

‘The God who removes and raises governments.’ (12)

We’re continuing our study of Peter’s letters and I’m sure by now you would have realised that as strangers travelling through a strange land until we get to heaven we have many blessings and responsibilities. The last time we were together we saw that we need to live honourably on this earth because people are watching.

Today Peter is going to share with us more responsibilities which we have as Christians especially concerning our responsibility towards our government. Now according to Paul in **Philippians 3:20** our true citizenship is in heaven, **so where does that leave us in regards to our government?** Well Peter is going to answer that question today in **1 Peter 2:13-17**.

My friend Pete was a sheep farmer in Scotland. One day a stranger walked up to him and asked, "If I can guess how many sheep you've got, may I have one?" Thinking was impossible, Pete agreed. The stranger declared, "You have 1,795 sheep." "Now how did he figure that out?" Pete wondered as the man selected an animal, slung it over his shoulder and turned to leave. "Wait," called the Pete. "If I can guess your occupation, can I have that animal back?" "Sure," said the man. "You're a government official." "How did you figure that out?" asked the stunned man. "Well," grinned Pete, "put my dog down and I'll tell you."

And so loved ones whether we like our government and those who represent our government or not Peter has got one word for us today and it’s the word **submit**. **1 Peter 2:13+14** “**Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evil-doers and for praise to them that do well.**”

Now I know that this translation uses the word **subject** and other translations use the word **submit**. But it really makes no difference as Peter is saying that as Christians we need to place ourselves under subjection or submit to every ordinance of man.

And this is not the only time Peter is going to ask us to be in subjection to others. He says to slaves in **1 Peter 2:18** “**Slaves, be subject to your masters with all reverence, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are perverse**”. He’s says to our married women in **1 Peter 3:1** “**In the same way, wives, be subject to your own husbands. Then, even if some are disobedient to the word, they will be won over without a word by the way you live.**” He says to our younger ones in **1 Peter 5:5** “**In the same way, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. And all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble**”. And when we are told to submit to every ordinance of man in **1 Peter 2:13**, the word "ordinance" literally means "a creation."

Now you and I are not used to this type of language today but for the Greeks and Romans they were accustomed to describe the appointment of officers as the **creation** of them. So what Peter is actually telling us loved ones is that as Christians we’re to submit not to a particular law passed by government but to the civil government or institution itself.

Now this is where it gets tough for some of us because he says we are to submit to **every** ordinance of man or every human institution as some translations have it. Whether it is a monarchy, democracy, or totalitarian state, Peter says we’ve got the responsibility to simply submit. The apostle Paul reminds us of the same thing over in **Romans 13:1** “**Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except by God’s appointment, and the authorities that exist have been instituted by God**”.

Now we may not like it at times, we may not agree with a certain government’s policies but there are certain policies we must adhere to and we have to submit to them. Paul again goes on and says in **Romans 13:5-7** “**Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of the wrath of the authorities but also because of your conscience. For this reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants devoted to governing. Pay everyone what is owed: taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due**”.

Now I don’t know anyone who enjoys paying the **Inland Revenue** taxes and there are those today who refuse to pay taxes. Some actually believe their motivation is noble, while others deny the **Inland Revenue** his due purely out of greed. And for some the fear of being caught is one reason to pay their taxes.

But loved ones for Christians the highest motivation for paying our taxes is to remember that it is very important to God that we pay them. And remember, our tax returns are less "taxing" when motivated out of a love for God. And so again we're reminded that our responsibility as strangers in a strange land travelling through earth until we get to our real home in heaven to the governments of men under which we live is quite simple, submit to them.

Now that's easy for us to say isn't it but submission is not always an easy thing to do. Sometimes we struggle to do what's right simply because we don't understand the reasons why we have to do it in the first place. But thankfully Peter and Paul don't leave us in the dark as to why we need to submit.

**1 Peter 2:15-17** "For God wants you to silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. Live as free people, not using your freedom as a pretext for evil, but as God's slaves. Honour all people, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the king". Peter says first and foremost the reason we must submit to the authorities is because it's God's will.

He said back in **1 Peter 2:13** we're to submit to the authorities "for the Lord's sake." Now because God said it, that should be enough reason to submit but notice Peter tells us why it is the Lord's will for us to submit. **1 Peter 2:15** "For God wants you to silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good". Peter says by submitting to the authorities we can actually silence certain people by doing good. And because of our allegiance to a heavenly King, Christians are often falsely accused of troublemaking or treason.

Look at **Acts 17:5-8** "But the Jews became jealous, and gathering together some worthless men from the rabble in the marketplace, they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. They attacked Jason's house, trying to find Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly. When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city officials, screaming, "These people who have stirred up trouble throughout the world have come here too, and Jason has welcomed them as guests! They are all acting against Caesar's decrees, saying there is another king named Jesus!" They caused confusion among the crowd and the city officials who heard these things."

