

“Submission? ...seriously?”

1 Peter 2:13-25

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at Believers City Church
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*1 Peter 2:13-25 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. 18 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. 21 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.

Well, this is certainly a timely and deeply unpopular theme in our day! Civil disobedience is popular. Rebellion is cool. Protesting in very “in.” Adapting, making it work, submitting, contributing to the solution alongside those we disagree with ...well, not so much. Our American DNA is to effectively do as we please and are accountable to no one except ourselves. “Group think” is so unamerican. Submission is a deeply anti-American quality. But it IS a distinctly Christian one!

Peter says that we are called to submission. In Matthew 8:18-22, a scribe and a disciple come to Jesus and desire to follow Him. Jesus does not say to them, "Come on along, the more the merrier. This is going to be so much fun!" To one He says, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head" (8:20). When the other asks for permission to remain with his father until he dies, Jesus replies, "let the dead bury their own dead" (8:22). Quite literally Jesus tells one of them to consider the cost and sacrifice required in following Him, and to the other He demands that He be first priority. Note that following Him...actually serving Him, was going to cost them. In effort, time, and sacrifice. I wonder if there were whispers of “legalism” from His listeners?

I can't get over the feeling that the original reader of this letter was...round about now... growing increasingly uncomfortable. Maybe the modern one here today is doing the same! When I started this letter, I cast out a rather wide statement of warning that this letter was not for the unredeemed, not for the religiously snacking

“searcher,” ...not even for the modern “Jesus Lite” believer! No...this letter...like several of these small, church addressed letters in the New Testament was and *is* “rubber-meets-the-road” stuff. Many have simply ignored them, others have tried to negate them on the basis of cultural changes and social shifts, others still, have even attempted to debate their unusually clear directives and shift their application. Any way you look at it...passages like this one, separate the sheep from the goats...the authentic disciple from the tacit believer.

Over the years of ministry, I have had those who actually went so far as to verbally state what countless others were thinking, and all of them departed...in a variety of vernacular, the statement was given: “*I need something easier...*” There is no retort to such a statement, because essentially, they are saying they just don’t want to be a Christian. Facts and reason are of no use at that point. They just want *out*...They wanted a Christianity...a Jesus, of their own making, not the Jesus that simply was...*well*, “in charge, and non-negotiating.”

We ...as mere members of humanity, tend to judge the “love content” of the message, the statement, the directive... by how pleasant it is to our ears and how good it makes us feel. However, Jesus is not, nor His Dad, under such modern emo understanding, and so many times God has delivered extremely loving words to me via scripture or even by Spirit, that are anything but ‘delightful’ to hear...at least in my flesh. Jesus calls it love. Even if it is unpleasant.

However, some of us just never 'get' that. We fight our whole lives for a "feel good religion"...one that is constantly affirming and uplifting even if it kills us. Even if it fails to take us to an eternity with our Creator. We want to be told congenial and agreeable things, because we all know that the most important thing to Jesus is that we feel good, right? Not truth...not obedience...not holiness...not growth. Just that we feel all fuzzy and warm about ourselves. Hmmm...not my experience...that is for sure! Many of us never knew discipline in our childhood or in our early adult years, so we can’t imagine a God who loves us would ever tell us “No,” or call us to act in a way that is inconvenient, maybe even dangerous to us bodily! But that is exactly what He is doing through the apostle Peter here in this passage.

Terribly persecuted by the infamous Emperor Nero, this letter would be hard to accept. And life in 2025 with all of its anger, violence, political rhetoric and governmental corruption...all its polarizing aspects, it can be equally hard to swallow. Further, we live in the age of "easy Jesus" where love always is to encompass a 'feel good' attribute and has very little to do with any real truth but more about my emotional condition and whether it is comfortable and expedient for my life. The word "submit," for which Peter begins the section, is enough to make many of us bristle, because the idea of submission just runs contrary to the culture. It's thought of as even “un-American!” And current events have made us so often quite ready to fight...or even kill if necessary. Submit? *Not even remotely...*

When we realize that pride is the root of all our sin, we can see immediately why this is so. Because of our “natural man pride,” we don't naturally want to submit to anyone, anywhere. Not to government, not to law authority, instructors, employers, churches, or even God Himself! Our rejection of the concept of submission has brought us the great cultural gems of overcrowded prisons, alcohol, drug, and porn addictions, street crime, workplace shootings, broken marriages, broken families, broken relationships, broken churches, etc, etc. The word "submit" is actually closely related to the word that is scripturally translated "humility." When we fail in this issue, we inevitably stumble down a road of life chaos.

