

Living to Display God's Grace: Submission to Civil Authorities (Part 4)

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[0 : 00] In 1 Peter, chapter 2, the title of my message for this morning, Living to Display God's Grace, which has been the title over the last few sermons.

This will be a part four with the subtitle, Submission to Civil Authorities. In our supercharged time in society right now, still living under at least some of the COVID mandates that we've endured over the last couple of years.

So it's been particularly important for me to preach through this particular passage very, very carefully, as I always try to do with the scriptures when I handle them in sermons.

But I've really slowed down here, trying to help us better understand and grasp some of the nature of Peter's emphases on civil obedience and why that is so important.

Now, again, for those of you who are visiting us, you're coming in on number four in this passage, but I've actually preached six or seven sermons moving into this section of scripture.

[1 : 14] Again, this will be a part four. Let's read the passage together, kind of get better familiar with what we're going to be looking at. I'll actually start in 1 Peter 2, beginning in verse 12.

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may, because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

For such is the will of God that by doing right, you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bond slaves of God.

Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. Let's pray together.

[2 : 38] Almighty God and Father, just very aware this morning that as I come to open your word and preach what I hope will be your heart from 1 Peter, as you used this precious apostle to pen these words, that we might grow in grace and follow ever faithfully the Lord Jesus Christ and his example of personal suffering for the will and glory of almighty God.

Help us then now, Lord, to look into your word and by your spirit's power to have insight and understanding and increase our discernment that we might follow Jesus and love him more deeply. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Well, in last week's message, friends, what I did was I presented you with three features of the historical cultural situation that Peter's readers find themselves living in.

So these three sociocultural realities serve to present very serious, very challenging realities for these Christians as they sought to live faithfully to Jesus while submitting to human authority, which was no small issue for them at this time.

Some of you were here last week and you'll remember some of the things I shared. I just want to give you a quick reminder. These three features of the context they live in should help you and I frame and better inform our own understanding and interpretation of Peter's command that we submit to civil authority.

[4 : 28] We should submit to civil authority. Now, the first of these features concern the influence of what we are calling the emperor cult.

This was all last week. The emperor cult. Roman emperors during this time and decades prior to this were viewed and worshipped as deity.

Deity. And Nero, the emperor in place at the time of Peter's writing, enforced this worship of Caesar with intense cruelty.

In fact, Roman rule stretched across many, many diverse cultures. It was in North Africa. It went up into Great Britain. It was in what they called Gaul.

So it took in some of France and Germany. There were just so many different cultures that were included in the Roman Empire. And so emperor worship helped to kind of meld this multiculturalism into a unified whole.

[5 : 33] It was a way of putting Roman citizens and captured peoples kind of on the same page together. It promoted what Rome hoped would be peace within.

Now, think about this. Christians felt a strong social pressure to participate in it. It was the fabric of living in Roman society.

It's just the air that people breathed. The emperor cult. The emperor as deity. The emperor as someone we should worship. But the reality was this.

Christians understood they could not support nor participate in any social expressions of emperor worship.

So they were seen as fomenters of rebellion who threatened the very peace of Rome. That was one of the contexts that these people lived in every single day of their lives.

[6 : 39] Now, listen. Remember, these people, these Christians, they weren't marching on the Capitol. They weren't protesting. They weren't making banners. They weren't taking up arms.

None of that was going on. These Christians were simply living out their faith in these foreign lands that Peter mentions as Roman provinces back in chapter 1, verse 1.

Listen to these. To those who reside as aliens scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Those are Roman provinces that take up what is now modern Turkey.

So Peter's writing to these people and saying, I know it's hard. And I know you're under persecution. The second feature that we looked at last Sunday was illegitimate religion.

Illegitimate religion. That's the issue here was that unlike Judaism and other religions within the Roman pantheon, as it were, Rome did not sanction or legalize any aspect of Christianity.

[7 : 45] So to be a Christian, just simply to be a Christian and live as a Christian was to align yourself with a sect unsanctioned in Roman life and policy.

To live as a Christian was to live illegally. Now, that would be actually put into law a little later, a little after this time. Right now, in Rome, it was a death sentence for you to be a Christian.

That began to spread around the empire. And I think by the time of this writing, that is starting to happen, starting to proliferate, go out into the empire. Pretty soon, under another Roman emperor, it will actually be illegal for you to be a Christian.

That's where all of this is headed. So among the common people, then, just like the Roman elite, the Roman authorities, the Roman governors, the people who were in charge of these provinces, then there was the common people.

The Gentile world took issue with the beliefs and practices of Christian worship as well. And this was more bizarre to me as I learned about this.

[9 : 00] Communion by the common people was considered as cannibalism. So many of the Gentile populace looked on Christians and thought that they were cannibals.

