

## Midweek Message

*“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. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor” (1 Peter 2:13-17 ESV).*

This past Sunday, as we are working through the Sermon on the Mount, we talked about how Jesus calls us to refrain from any form of personal retaliation, revenge, or retribution. As we saw, it's a mindset, an attitude, by which we restrain ourselves from a “tit for tat” behavior when someone insults us, sues us, forces us into service, or even desires to borrow from us. As God's people we're to respond appropriately in such situations with the love of Jesus. It's not that we don't stand up for what's true and defend ourselves but that we're careful with the manner in which we do so.

Now, in the midst of that passage, we also saw how some Christians misunderstand our Lord's statement when He tells us we're not to “resist the one who is evil” as meaning we're to live as some sort of pacifists, some kind of sanctimonious doormats, having nothing to do with human institutions or human laws, and not even standing up against evil and those who spread it. As we see in our passage above such an understanding of Jesus' words is completely incorrect and what I'd like to do in this message is briefly look at our calling in regard to secular laws.

**First**, we need to understand the principle of submission. The idea being expressed is that we place ourselves under the authority of those who are in charge of government. It means that we work with and not against, showing proper respect in how we talk about such leaders even in those times when we might disagree with them. In other words, we don't do what some did who stormed the capitol a few weeks ago or what's happening in some of our cities regarding those who are rioting and destroying property or hurting others they come across. Now, as Scripture clearly states, this submission ends when we might be required to do something God forbids or kept from doing something God explicitly commands. However, as believers in and followers of Jesus, we're required by God to place ourselves under all human authority and be the best examples we can be in every situation. We must remember what the Apostle Paul writes: *“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment” Romans 13:1-3 ESV).*

**Second**, we need to understand the purpose of submission. God has a purpose in calling us to submit to the governing authorities. The Apostle Peter tells us: *“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.”* Now, did you get that? When we become the best examples of obeying the authorities and the laws of our land, we silence those around us as they cannot bring any charge against us. Listen, our life, and the way in which we live our life, tells those around us something of what Jesus is like. And the reality is our life will either tell the truth about Jesus or a lie about Him. What you say, what you do, how you live your life each day will influence someone, somewhere, either for good or for evil. When you became a believer, God placed you on display before the whole world to show the world what He's like, revealing the grace and power He has to transform lives. We must remember that we're not here for our own pleasure, but we're here for the glory of God.

That's why Jesus tells: *"You are the light of the world ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 5:14a, 16 ESV). One way in which we can be lights is by being the best examples we can be in regard to our secular authorities. In fact, if we really think about it, how can we claim to be obedient to God's higher law, what we call the Ten Commandments, and then fail at obeying the lesser laws, those instituted by human authorities. Since God is the one who has established all authority, in every age, and sovereignly rules over such authority, then to fail at being submissive to those authorities also violates God's moral law since it disobeys God. When we do that, except in the case of unjust laws or in those instances that violate Scripture, we dishonor the Lord who gave His life for us. On the other hand, living in obedience to the laws instituted by human authority also honors the Lord and can become an instrument that leads others to Him.

**Finally**, we need to understand the practice of submission. The Apostle Peter tells us that we're to *"Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."* One of the great truths of Scripture is that regardless of whether we live in a free country, such as ours, or if we might live in an oppressive regime, we're still to live as free people because Jesus has set us free. Nothing the secular government does will ever change the freedom we have in Jesus, that we'll always be able to love Him from the heart and serve Him with complete devotion. Sure, there may be serious consequences for our love for the Lord as Scripture tells us, but even then, we're still free within and we know there's a better world coming. Now, all of this comes to us as we have a right perspective of God and who we are in relationship to Him. The Apostle Peter makes it very clear that we're to *"fear God"* and *"live as servants of God."* Perhaps one of the reasons why we aren't careful when it comes to being in submission to governing authorities is that we've lost the genuine sense of God's holiness and see Him more as some kind of grandfather. It's seen in our worship or lack of it. It's seen in our daily living, by what we say, think, and do, which reveals what we truly believe. And to be honest, if we who know the Lord don't live with a high regard, a holy reverence, for the Lord, how can we expect a sinful world to understand who He is and what He's like? You see, it's our reverence for God that's the basis for our obedience in society. If we have that respect and love for God, we'll want nothing more than to please Him, bringing a smile to His face by the way we live. It'll affect the way in which we'll treat others, whether it's our neighbors, our co-workers, our family, our friends, our governing authorities, or even our enemies. It won't matter whether the person is a believer or a non-believer, whether we agree or disagree, we'll treat everyone with dignity, as those made in God's image.

Some of you may not know that when the Apostle Peter is writing this Nero is on the throne in Rome. In the summer of 64 A.D. the city was ravaged by a horrible fire that burned for six days and seven nights. The citizens blamed Nero of setting it for political gain who in turn blamed the Christians which began a severe persecution of the Church for the amusement of the city. In fact, the Apostle Peter himself, was crucified after he had watched his wife martyred before him. It was in this framework that he wrote his letters calling on Christians to be submissive to human government for the glory of God. Listen we're not called to be sanctimonious doormats, nor are we called to let evil prosper around us. There are times in which we must take a stand. However, there is a right way to stand for righteousness and a right way to work for change in society. We're called to be the best examples of obedient citizens in whichever country we reside. In our hearts we're to: *"honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame"* (1 Peter 3:15, 16 ESV).

***Pastor Mark***