During New Testament times those who were actively sharing the gospel met opposition. Paul and Silas in Thessalonica were persuading and converting several people. There were, however, those who were unconvinced, and they complained that the preaching was disruptive and upsetting. They took their views to the authorities and ultimately the two missionaries had to flee by night. It might be hard for us to imagine such a thing happening today but it does. We may believe that our beloved **Human Rights** would protect us from such outlawing of evangelism but the reality may well be different.

In the local newspaper recently they reported on the front page of an instance of religious freedoms in jeopardy. The article is about an 11-year-old in the normal school system who was told not to discuss the Bible or pray during break time because "a parent had complained that it was disruptive." The school district further states that the girl had "infringed on the rights of other students." A reporter made some comments about this and said, "I have seen several things take place during break time, both while a student and later as a substitute teacher. Amongst other things I saw boys fighting, girls arguing, hair being pulled, kids being picked on, and heard all kinds of foul language. I am wondering if a girl with 'six of her friends' reading and praying could be any more 'disruptive' or could be any more infringing on personal rights?"

Now loved ones I can remember my school days with Bibles on the bookshelf and lively religious discussions. We certainly did not consider ourselves religious fanatics and prospects for lawsuits. **What has happened? Why are things like flag burning, Satan worship, and obscene materials forms of expression protected by the Human Rights, and yet an 11-year-old praying is questionable?**

**What would Paul and Silas do in a similar situation? Would they agree with the idea that religion should be confined to the church building?** It is true that there are people who purposefully set out to cause disorder. On the other hand, I have personally been threatened by a local man simply for putting a leaflet through his door. The thing we need to remember in both cases is that Christians have never gone through a period when everyone was encouraging them to proclaim Jesus.

There have always been those who give 'strict orders not to continue teaching.' It is in response to such charges that first century proclaimers stood and said, "We must obey God rather than men" **Acts 5:28+29**. They knew that if they waited around on the majority vote they would only end up talking to each other. Such a lifestyle for a Christian was and still is unsatisfactory.

The command of our Lord is still 'Go into all the world,' even if the world gets a little upset. You see Peter is saying by doing good, in other words submitting to the governing authorities, we can actually silence such ignorant charges. Now not only is it God's will but Paul gives us another reason as to why we have to submit to our governments. Paul says in **Romans 13:1** "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except by God's appointment, and the authorities that exist have been instituted by God".

Paul says have no doubts about it church, the governing authorities that exist are there because God put them there. Now my suspicion is that we're more than happy to accept that God does that, if the authorities are fair and just, but in places like **Zimbabwe** for example we may struggle with this. Now we're going to look at that in a moment but for now I really want us to understand that God puts all authorities in the places they are.

Turn your Bibles back to the **book of Daniel** which will help us in our understanding, we're going to read a few verses from this book, so please bear with me. **Daniel 2:20+21** "Daniel answered, Blessed be the name of God forever and ever; for wisdom and might are his. He changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings, and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those who have understanding."

**Daniel 4:17** "The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones; to the intent that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he will, and sets up over it the lowest of men."

**Daniel 4:25** "You shall be driven from men, and your dwelling shall be with the animals of the field, and you shall be made to eat grass as oxen, and shall be wet with the dew of the sky, and seven times shall pass over you; until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he will."

Daniel said it long ago loved ones, it is God who **removes kings and raises up kings**. This was the way Daniel stated the truth that God is the One who controls and rules the world. Regarding Jesus, John said in **Revelation 19:16** that He is now "**King of kings and Lord of lords**." Yet it still surprises us when faced with the reality of God's control. You see loved ones I think we don't like what we cannot easily explain. If we cannot say exactly how God does something, we are at a loss. It's time we accept the vantage point of many Bible writers when they could not explain, but they could declare the power of God.

Think about, cast your minds back to **November 9, 1989**; do you remember what happened on that day? That's the day the **Berlin Wall** fell, no one saw it coming; no political leader, no social scientist, no church leader saw what was happening. It shocked the world. No-one can explain how it came about. Then nation after nation of Eastern Europe eliminated Communism as master. Is it answered prayer? Yes! Is it God's work? Yes! He now gives the church an open door. Do we believe He can get us through the door?

It is God who removes kings and God who raises up kings. And whether we like it or not loved ones that also goes for those who are evil. God can use evil authorities for His divine purpose and replace them when He decides to replace them. God tells Moses, to tell Pharaoh in **Exodus 9:16** "But for this purpose I have caused you to stand: to show you my strength, and so that my name may be declared in all the earth". In other words as powerful and evil as he was, he was only there because God put him there.