They thought they were atheists because they didn't worship any visible gods. They didn't make statues for themselves and bow down to them or anything like that. There was another aspect to this.

Looking to Jesus' second coming as king meant to the general populace that Christians were planning a rebellion. They were seditionists.

So also, it was very easy in Nero's time because Christians believed that God was going to rain down fire on Judgment Day, made it easy for Nero to label Christians as the arsonists who set Rome ablaze and burned down the beloved city.

Now, in all of those ways, these things were going on among the people that the Christians were living with and around. Let me give you the third reason, the third feature that made this life very hard.

[10 : 19] And even Peter's counsel here to submit to authority, to civil authority, made this a very challenging thing. Roman society itself.

Their illegitimate religious status officially with Rome kind of fed into this third feature. Rome itself, Roman society itself, was debased.

It was founded on self-pleasure, self-indulgence. Because so much of Gentile society was bound up in practices that were forbidden for Christians, believers continually found themselves having to abstain from much of Roman society.

So the general populace saw this as antisocial, while Roman authorities saw it as rebellious and a threat to the government, so that Christians were thought to, and I quote, have a hatred for the human race.

This was all of the kind of thing that I elaborated on last message. So societal expectation was that Christians were antisocial evildoers, look with me at the context of Peter's letter, back up in verse 12.

[11 : 46] I don't know what your translation might say, but he tells these people, keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles. Now, we've already preached through that part.

Notice the reason, the purpose clause, so that in the thing in which they slander you as, my translation says, evildoers. This is how society looked on Christians on the whole.

You're evildoers. You're a threat to beloved Rome and to our way of life. You're antisocial and you hate society. That's what they lived in.

As Rome then began to persecute their prejudice against Christians, the general populace gave wholehearted approval for them to be removed from society wholesale.

Now, for you historians, is that kind of putting you to mind about another era in time where an entire nation of people were being rounded up and killed, murdered?

[12 : 54] Yeah. It's happened actually a number of times, hasn't it, through human history, not just during the time of World War II with the Nazis. That's something that I can reflect on a little better.

That's a little closer to home for me, but we've had it even since then in other societies around the world. So Christians found themselves increasingly marginalized and persecuted just for being Christians.

As they lived for Jesus, they found themselves suffering in the name of Jesus. Look with me at 2 Peter, if you would.

Chapter 4, or excuse me, 1 Peter, chapter 4, verse 16. Well, we'll do 15 just to give you a little running context.

Make sure, Peter's going to say in a little while, make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer or a thief or evildoer or troublesome meddler.

[14 : 04] Now, folks, that's the kind of stuff society was accusing Christians of. This is what people thought in general terms of Christians. So he says, no, make sure that you're not suffering as one of these.

But if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God. What in this name?

And so they kind of captured a phrase at this time. Many historians bore this out. Suffering for the name. Suffering for the name.

Which is exactly where Peter takes us in the section we're in now. As Peter wrote this letter, he understood that Jesus' example, Jesus' own example of submissive suffering for righteousness was at stake.

And so Peter commanded, if you'll look at chapter 2 of 1 Peter, verse 13, submit yourselves. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority or to governors as sent by the king, by the emperor, for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

[15 : 34] Now that kind of running treatise brings us into our fourth characteristic in this little outline that I've put together for you here about submitting to civil authority.

So we have point number four that we've been working toward. It's taken me how many four sermons to get to point four, I think. But here's the good news.

So I have, what, three left that I need to do. I've done four sermons in the three previous. We're going to try to do one sermon on the last three, and you can thank Mike for that.

My brother Mike was praying for me this week. Lord, help the boy from what I said to him last week.

And so, brother, your prayers were answered. I was able to pull it together in this. It was so tempting, though.

You know, when you're studying and editing, when I'm doing that, I'm being blessed. It's so rich and so wonderful. And there's so many things that I want to bring and share, but we'd never get out of two verses.

[16:32] We'd preach two verses for months. It's so wonderful. So that editing is hard. I weep. I bleed. It hurts. But it gets done. So thank you for praying for me.

Let's look at this one. The will of submission to authority in verse 15. For such is the will of God that by doing right, you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

Now, beloved, Peter wants Christians to be careful to align their will regarding submission with God's will regarding submission.

So doing here this now doing God's will in verse 15 refers back to the act of submitting to human authority.

In other words, I can say it this way. We look at this. For such is the will of God. Such is the will of God does not refer to what's said next. It is the will of God for you to do what's said next.

[17:36] But Peter's point is this. For such is the will of God that you submit with the result being that as you submit, these people will be silenced.

So by doing God's will, by doing right, that's what he calls this submission, by submitting in godliness, the result will be silencing the ignorance of foolish people.

People like we read about in Titus just a little while earlier, like we once were before Christ. This is Peter's primary concern.

