**1 Peter: Submission to Governing Authorities**

1 Peter 2:13-14

**Context**

**1 Peter 2:13-17**—Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, **14**or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. **15**For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. **16**Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. **17**Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

Because God has made us, through His divine election, members of His kingdom, we are to submit to His divine authority in every way. That includes civil authority. We would agree to that until it conflicts with our way of thinking—either as a personal preference or as determined to be unjust or ungodly. Certainly, it becomes a greater challenge when it appears to be even more ungodly.

How are we to respond to imperfect authority? How does God want us to think and act in an ever-increasing immoral, godless society?

**Christian submission to God-ordained authority**

1. **The command: submit yourselves**

**1 Peter 2:13a**—Submit yourselves…

1. Submit (hypotassō)—to subordinate; reflexively, to obey:—be under obedience (obedient), put under, subdue unto, (be, make) subject (to, unto), be (put) in subjection (to, under), submit self unto[[1]](#footnote-1) It is a military expression literally meaning “to arrange in formation under the commander.”[[2]](#footnote-2)
2. Peter’s audience needed to understand this principle

Peter’s readers were, of course, under a pagan government, and the question was always asked in how far and on what principle God’s people should obey pagan rulers.[[3]](#footnote-3)

* 1. Ultimate authority comes from God
  2. God expects believers to submit to human institutions He ordains
     1. Government  
        “In all government, whatever its human form may be, is of divine origin.”[[4]](#footnote-4)
     2. Family
     3. Church
  3. Believers’ submission demonstrates a godly character quality

**2 Peter 1:5-7**—Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral [[g](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%2520pet%25201&version=NASB1995#fen-NASB1995-30485g)]excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, **6**and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, **7**and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.

* 1. It demonstrates a concern God’s concern for peace

**1 Peter 3:11**—“He must turn away from evil and do good;  
He must seek peace and pursue it.

**Psalm 34:14**—Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.

**Matthew 5:9**—Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

**Romans 14:19**—So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

**James 3:18**—And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

**Romans 12:14-21**—Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. **15**Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. **16**Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but [[n](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=rom%252012&version=NASB1995#fen-NASB1995-28262n)]associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. **17**Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. **18**If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. **19**Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. **20**“But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” **21**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

* 1. We submit, unless it otherwise violates His commands

**Acts 4:19**—But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge

**Acts 5:27-29**—When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, **28**saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” **29**But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.

* 1. Submission to authority has always been God’s directive as seen repeatedly in the OT

**Deuteronomy 17:14-15**—“When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,’ **15**you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman.

**1 Samuel 10:24**—Samuel said to all the people, “Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen? Surely there is no one like him among all the people.” So all the people shouted and said, “Long live the king!”

**2 Kings 11:12**—Then he brought the king’s son out and put the crown on him and gave him the testimony; and they made him king and anointed him, and they clapped their hands and said, “Long live the king!”

**Proverbs 24:21-22**—My son, fear the Lord and the king; Do not associate with those who are given to change, **22**For their calamity will rise suddenly, And who knows the ruin that comes from both of them?

* + 1. In a similar manner, NT believers are to promote the welfare of the city
    2. We are to live and thrive in the culture awaiting our eternal home

**John 14:2-3**—In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. **3**If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

**Hebrews 4:9-10**—So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. **10**For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

**Revelations 21:1-4**—Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. **2**And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. **3**And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, **4**and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

* 1. Paul elucidates this principle earlier

**Romans 13:1-4**—Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. **2**Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. **3**For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; **4**for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

1. We submit to imperfect authority
   1. Even openly sinful authority
      1. First century Roman authority was anything but godly
      2. Peter, Paul, the rest of the Apostles, and newly formed church lived in a very hostile environment
      3. Nowhere in their writings (the scriptures) do you see a freedom to defy civil authority

**Matthew 22:21**—They \*said to Him, “Caesar’s.” Then He \*said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”

* 1. Throughout human history there have been many violations of this principle all in the name of God—violations of ordinances, acts of civil disobedience, insurrections, revolutions, wars

Even unreasonable, evil, harsh rulers and oppressive systems are far better than anarchy. And all forms of government, from dictatorships to democracies, are filled with evil because they are led by fallen sinners. Still, civil authority is from God, though the individual rulers may be godless.[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. **The reason: for the Lord’s sake**

**1 Peter 2:13b**—…for the Lord’s sake…

1. The motivation for submitting is simple: we desire to honor the Ultimate Authority

**Psalm 119:12-13**—Blessed are You, O Lord; Teach me Your statutes. **13**With my lips I have told of All the ordinances of Your mouth.

