

Peter, up to this point in our epistle, has been laying the foundation for us, and he's finally come to an end of it. Now we can see just why we can have confidence in the face of trouble. Because God has called us to himself, because he has brought us out of darkness into light, and because he has even chosen us from before the foundation of the world, all of these things mean for us that we don't have to be afraid. When we suffer in this world, we know that we belong to God, and nothing in heaven or on earth or under the earth is ever going to change that. So we don't have to worry, because we know that God is going to take care of us.

But since he's laid that foundation for us, he now moves on to the more difficult question. What do I do as a Christian in these specific situations that are in front of me? How do I deal as a Christian with the problems that I'm actually dealing with and not just things in general? Because when you deal with that question, you're asking what it means to be a Christian in your day to day life. And that's what Peter is doing here. He's answering the particulars. He's going after the very points that we need to have answered so that we know what it means to be a Christian.

But here Peter begins by giving us some very general statements. He wants to show us what applies in every place and time. So beginning in verse 12, for example, in chapter 2, Peter says this: "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." So now, what does that mean? It means this. Peter is saying that we should be self-controlled, because when the world abuses us--And it will. We can't avoid that. It's gonna happen. There's nothing we can do about it--but when the world abuses us, we can actually focus on the things that we actually have control over. We can't take control of what the world is doing. That's just what the world is. But we do have control over what we do, the way that we act, the way that we react to the things of this world. And so when you are reacting to what the world is doing to you, keep your conduct honorable. Do what is right in every situation. Because when you do what is right, then the world will see that you are doing what is right. And when the world is called to account for the all of the things that it has thrown against us before the Lord himself, they will have to admit that we didn't do anything wrong, that we were doing exactly what we were supposed to do. And that will glorify God, because on that day the world will admit to its shame that we were doing what God wanted us to do all along. So yes, Christians, we are called to do what is right. We are called to be Christians even when the world attacks us.

But now Peter focuses on a very narrow question, one that we actually ask ourselves these days. What does a Christian do in relationship to the government? How do we relate to worldly authority, especially when that authority is doing things it's not supposed to be doing? It's a pretty live question for us, isn't it? Just think back over these past several months. All of the things that the government has been doing, claiming authority for itself that we never would have dreamed that it would've claimed, and even doing things against the church. How is a Christian supposed to react to that? How do we deal with this situation?

Because it'd be one thing if the government was doing what it was supposed to be doing. If the government was doing the right thing, if it was doing a good thing, then that would actually be easier to deal with, wouldn't it? Because we all know what the government should be doing, after all. We want the government to uphold law. We want them to protect our property. And we know that that's what they should be doing. And we want the government to uphold order in this

world. You think back to all the riots that were going on, and how we could say against those governments that refused to do anything that they were actually doing the wrong thing. Because we know that a government should put down disorder. We know that a government should put down riots. But they weren't doing it, and so we were able to say you need to do your job. And we could blame them for it.

But we understand that. We understand what it means to be under a good government. But what about when the government isn't good? What about when the government is doing something evil? Actually claiming something evil? We see that happening for a couple of reasons here in our text, that this is what Peter is talking about. If you have your Bibles with you, when you open up to 1 Peter chapter 2, and look at verse 18, which is actually the next section that we're going to get to next week, Peter says this. "Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust." So in other words, Peter is saying we're not dealing just with the good things. We're actually dealing with the bad things too. Not just a good master, one who takes care of you, but also the one who abuses you. Or if you see in the beginning of chapter 3, Peter says this. "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives." So again, a wife who is submitting not just to a good husband, but also to the unbelieving one, the one who is causing her trouble because she is a Christian. So Peter has those things in mind here, and he also has that in mind when we're talking about government, a government that is sinning, a government that is going against the things of God.

And we also know that because in Peter's time, back in the days of the Roman Empire, some of the emperors actually claimed some blasphemous things. They claimed to be gods! They took the titles for themselves of "Lord and God," and that was their official title, one that they actually used in the government. How is a Christian supposed to deal with that? When the government is actually saying something completely blasphemous, how are we supposed to relate to that? That's exactly what Peter has in mind.

So what you do, Christians, like, for example, when the government says something contrary to the word of God? How do you relate to that? How do you deal with that? Or when the government claims something for itself, like those Roman emperors who claimed to be gods, how do you deal with that? How do you deal with a government which abuses authority, taking powers onto itself which it has no right to do so? You think over like in California, for example, how the governor there in the interest of public health was saying things like the church can't meet. You can't even meet in your homes! Something he had no right to do. And we see that happening all across this nation. Governors claiming for themselves the authority to dictate to the church. What we supposed to do in that situation? Or even more, what about when the government flat upholds something that is completely contrary to God's will? Abortion's been legal in this country since the 70s. And we also are dealing with a government which claims for itself the right to redefine marriage any way it pleases. What are we supposed to do?