So his point here is that our obedience to God's will for us to submit to human authority brings God's spiritual designs into effect.

Now that shouldn't surprise us. That's how we live for the glory of God. When we live by his will and not by our will, we are bringing God's designs and purposes for grace living into effect.

[18:42] We're bringing that will into our life, into the tangible way that we speak and what we do. I want God's will to be seen in my life, God's character to be lived out in my life, not my will.

You don't want me to come into the pulpit and preach Jeff. You want me to come into the pulpit and preach Jesus. This is one of the reasons you pray for Greg and I as we preach and teach the word of God.

You pray that God will keep us in the middle of that road, always exalting and honoring Jesus Christ and lifting up the mind of Christ so that you're blessed in grace for grace living.

This is what we're concerned with as we read Peter and gain his point. Again, I'll say it. Our obedience to God's will for us to submit to human authority brings God's spiritual designs into effect, and that's what we want.

Now, the rub is this. When we're chafing under human authority that we don't agree with or don't like, it's really easy for us to rationalize and justify and kick that thing out and say, yeah, well, the fact that I'm suffering ought to be proof enough that this isn't right.

[19:58] And I'll just point you to one symbol that blows that right out of the water. It's actually right behind me on the wall here. This can't be right because it's so full of personal suffering.

You see? This turns everything about the wisdom of man on its head. The world doesn't realize how lost it is, folks. They need Jesus Christ to open the eyes of their hearts to show them that this is their only hope.

This is their only hope. Now, folks, this reality of bringing God's will to bear in our lives, in the tangible expressions of how we speak and live, this is very significant for helping us discern our situation and helping us to frame our behavior again, what does God's will for our submission to human authority intend to bring into effect?

Well, according to Peter, in this text, in verse 15 of chapter two, for such is the will of God that by doing right, you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

That's the intention. Doing right, as we unpack this a little bit, Peter says in my translation, the New American Standard, that by doing right, by doing right, doing right emphasizes lifestyle, lifestyle.

[21:31] This isn't a one-off. This is how you approach your life. It's the priorities, the order, and the manner of your day-to-day living. Now, the question on the table is this.

How does Peter want his readers to battle against the lies people believe and say about them? These Christians are evildoers.

They're atheists. They're cannibals. They're haters of society. They're seditionists. How does Peter want his readers, these Christians, to battle against these lies?

Well, here's the answer in straightforward fashion. By submitting to human authority through truthful living. That is, godly behavior based in the will of God.

That shouldn't surprise us. That would be the answer from Paul or James or any other author of the New Testament. Right? We are called on to live out the will of God.

[22 : 31] Godly behavior based in the will of the Lord. Now, we need to do something with that because Peter's going to do something with it in a few more verses and it's going to take us just a little bit longer to get there.

So I'm going to jump ahead a little bit just to show you what Peter's going to do. If you look down at verse 21, for you have been called for this purpose since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps.

And in following this will of God, Jesus committed no sin. Jesus didn't open his mouth to incite rebellion against the Roman government.

Jesus exalted the kingdom of God. Now, I want to show you just a little, little, tiny taste of this. We'll do more with it when we get there. But this is just really encouraging, I think. If you'll turn to the book of John, let's see this.

Let's see this answer here. Something, somewhat in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. John 4. And Jesus, we'll go up into verse 31.

[23 : 43] Jesus is dealing here with the disciples. Meanwhile, the disciples were urging him, saying, Rabbi, eat something. He'd had a very busy day of ministry. They were concerned about him. And Jesus said to them, I have food to eat that you do not know about.

So the disciples were saying to one another, hey, no one brought him anything to eat, did he? No, no, I didn't see it. Yeah, no, no. Somebody must have. No, no, I didn't see that. Then verse 34.

Jesus said to them, my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

That's what Jesus was sustained by, was the point of his whole life. His entire life was based in doing the will of God, which meant suffering.

Couldn't get away from it. Jesus had to suffer to fulfill God's will. Let's look at another one in John chapter 5, verse 30. This is an interesting answer that Jesus gives here.

I can do nothing on my own initiative. Now, isn't that an interesting statement from the Lord Jesus Christ, the creator of the universe? I can do nothing.

[24 : 54] Have you ever had anybody ask you, is there anything God can't do? Here's your answer. God can't speak or work against himself.

So God says here, I can do nothing on my own initiative. As I hear, I judge. And my judgment is just because I do not seek my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

Isn't that interesting? And then one other, chapter 6, verse 38, just kind of tightly packed in this section in John, we see several examples of this.

John 6, verse 38. For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

This is the will of him who sent me that of all that he has given me, I lose nothing but raise it up on the last day. Aren't we glad? That's a hallelujah moment there for sure.

