Even though it is not easy at times, believers should submit to authority in the area of labor.

It seems that Peter almost anticipated our comments that this biblical teaching is too difficult! So Peter closed our critical and complaining mouths by reminding us of the example of Jesus Christ (v21-25).

Practical Application

Let's follow in the steps of Jesus.

Verses 21-25: "*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ²² "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; ²³ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*"

Look again at verse 21: "*Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow in His steps...*" What a supreme example for us to follow! We are to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus!

- He submitted to the authority structures, even though it involved suffering.
- He was silent when He was verbally abused at His unfair trial.
- He did not complain or criticize, but committed Himself and the situation to the Father.

You probably recognize a number of quotes from Isaiah 53 in these verses. Notice that verse 24 does not say, "the Lord's body bore our sins." No, ***He Himself bore our sins in His own body.*** The cross of Christ involved much more than physical suffering.

"*By His stripes, you were healed*" (v24). This does not mean that when we become Christians, we should expect physical healing. This verse is speaking about healing and salvation from the disease of sin. And the Lord has not only searched for us and saved us as wandering sheep (v25) - He now cares for us and protects us as our Good Shepherd!

Our responsibility is to follow in the steps of Jesus!