**Acts 13:48**—When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

**1 Corinthians 10:31**—Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1. Our obedience says far more about our commitment to Him than any institution/person
2. We honor God when we obey earthly authority

**Psalm 9:20**—Put them in fear, O Lord; Let the nations know that they are but men. Selah.

**Psalm 46:10**—“Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

1. In so doing, we imitate Christ

**23**and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously

* 1. The Holy, Righteous One from the moment of His birth was subject to imperfect authority
  2. That was especially seen in the Jewish and Roman authorities

Cf. **Matthew 23:13-33**

* 1. The whole time, He never thought to overturn the authority
  2. He never lead revolts against any injustice clearly in play

**John 6:15**—So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

* 1. Jesus’ objective was always to do the will of His Father

**Matthew 4:17**—From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

**Mark 1:15**—and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

**Luke 5:31-32**—And Jesus answered and said to them, “It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. **32**I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

1. God is pleased when His representatives model similar responses
   1. Even when unbelievers know of the righteous behavior of His children

**Philippians 2:14-15**—Do all things without grumbling or disputing; **15**so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world

* 1. Our conviction as Christians is to know and do nothing other than point to Christ

**1 Corinthians 2:1-2**—Do all things without grumbling or disputing; **15**so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,

1. We need to remind ourselves that our struggles are not physical

**2 Corinthians 10:3-5**—For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, **4**for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. **5**We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ

* 1. “Fortresses” and “speculations” refer to ideologies
  2. There are ways of thinking that we must combat not with earthy means but with spiritual

1. Our goal is to advance God’s kingdom according to His Spirit and His directive

**John 18:36**—Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”

1. **The scope: to every human institution**

**1 Peter 2:13b-14**—…to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, **14**or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

1. Three purposes for Government

**Romans 13:3-4**—For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; **4**for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

* 1. Restrain evil
  2. Promote the public good
  3. Punish the one who practices evil

1. To every human institution
   1. Why “every” institution?
   2. Why not just gentile/good/peaceable authority?

To maintain peace and order in society, God has ordained them all; thus to limit or make exception to the command to submit to every authority would condone disobedience and disrespect for God’s plan.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The expression, “every ordinance of man,” means that we are to obey all the laws of every branch of government. … If as Christians we take Peter seriously, we will try to observe all ordinances and laws, even when we question their value or wisdom. … We’ll accept the laws as pertaining to us, and obey them to the best of our ability.[[7]](#footnote-7)

1. In the scriptures we are commanded to obey those institutions created by God
   1. Civil Government—in all their forms
   2. Family—Husbands, wives, children

**Ephesians 5:21-6:2**—and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. **22**Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23**For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. **24**But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. **25**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, **26**so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27**that He might present to Himself the church [[q](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=eph%25205&version=NASB1995#fen-NASB1995-29332q)]in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. **28**So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; **29**for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, **30**because we are members of His body. **31**For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. **32**This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. **33**Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she [[r](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=eph%25205&version=NASB1995#fen-NASB1995-29338r)]respects her husband. **6-1**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **2**Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise)

* 1. Work—masters, slaves

**2:18**—Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

**Ephesians 6:5**—Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ

**Colossians 3:22**—Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

* 1. Again…as to the Lord

**Ephesians 5:22**—Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

**Colossians 3:23-25**—Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. 25For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

1. Despite the evil that otherwise may exist, God is sovereign and exercising His wisdom and perfect rule over all nations

**Genesis 18:25**—Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”

1. Peter breaks down the levels of government from top to bottom
   1. King—the one in authority as a monarch
      1. Consider Caesar
      2. Nero was in power during this time
   2. Governors—lower level of rule, but reporting to a higher authority
   3. Those sent by the king
2. Governments role is for the punishment of evildoers

**Genesis 9:5-6**—Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man’s brother I will require the life of man. **6**“Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

* 1. They bear the sword
  2. They do so to punish bad actors
  3. They have the authority to take life—therefore, take them seriously

**Matthew 26:50-53**—And Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you have come for.” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him. **51**And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. **52**Then Jesus \*said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. **53**Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

1. Conversely, they praise those who do right through favorable treatment and protection

**Roman 13:3**—For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same

**Conclusion**

The credibility of our faith will be seen in how we respond to those whom the Lord has placed in positions of authority. Our love for Him and our testimony to His sovereign will and plan will be tested in how we think and live.

**Matthew 5:14-16**—“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; **15**nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. **16**Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

**Source**

Most of the message and notes come from:

Richard W. DeHaan, Good News for Bad Times: 1 Peter

R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of I and II Epistles of Peter, the three Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude

John MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1 Peter

John MacArthur, Submission to Civil Authority, Pt 1, April 2, 1989, [www.gty.org](http://www.gty.org)

Jerome H Smith, The New Treasure of Scripture Knowledge

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1. Strong’s G5293 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. MacArthur, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lenski, 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Lenski, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. MacArthur, 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. MacArthur, Why Government Can’t Save You, ch 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. DeHaan, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)