[25 : 59] I have come down from heaven not to do my own will. This is Jesus. This is Jesus submitting to human authority through truthful living.

That is, the godly behavior of our Lord based in the will of God, his Father. Let me show you how this fleshed out in a moment in Jesus' life when everything could have turned on a dime and gone a very different way.

It's John 18. John 18. And you'll recognize the issue here. Judas has betrayed the Lord Jesus and they have come to arrest him.

The Roman authorities have come to arrest Jesus and we pick it up in verse 8 of John 18. Jesus answered, I told you, I am he.

They're seeking for Jesus. Where's Jesus? So if you seek me, let these go their way. So he's saying, let the disciples, let all these others who are following around, let them go.

[27 : 02] I'm the guy you're looking for. Here I am. I'll come willingly to fulfill the word which he spoke of those whom you have given me. I lost not one.

Didn't we just read that? Simon Peter then having a sword, this is the author of our text, folks, drew it and struck the high priest slave and cut off his right ear and the slave's name was Malchus.

So Jesus said to all of his disciples, draw your swords to the gates, men, into the breach. No. So Jesus said to Peter, put the sword into the sheath.

The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it? And that's the question we're asking. Your knee-jerk response to civil authority is this.

Shall I not drink it? Because we know that all authority is appointed by Almighty God. Again, for you visitors who are here looking at me now thinking this guy is preaching that we're supposed to lay down and just let the government walk.

[28 : 13] No, that's not what I'm saying at all. It's not what I've said. Go back and listen to my messages and you'll see. What I am saying here is that there's not a hint in Peter's letter of any kind of civil disobedience whatsoever.

He is simply telling these people who are living under this crushing weight of judgment from the general populace and from Roman authority submit yourselves and what he's concerned about is the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are you willing to suffer for Jesus' sake under this kind of authority for Jesus' sake? Now, Greg and I have told you that we have put together several Tuesday nights over the next three months in the summer.

Kind of doing a little summer emphasis here. The first Tuesday night is coming up this week and then we'll have one in July and one in August, God willing. And those Tuesday nights are being set aside for you to come in and for us to sit down together and talk about, all right, when is it biblically right to say no?

When is it right for us and godly for us to do the will of God by saying no to human authority? Because there are those times. How do we blend that?

[29 : 30] How do we understand that? How do we become better discerners of when that moment comes? All I'm trying to impress on you now and have been now for seven weeks is that it is not your knee-jerk to listen to somebody tell you what to do and for you to go, okay, it ain't for me.

My response initially is to start thinking in terms of, okay, Holmes, let's just see how that's going to work out. I don't like people telling me what to do either.

Do you know where I've started to get used to that? I've had 30 years of walking with a Lord, the Lord. He tells me what to do all the time.

And you know who I have to get over in that relationship? Me. Me. I'm willing to bet because I know human nature just a little bit that you're not far off from being like me in that.

So I'm trying to bring you some encouragement from the Lord Jesus, from Peter, about what it means to walk with the Lord. Mike, I'm only on page two and I got five, so keep praying.

[30 : 36] This is a constant prayer, brother. Doing right. How does Peter want us to deal with this? By submitting. Folks, Peter has already, this is the guy who whacked off Malchus' ear and Jesus said, put your sword back, Peter.

That's not what this is about. He's already shown us the nature and importance of this kind of spirit and attitude in chapter two, verse 12. So if you go back to first Peter, first Peter chapter two, I read this earlier as part of the running context.

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, the people who are reviling you, the people who are saying that you're evildoers, that they may because of your visible behavior, your good deeds as they see them happening, will glorify God in the day of visitation.

So your godly behavior in verse 12 is about the hope of these slanderers coming to Christ, coming to the place where they come to know by faith the Lord Jesus Christ so that on the day of his return, these people will be brought into heaven as people who worship God.

Now in verse 15, we have a little bit of a different slant on it. For such is the will of God that you submit that by doing right, by submitting, you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

[31 : 56] So in verse 15, it's about silencing these people, silencing them, all right? Now look at this with me. Silence here is phimo'o.

Phimo'o. It's from the word phimos, and it literally means to muzzle. Literally, phimo'o means to muzzle the mouth, to gag the mouth, or to make the mouth speechless.

That's pretty strong, isn't it? And then ignorance. Ignorance. Agnosia. It refers to, and this is very interesting, the English wouldn't bring this out, but the Greek does.

Listen, what we're dealing with in this word, it refers to a culpable, willful ignorance due to disobedience. So, this is not this.

It's not, I'm simply uninformed so that I'll stand before God one day and say, yeah, well, I didn't know. No. No. This is culpable.

[33 : 08] It's, I don't know because I don't care and because I'm disobedient. So, there's no innocence here when he talks about this ignorance.