The call to submit is found four times in this letter: Citizens are to submit to the government (2:13). Slaves are to submit to their masters (2:18). Wives are to submit to their husbands (3:1). Younger believers are to submit to the elders (5:5). Four times, and yet so many believers unabashedly just answer an unequivocal "no." Just flat out rejection. Truth be told, there are several such passages that we just don't like at all, and in lieu of a simple

and obvious way out of them, we are essentially forced into the corner: accept or reject them, *out-of-hand*. This is one of those passages.

Today we see extreme anti-government groups that tie themselves to Christianity. Some of these folks are nothing more than terrorists. We may not count ourselves that extreme, yet the truth is, the crime is the same even if we only wear the acceptable label of "rebellious." Both fail to heed the words of Christ before Pilate: "*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.*" (John 18:36)

Perhaps you are thus far in at least tacit agreement with me, but in this scriptural scenario...a country and a time where believers lived under such overt persecution and much of the population was living as slaves, one still lets out a heavy sigh. I mean, *really*? How could Peter in good conscious ask this of his readers? Just look around at the world we live in today. How could he ask it of *us*?

I think we must first question whether we have in fact actually built a faith life that in truth is very different than that of scripture. One very different than that which Jesus practiced and taught. Even to authenticate our very salvation, we must ask ourselves *first* whether we are firmly committed to living out the ***Christ-directed scriptural version of Christianity***, or whether we have just "re-invented" this thing to a more comfortable version...one compatible with our passions and emotions? Have we just made "*something easier*?"

Peter wasn't alone in these directives. Paul called HIS readers in Romans to "*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience's sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.*" Romans 13:1-7

Paul gave Titus similar instruction, even considering that Crete was home to "... liars, evil beasts, *and* lazy gluttons." The believers there we told to "*be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed...*" (Titus 3:1)

Are there limits to these directives? How far must we go? Scripture does not teach us to follow any law, call, direction, or order, which would compromise our "Jesus first" living. However, such positions are far more rare than we would like to admit, especially when trying to defend our protests. Furthermore...*and ever so important in this discussion*, just because the world *allows* something, that does not mean we are necessarily being ordered to *participate*, and we must learn to differentiate between these two. We morally stand against the horror of abortion which is legal in most of this country, but we are not commanded to abort our babies. We aren't forced to marry someone of the same sex, nor am I required to get high when I drive through Colorado. The greater government may not be overtly supportive of Christianity, but thus far no one is outlawing the gathering together of believers or our worship practices. When that day comes of course, the "gloves come off." The early church did not stop meeting and worshipping, however they did adjust their methods in a non-compromising ways in order to keep meeting without having to carpet bomb Rome in order to see that happen. No such acquiescing is required or even requested in such matters, and seldom if ever is that really our problem today in this country.

Peter is seeking two things here: One, to be able to live on this planet in as much of a calm, quiet, and steadfast fashion as possible. Paul called us in his first letter to the church in Thessalonica...chapter 4, "*...we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.*" (10-12). This is greatly illuminated wherein we read Peter's earlier declaration that we are to be just "sojourners" here in this world...just "visitors passing through." When I go to another country, I don't reject their laws and say "well, I am an American! I don't have to follow your laws!" Not unless I want their courts and correctional institutions to be part of my tour! But when we forget this fact...when I start thinking that this IS my home, and further, this is MY life, then I immediately have conflict! It's *that* guy who is going to have an issue with Peter's words!

This does not mean we are to withdrawal into an Amish-type of living wherein we cut ourselves off from the culture and society around us. Jesus did not do that. We cannot be missional if we adopt such a position. But we *are* called to "*come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them...*" (2 Corinthians 6:17.) The bottom line is God's family is to be "special" and most of all "different." We are blessed to live in a moderate democracy where there is still opportunity to vote and take part in the democratic processes, but the fact is we will never...we *can* never, be a real part of this world if we are a citizen of the country of God.

This leads us to the second issue of Peter's call in this area: Our submission is to be given for the benefit of others. I practice submission in order to bless another... a "third party." Our obedience to the laws of the land... whether we agree with them or not, are made for the benefit of not just me, but others too. It works the same in the family, in the community, and even in the church, where we always have those who want to rebel against the patterns and designs of this church, because they don't want anyone telling them what to do. Their motive however is transparent. They simply are selfish and, in their immaturity, live in a small world of one citizen. When my living is just about me, it will not be long before I'm in trouble.