Listen to what God says in **Isaiah 10:5-12** "Assyria, the club I use to vent my anger, is as good as dead, a cudgel with which I angrily punish. I sent him against a godless nation, I ordered him to attack the people with whom I was angry, to take plunder and to carry away loot, to trample them down like dirt in the streets. But he does not agree with this, his mind does not reason this way, for his goal is to destroy, and to eliminate many nations. Indeed, he says: "Are not my officials all kings? Is not Calneh like Carchemish? Hamath like Arpad? Samaria like Damascus? I overpowered kingdoms ruled by idols, whose carved images were more impressive than Jerusalem's or Samaria's. As I have done to Samaria and its idols, so I will do to Jerusalem and its idols." But when the sovereign master finishes judging Mount Zion and Jerusalem, then I will punish the king of Assyria for what he has proudly planned and for the arrogant attitude he displays."

Again **Isaiah** is reminding us that it is God who removes kings and God who raises up kings. Do you see my point here loved ones? Paul is saying if we resist our governments we're actually resisting God Himself. Paul says exactly that in **Romans 13:2-4** "So the person who resists such authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will incur judgment (for rulers cause no fear for good conduct but for bad). Do you desire not to fear authority? Do

good and you will receive its commendation, for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be in fear, for it does not bear the sword in vain. It is God's servant to administer retribution on the wrongdoer."

So loves ones we may not like the **Conservative party** or the **Liberal Democrats** but you know what? God put them there and it's our responsibility to submit to them as our governing authority. And Peter is saying that when we do submit we will also silence those who might falsely accuse us of wrong-doing. Now is there a time when we don't have to submit to their ruling? Is there ever a time when Christians are justified in refusing to obey governmental authorities?

Well first of all we need to understand that even when a government is oppressive like we see happening in some parts of the world, that's not a get out clause for us not to submit to their rule. Put yourself in Peter and Paul's situation for a moment and their ruling authorities and governments. The government was oppressive, with Nero as ruler, an evil, cruel emperor. And it was under his reign, Christians suffered greatly.

We're going to look at this in more detail in a few weeks time but Peter says in 1 Peter 4:12+13 "Dear friends, do not be astonished that a trial by fire is occurring among you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in the degree that you have shared in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice and be glad. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory, who is the Spirit of God, rests on you."

Now we know from history that even Peter himself was crucified, and Paul was beheaded. But Peter and Paul would both say to us today, even under such oppressive governments, our responsibilities remain clear, we are to submit. You know we complain about our government, we complain about their leadership skills and motives. We complain when trouble and strife come because of bad decisions from our governments. We complain about being involved in wars we shouldn't be involved in etc but loved ones what are you doing about it?

If complaining is all you do, then you've seriously missed the point. Paul says to his young friend Timothy that Christians should not be complaining but praying. 1 Timothy 2:1+2 "First of all, then, I urge that requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanks be offered on behalf of all people, even for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and dignity".

Paul says we are to pray for our rulers, that peace may prevail. You want a godly government, Paul says pray for it. You want the people who run our country to use godly wisdom in doing so Paul says pray for it. And who knows, perhaps the God who removes kings and raises up kings will answer our prayers and give us rulers who are good and just.

But going back to our original question is there ever a time when Christians are justified in refusing to obey governmental authorities? I believe there is, I believe we shouldn't obey our governmental authorities when they want us to disobey God. Turn your Bibles over to the **Book of Acts** for a couple of examples of that happening.

Peter and John are before the authorities in Jerusalem for preaching the gospel and we pick up the story in Acts 4:18-20 "And they called them in and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, "Whether it is right before God to obey you rather than God, you decide, for it is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard." Peter and John said, this is one of those times we're not going to obey the authorities because we're commanded to preach the gospel.

Now flick over to Acts 5 again we find Peter and the apostles before the authorities for continuing to disobey their rules and in Acts 5:27-29 it says, "When they had brought them, they stood them before the council, and the high priest questioned them, saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood on us!" But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than people."

My point is this loved ones; it's only when the government tries to force us to disobey God, must we then disobey the government. But even at that it is only the particular laws designed to force us to disobey God that we have a right to break. We have no authority to break other laws in protest but we are asked to pray for those in authority, and submit to them in all other areas.

And so loved ones we do have a responsibility as strangers in a strange land under whatever government we may find ourselves under as we travel here on earth on our way to heaven. And even though we have freedom in Christ, we should use that freedom in serving the Lord and show honour and respect to those in authority.

1 Peter 2:16+17 “Live as free people, not using your freedom as a pretext for evil, but as God’s slaves. Honour all people, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the king”.

We who live in countries that allow freedom of religion should be especially quick to show our respect and submission to our government. But what we also should be doing is thanking God daily for this wonderful privilege.