It refers to a heart of rebellion against the truth and against what is good. We can see this kind of played out for us in Romans 1, 18, where Paul says that mankind suppresses the truth in unrighteousness.

Unrighteousness is willful disobedience, not just, I don't know, I didn't realize. It's not innocent ignorance. It's a heart that rebels against the Lord.

You see, this is what Peter's going after in these moments. He understands human nature as well, that we are rebellious people. What did God say about his own people?

They're stiff-necked. They're stiff-necked people. So, no innocence, willful rebellion, and it's inexcusable. Paul actually talked about this, well, let me go there, in Romans chapter 10, about the Jews, his own people, and it broke his heart.

[34 : 27] I mean, this is a man that said, I'd be willing to give up my own life with the Lord that these people would be saved. That is unbelievable, really. So, in Romans chapter 10, he's talking about this willful disobedience, this ignorance from disobedience.

He says, in verse 1, brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is for their salvation. That is, his Jewish compatriots, the Jewish nation.

For I testify about them, they do have a zeal for God, but notice, not in accordance with knowledge. What do you mean? They have a knowledge about God, not in accordance with knowledge, and he explains it.

For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own. Do you see that? That's a culpable, culpable wickedness.

They're not only turning away from God's righteousness, they're seeking to establish their own. They did not notice, subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

[35 : 30] You see? There's no submission there. There's an active rebellion, and so God judged them for it. This is what Peter's talking about. The next word in our text further bears out this kind of willful rebellion, this sinful culpability.

The text says, these people are foolish. Foolish in God's eyes. It means senseless, without reason, rash.

Proverbs tells us exactly what God means by this kind of foolishness. I'm going to go back to Proverbs. In chapter 1, right at the beginning of Proverbs by verse 7, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

So you can't have this kind of knowledge apart from a high and holy reverence for God. The absence of that high and holy reverence for God brings on the second part of verse 7.

Fools despise wisdom and instruction, meaning God's. Fools despise God's wisdom and instruction.

[36 : 42] If you drop down in chapter 2 to verses 22 and 23, how long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded?

That's the truth. People love being in this state, and scoffers delight themselves in scoffing. That's true. People live in the delight of their own scoffing against God, and fools hate knowledge.

Folks, do you see that this is not the kind of ignorance that you say, oh, I wasn't aware of that. Now I'm aware of it. I'll make a change. This is a culpable ignorance that says, I am at war in my heart with God.

And then verse 23, turn to my reproof. Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you. I will make my words known to you. That's redemption, isn't it? This is what we pray for them.

We wouldn't want anybody to die in a state of hating the Lord and in this active rebellion of their hearts. God forbid. My friends, look, this is the world of people they lived in and that we live in and around.

[37 : 58] They have no respect or reverence for our Savior and our Lord. So they have no respect for Jesus living in us. In fact, they see us as a threat.

You realize that? You understand? You're not neutral. You're not just one other person on the earth with a different viewpoint. Boy, if you haven't seen that in the last couple of years.

Everything's fine as long as we're talking about crystals and universalism and Hinduism and whatever other sect or cult or whatever. But the minute that you become definitive and say, Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, woohoo!

You better buckle up. Don't get definitive about the cross. There are lots of ways to heaven, they say.

But this is what we are confronted with in the truth of the Lord. These folks see us as a threat. Well, let me say this. We are a threat. Now hear it.

[39 : 10] We are a threat to their sinful ignorance. against God. But they, they see this as a bad thing.

Because what they see and say are based on minds captive to the cruelty of Satan. And that we have to hold on to.

Because it can feel very personal. And the closer the person is to you in the rejection and the malignment and whatever else you're going through, the harder it is for you to keep that perspective.

This is not personal to me as Jeff. They hate my Lord. It's hard. I'm telling you it's hard.

I understand that. I empathize with you in that struggle to keep that perspective. But we must do it.

We have to see this for what it is.

[40 : 10] I know I'm turning to a few other places but Ephesians chapter 4. I just, I want to give you places in scripture every once in a while here that I can outside this context that helps to support and undergird your understanding because I think it's critical to you framing this in a way that you can walk in faithfulness to the Lord while obeying human authority as long as that authority is not asking you to sin.

That's the bottom line, isn't it? In saying no. So in Ephesians chapter 4 we read this. So this I say in verse 17 and affirm together with the Lord that you as Christians you walk no longer as the Gentiles that is the unbelievers the non-Christians also walk.

How? In the futility of their minds. That's how God sees their wisdom. It's futile. Empty. Being darkened in their understanding.

There's no light there. Excluded from the life of God. Why? Because of and here's the interesting part the ignorance that is in them.