Jesus was actually all about *everyone else*! Certainly the crucifixion didn't bring *Him* any direct benefit and pleasure! He allowed himself to be beaten and killed so that all those who would come after Him would have the opportunity to stand before their Creator and live eternally with Him. Yet this is the age of *my* rights, and *my* feelings, and *my* desires, with a battle cry of "**what about ME?**"

When our faith becomes about these things....my feelings, my rights, and my plans, then it fails to be about submission, sacrifice, obedience and other-centered living that is the proof and the outpouring of the Spirit's presence and influence in my life. We are called to submit not because the government is so righteous, or our boss is so great or because our church leaders are so perfect...*because they are not*. But we do so because of the "Lord's sake." (verse 13). We do it because He wants it and it ultimately benefits the furtherance of the kingdom of God, whether we individually see it or understand what He is doing. We don't have to. He is God, not us! When it is all about us, we end up departing our church...*just what Satan wants by the way*, and then spending our time as wounded puppies in "healing ministries" talking about how our feathers got ruffled and how we feel bad.

If you have spent very much time around children you know that one of their favorite phrases is, "That's not fair," which is usually followed by a temper tantrum. You would think things would change as we get older, but sadly that does not seem to be the case. We have become a nation that screams, "That's not fair." If things don't go our way or we think we have been mistreated just the least little bit, we cry "Not fair". But instead of throwing a temper tantrum, we file a lawsuit. In the greater church it is not any better. There is jealousy, bitterness, anger, backbiting, slander, gossip, and all forms of dissention.

Lastly, and in truth *ultimately*, let us acknowledge that when we fail in this matter, we are in essence saying that God is not all powerful. That, in fact, He is incapable of altering the field of play if he so desires. It shows that we do not understand the God we say we follow and worship; the God who created everything and holds my next breath in His hands. He gives life, power, and status to whom he wishes, and takes it away just as easily. He is not helpless, inept, or aloof. As with Job...He asks "*Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding.*" (Job 38:4)

God alone is sovereign. That means "He's the man." He ***made*** everything... He ***controls*** everything, ...He ***sees*** everything... He ***knows*** everything. He has everything under His control, and He never ...ever ...needs our help. But how often we think He needs us to get in there and fix things for Him? This is not a practice of fatalism. But rather, our submission...*not our surrender*, to the "powers that be," is an acknowledgement of that sovereignty. It is saying..."I may not *want* this, ...I may not even *like* this, but **you are God and I am not, and I trust you.**"

The aim of our life cannot be...as a true disciple of Christ anyway, to essentially just "get mine." It must be to live to God. That means that we live with God in view, God in control, and under His authority. He is to "be our life." (Col 3:4) This passage places all of our social and political life into the light of Christ. The Bible is not a book about how to get along in the world. Rather it is God's instruction about how to live to (for) the kingdom of God. "...*Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Php 3:20) We are called to live as obedient and submissive citizens in this world so that God will be honored and glorified. Rebellious conduct by a Christian only brings dishonor on Christ, and says we do not trust Him.

We can say we love Him, and that even we are redeemed by Him. But for what? For ***your*** peace and joy, ***your*** salvation, ***your*** eternal redemption before God our Creator? Yes certainly. But is that it? Is that as far as it goes? Does your salvation have anything to do with HIM or anyone else? Or maybe you just need to find "something easier?"

But how do we live submissive lives? Peter defines a submissive life by the example of Jesus. According to Peter, submission is not retaliating for wrongs suffered. It is not saying one thing and doing something else. Submission is not vowing to get even or threatening to return suffering.

When He endured the agony of the cross, He was beaten, mocked, tortured, humiliated, and killed. And for what? Pilate said that he found no fault in Jesus. A man who had done nothing wrong suffered a horrible, gruesome punishment, yet He did not demand His way. Paul says that, "*He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.*" Jesus tells us to be submissive, and then He modeled that submissiveness as He suffered and died on the cross.

I do not serve God so that I can be guaranteed fair treatment. I am not a Christian because I want be able to get even with someone. I follow Jesus because I realize that His love for me is so great that He died for me, and that without Him I would be eternally lost. The greatest gift I ever received was an unfair gift that cost Jesus His life.

The next time you are not treated fairly, think about how they treated Jesus. The next time you want to cry unfair, think about how Jesus died unfairly for our sins. This is not about fairness, this is about gratitude. Fairness is about ourselves, and gratitude is about submission...