Peter gives us an answer. He says this, verse 13. "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." We are called to be subject to worldly authority. Now, that's something we probably don't want to hear. Because what do you think of

when you hear that word "subject"? You probably think, that means I have to blindly obey, that I'm being crushed underfoot, that I don't really have a choice in the matter, that the government can just kind of tell me whatever, and is that really what God is telling me to do? To subject myself in such a low way to the government? That's not what Peter means. That's not what God means either.

Because when we're talking about being subject to the government, that means, first of all, that God has put an order into creation. He sets us into a certain relationship with other people. Sometimes we are set under someone else, and sometimes we're set over someone else. But it's God's order from top to bottom. And so when God puts us somewhere in this order, being subject means that we are listening to what God would have us do. God put us here. God put us under these governors. God put us under this government. God has set these people over us for a reason. And he wants us to honor them. He wants us to listen to them, but only to a degree.

Because going on in verse 15, this is what Peter says. "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." We are called to show honor. We are called to show respect to these authorities that God has placed over us. That is what Peter is talking about here. But does that mean for us that we always have to listen, as if the government can just tell us whatever? No, it doesn't. Because ultimately, Christians, we listen to the government not because it is the government. We listen to the government because we are listening to God. God is the one who commands us. We are to be subject "for the Lord's sake." And when we listen to God and subject ourselves to the government, it shows that we have really only one master, one Lord, and that is our Lord God himself. We are not the servants of the governor. We are not the servants of the president. We're not even the servants of our bosses. We are the servants of God, and when we listen to God and do what he would have us do, it means that we are doing what is right.

And sometimes doing what is right means that we listen to what the government says. Yes, absolutely! But what about when the government tells us to do something wrong? What do we do? We listen to God. Because your master, the Lord, is the one who commands you. He is the one who has your loyalty. He is the one who has all authority in heaven and on earth. And so sometimes doing the right thing, Christians,--listening to God--means that we have to not listen to the government. You're gonna suffer for that. You can't avoid that. But we know that when we listen to God, we are doing the right thing. We are doing what God would have us do. That's not always easy, but it shows us that we do have one Lord, one master, to whom we owe all of our allegiance.

As American Christians, of course, we do have other options available to us to deal with a government who is doing something wrong. We can vote. We can change things. We can talk to our governors. We can call them to account. We can even call them back to follow the Constitution. All of these things God has given to us, and we should use them when we have the opportunity. But when doing the right thing means that you don't have any of those options, when doing the right thing means you're going to suffer for it no matter what, we are called to listen to God and to do what he would have us do, even if that costs us a great deal.

Let me use an example to illustrate what I mean, a historical example. There was a Christian Roman Emperor by the name of Theodosius. He was a very Christian, very important man. One of the most important Christians that the church has ever had. In fact, we owe the Nicene Creed to his influence. There are few people in the history of the church who have ever done more for the church than Theodosius. But Theodosius was still a sinner, after all. He had kind of a murderous temper. And there was one time when there was a revolt in the city of Thessalonica in what is now modern Greece, and putting down that revolt like he was supposed to, Theodosius went a little overboard. He ended up murdering or slaughtering thousands of people. He took it too far. He sinned. But now there was another man by the name of Ambrose, who was a pastor in northern Italy, who knew he had to do the right thing. Because the Roman emperor was the most powerful man in the world. There was no one above him, and he was over absolutely everyone. It seemed like he could do no wrong. That's a lot of intimidation that Ambrose had to deal with. But when Theodosius came to his church to go into worship and also to receive communion, Ambrose told him no. Ambrose said, "You can't come in here, and I'm not going to let you in here until you repent of what you have done." That was very brave thing for him to do, especially to a man who could literally do anything to him. Ambrose knew he had to do the right thing, even though it may very well have cost him everything. But to Theodosius's credit, he repented. He turned away from his sin. He confessed it and he was forgiven, so that he was received back into the church.

But Ambrose should teach us something, Christians, about what it means to do the right thing even when we might suffer as a result for it. Ambrose knew that he had to listen to God, even when the government was completely against it. And because he listened to God, Theodosius repented and came back to the truth. And we are called to be like him, to stand for God in everything, even when the government is doing wrong, to listen to what God has to say and to no other.

So yes, submit yourself, Christians, to worldly authority, because God wants you to do it. But remember that when the worldly authority tries to tell you something God has not told you, listen to your real master, the Lord himself, who will take care of you in every time and every place.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.