You think God would hold you responsible for an ignorance that says well I just didn't know. This is always about willful ignorance. sinful ignorance that causes you to put your hand up in the face of God and say no no because of the ignorance that is in them because of notice the next phrase the hardness of their heart and they having become callous callous toward what the Lord have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with and he closes it out greediness and then the contrast comes but you did not learn Christ in this way.

[42 : 13] That's a foolish person. That's a person whose mind is captive to the cruelty of Satan. My friends as you deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Jesus please hear this beloved you will face leaders bosses people even friends and family who will see your life with Christ as a threat to them and they will attack you and they will exit from your life.

If you haven't already experienced that keep living for Jesus and you will. It is a raw reality of life living for the Lord.

Your life according to Ephesians is supposed to be a life of rebuke. Now that doesn't mean that you're personally offensive to everybody because you're just personally offensive.

But by living in the light and love of the Lord what does darkness do with the light? It runs from it. It doesn't like the light. And so the very life that you live in the glory of the Lord and for the Lord becomes a rebuke to these people and they see you as a threat.

I can't stay the way I am if I hang around you because you're constantly bearing out this other standard in life and it's convicting.

[43 : 43] Have you ever had somebody say to you you're just too convicting to be around and you're like I'm not trying to be. Well you should be. Try to be convicting.

That's okay. Live for the Lord and you will be. This is Peter's movement. This is Peter's movement. He wants the attitude of that heart for Christ to be visible. He wants it to be observable. Palpable. In the life of his readers.

All right let me ask you a question. What will support your ongoing testimony testimony to these people for the Lord's sake according to Peter.

When you have people in your life like I've just described people who see you as a threat people who attack you and or exit from your life what will support your ongoing testimony to them for the Lord's sake.

[44 : 52] Emphasize that. Here's the answer. Peter. When what they believe and say about you doesn't match what they see about you.

Isn't that what Peter says? Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles. As they observe them they will glorify God.

For such is the will of God by doing right. This is the life that we're called to live. What does Peter tell us?

Follow God's will by submissive good godly living so that your right behavior will serve to muzzle their God hating rebellious ways.

And for Peter I think this is especially important in our relationships with human authority. human authority. Now folks Peter is careful here.

[45 : 55] Peter understands human nature too well. Even redeemed human nature. He knows we still struggle with the flesh. Right? So people want their freedom.

People insist on their rights. So Peter offers us a wise warning about freedom and obedience. That's what comes next.

A wise warning that he wants us to deal with in verse 16. Act as free men. He wants us to do that. And do not use your freedom as a covering for evil but use it as slaves of God.

So here freedom is Peter's concern. He turns right to that. One of the first reactions to a command for submission and obedience is this.

What about my freedom? I don't want to be under anybody's thumb. What about my rights? Right? Now notice Peter in this context still isn't offering any scriptural caveats for disobedience here.

[47 : 03] You can't read between the white spaces and come up but he is stressing the nature of biblical freedom in submission to human authority. Did you hear that?

Biblical freedom not opposed to in submission to human authority. There's a difference then between servility and submission in Peter's command.

Act as free men. Do not use your freedom as a covering for evil. Use it as slaves of God. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution.

Look at this. Obsequious. obedience. Obsequious obedience means servile or excessive obedience. That is not what Peter is telling us here.

That is not what he is commanding of us here. I want to be very clear about that. We want to avoid heart attitudes of sinful rebellion but we also want to avoid heart attitudes of slavish obedience.

[48 : 12] obedience. So how can we know the proper balance in the heat of the moment? Here's the answer. According to Peter, we prepare and train our hearts beforehand to respond not react to authority with wisdom and humility.

We have to train our hearts to respond to human authority not react to it, not knee jerk to it, but to respond to it with discernment and wisdom and humility with a sober mindedness that is steeped, marinated in our walk with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whether that's pastoral authority, whether that's the authority of you having to pay your bills so they won't turn your water off and your electricity off, whether you're answering to a civil authority or whether you're pulled over by a police officer or whatever it is, whatever the level of authority, that you're relating to that authority out of a carefully groomed and nurtured walk with the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's to help us prepare ourselves to stay out of the ditches of selfish obedience or selfish rebellion and slavish obedience. So here's what he does.

Peter now, he's going to give us three biblical standards of action from this verse. Let me just give them to you real quickly. The first is this, act as free men. That's one of the first standards that he calls on you to use and to apply in your life that will help you stay in the middle of this road between, I don't want to be slavishly obedient and undiscerning in this and just be a cow and get in line and moo.

[50 : 02] I don't want to do that, but I don't want my knee jerk to be, all right, we're going to fight this thing. Two arms, two arms, all right. How do I, where do I navigate that?

How do I do that? Okay, the act here, when he says act as free men, the act here refers to submission. It just keeps coming back to that.

But there is much, much power here when you might think, be tempted to think, in all of this, when you might think that submitting is not a power move.

It is when you are acting in your spiritual freedom, won for you by Jesus Christ and then gifted to you by his grace through faith, that you are in that power.

Take godly action because you are free. You have been freed to say yes and to do what the world considers the opposite of wise.

[51 : 04] What did Paul say? The world's wisdom is foolishness to God and God's wisdom is foolishness to the world, didn't he? But now here we are being called to something they are not going to get, they are not going to understand.

And yet visibly there is no denying it. Act as free men because you have been made free in the most important way that you possibly can, in a way that goes way beyond political freedom or cultural freedom.

It's the freedom of redemption. And Paul, Peter came and he based all of that, he said, look, he has hammered this and hammered this for one and a half, almost two full chapters before he gets to this point.

Everything he's been saying to us in the chapter one is all about how you've been freed up in the Lord Jesus Christ, so live as free people. Live in the freedom of what?

God, now you are no longer slaves to sin. Now you have a choice, whereas you didn't before. You could only live in sin before the Lord Jesus.

[52 : 12] Now the Lord Jesus has radically freed you from the power and penalty of sin so that you can say yes to the things that please God. You can. Now take full advantage and run with it.

Run with it and don't look back. Don't go back and play in the mud pies. Keep moving into the light and love of the Lord Jesus Christ and let that radiate from your life that they would see that in your life and it would be excellent to them and it will do this to their mouths.

Wham! And now we're done. What did Jesus do? As they took him to the cross, this was Jesus bearing the cross.

I can't believe I got to do this. I can't believe we're going to do that. I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it. No. He never opened his mouth. He never blasphemed.

He never spoke contemptuously about the people who were putting him on the cross and murdering him. What did he say on the cross? Forgive them. As he thought about those people coming in the future, forgive them.

[53 : 18] For the very people who were putting the nails in him and killing him, a lamb to the slaughter. Now I realize Jesus was winning redemption for us. What did Peter say?

Be willing to do this in order that some of these people may see this, realize how radical it is, and God might use it in their life to turn them to Christ, so that on the day of his visitation, they can glorify God in heaven.

That sounds like you being used for redemptive purposes to me, and that's what we're after. Father, this is our calling in Christ. Take godly action because you've been made free to do the right thing. Second, do not use your freedom as a covering for evil. Boy, here's where it really comes hard. This is the pernicious and powerful temptation that we would use our spiritual freedom to serve self through self deception, self favoring, and self promotion.

Oh, we're so prone to self favor. We want to tell a story about something that happened to us where a wrong was done to us and the temptation to self favor and that whole thing.

[54 : 29] Well, you think you had anything to, you know, no, of course not. Why would you even suggest such a thing? You know what kind of an angel I am.

And then third, use it as slaves of God. This is the antidote for using our freedom in Christ for selfish reasons. So slavery to self and sin is what you've been freed from and what you've been freed to is being a slave of Jesus.

You understand that, friends, spiritually? You weren't set free so that you can do your own thing. You were transferred from the ownership of one master to another master.

This one was the taskmaster and this one over here is the love master, right? But there's still a master to answer to. So you've gone from spiritual captivity to Satan to now, if you will, spiritual freedom in Christ.

And that freedom means I've been freed from what kept me from saying yes to Jesus and living for him. My life has been opened in a way of a path of living to please God, whereas over here I had no

chance of that.

[55 : 47] None whatsoever. That's the difference. That's freedom in Christ. It's not freedom in Christ to do, be, and whatever you want. Let me ask you something, friends.

How many of you came to church this morning in a vehicle of some sort? Every one of you. Whose car is that? Whose vehicle does that really belong to? Who owns all things? That's right.

Whose money is it? It's his money. Who gives you the ability to work a job to provide for your family? The scripture says God does. It all belongs to him.

And as Christians, we recognize that. As non-Christians, it's all about us. We've been brought into a whole different kind of lives. Don't use your freedom for yourself.

You changed masters. Live like it. You've been liberated from sin by God's grace through faith in Jesus to do right according to Peter for a greater glory.

[56 : 51] And that greater glory is the greater glory of God. So submitting to human authority is an expression of your spiritual freedom. Did you hear me? Submitting to human authority is an expression of your spiritual freedom.

Because now you're in such a better place to wisely discern what that freedom needs to look like. Especially if that authority is hard and tough and you don't agree with everything that's coming down.

That truth finally brings us to the summary statement. I can do this rather quickly in verse 17. If you'll look there with me. This is kind of his summary statement from 12 down through this particular verse.

Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, and honor the king. This is the wisdom of submission to authority. There are four quick commands.

They're very straightforward. They all kind of emphasize, reemphasize what he's been saying so far. Honor all people. That is just what Peter's been emphasizing since verse 12.

[57 : 57] Honor here means fix the value of. Fix the value of people in your mind already. People are made in the image of God and they are valuable to almighty God.

We want to be careful when we open our mouths to say things against people. Be careful. We are to value all of them in God as made in God's image.

This is loving your neighbor as yourself from Matthew 22 39. Love the brotherhood. Unbelievers, unbelievers do not know love.

Do you realize that? Unbelievers do not know love. Boy, you hear it. It's all in the movies. It's in all these books. You hear people talk about it a lot out there and throw it around a lot about what they love and who they love.

Listen, the world doesn't know anything about love. Why? God is love and they don't know God. Whatever it is, it's not love. love does not make the world go around.

[59 : 08] God does because the world knows nothing of love. So Peter tells us this because the world doesn't understand this love.

love. We have been spiritually recreated in love to love each other in Christ.

Where does this love for each other happen? It happens when we come together and when we gather together wherever we do that. You understand that? Please don't expect friends.

Please hear your pastor carefully. Please don't expect the world out there to love you. It doesn't know God and it doesn't know love. They call it all kinds of stuff and they might call it love.

It's not love. Listen, I told a number of people before I was saved, I love you. But after I was saved, boy, I found out what love was.

[60 : 12] I began to learn what love was. Real love, true love, God's love. Don't think the world's going to love you. Don't expect them to, so don't be all shocked and disappointed when they don't.

Mark it down. Let it be what it is. And then prize this. Gather together in moments like this.

Treasure it. Make priority for you to do this. Why? Because when you gather together in moments like this, you have an opportunity to show love to other people in this room who know God's love and likely have not experienced much of it, if any of it, out in the world through the week.

Do you understand what I'm saying? This is your opportunity to show love to each other, to be loved by one another. Don't squander it. Don't consider this something that isn't valuable and precious and worth every priority you could put on it.

The people in this room, God treasures them enough to do this for them. And so we get it. We get that love.

[61 : 35] Love happens here. We love God together. We love each other together. Here's what the scripture says. Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children.

Isn't that good? Walk in love just as Christ also loves you and gave himself up for you as an offering and sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. The fragrant aroma of God's love permeates this place. At least it should. And then finally, he says this. Fear God. Fear God. This is the overall textual command as it helps us frame our behavior for the other three commands.

We fear God, not people. We fear God, not the king. We fear God, not government or government reprisals. We can't. We can't fear that. We fear God so that we can love each other.

Well, if you're full of fear of other things, you're not going to be able to love each other well. If you have a fear of man, what if they don't like me? What if they think I'm fill in the blank?

[62 : 42] Who's at the center of that kind of thinking? These are the things we're called to get past, to move through and hold each other accountable for. We fear God, not the king, and it helps us keep it in biblical perspective.

All right. Honor the king. He switches. Peter switches again to honor. It's just like he did when he said, honor all people.

He's summing up. Honor all people. Honor the king. In the middle of that, it's a chiasm. You guys have heard me talk about that before, but I don't have time to. The emphasis is on what's in the middle.

So fear God and love the brothers. The honor on both ends of those help bracket that and draw. If you were reading this originally, you would have seen this as an original reader.

All people need to be honored. We need to love our brothers and sisters. We need to fear God above all, and we need to show biblical respect for the king. Well, those are the summary commands for showing submission to human authority.

[63 : 51] These four commands capture God's wisdom for us as we try to navigate the complex paths of civil obedience. Thank you for your kind attention.

Thank you for praying, and thank you for being a people who are conscientious about this. You wouldn't keep coming back if you weren't convinced that we were sitting under the truth of the Lord and being called by God's grace to walk in love with one another and submitting to civil authority as part of the church.

It's not easy, and it tempts us. Let's hold each other accountable and pray for each other, and let's be a church who stands for truth with great humility and love for Christ.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for the kind attention of your people. Thank you for their hearts. Thank you for their ability to take this in and process this truth and think very biblically and carefully and prayerfully about what we are discussing and what Peter has shown us.

Thank you for using the apostle Peter to pen very important words. Lord, little did we know a few years ago that this COVID thing would hit our world. You knew. And I pray that you would help us to be warned.

[65 : 07] This is just a warning, a sober warning of what is to come. There will be much more of this, and you've told us much worse. So we want to respond with humility, gentleness, and much discernment in faith.

So, Father, help us to continue to cultivate this wisdom in our walk with God. I pray that you would bless especially the fathers who are in our congregation today, that they would be godly men.

Help our fathers to be men who love Jesus with all their hearts, who will show their sons and daughters and their wives what it means to follow Jesus, what it means to be faithful, to deny self, to take up our cross and to follow you.

Help us to be men of faith. Help us to be men of grace. We thank you for Jesus. It's in his name we pray. Amen.