

1 Peter 2:13-17, Part C

1Pe 2:13 (NKJV) Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme,¹⁴ or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the* praise of those who do good.¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men--¹⁶ as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.¹⁷ Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

When approaching any passage of Scripture, it is important to initially interpret the passage in its original and historical context, and then find a reasonable and acceptable way to apply the passage in a modern way that is still biblical. Whoever handles and interprets a passage must be disciplined to understand the significance of the historical context and mindset of the ancient writer. There were customs, lifestyles, and concepts that are literally foreign to how people live and think today. I.e., a person cannot just pick up the Bible and read it like they would read a newspaper. The grid of our personal cultural values and priorities more often than not deeply impact how we handle a passage. For instance, in the modern American culture of the 21st century, the focus is primarily on the individual, on their personal rights, on their personal lifestyles and goals. So, very often when someone reads a passage, but disconnects it from its historical context that may have a more corporate perspective, they ultimately may completely miss both the proper interpretation and proper application of that passage relative to their modern setting.

Think of it this way. No one – not a pastor, not a young believer, not an older believer – no one comes to a passage without their own preconceived ideas and presuppositions. Because we all are culturally conditioned, we can rarely if ever be totally objective in how we both perceive and handle a passage. Everyone comes to a passage with their own agendas, their own beliefs, and their own opinions. Whether consciously or unconsciously, each of these deeply impact how a passage may be handled. No one is exempt. So, what happens in this scenario, which should be understood as normative for all who both read and study the Bible, personal experiences and personal beliefs often becomes the foundation for what a text means to someone. Stated another way, our personal biases and prejudices become the basis of what a passage means to us. We interpret and apply a passage based on our life grid with all of our personal experiences. The issue, however, is never what a passage means to us, but what did it mean to the person who wrote it. If in handling a passage, we actually get the meaning wrong, then ultimately, we will get the application wrong. Proper application cannot be divorced from proper exegesis. Please appreciate that there is no benefit in applying a passage improperly if we have imposed on it a meaning that was never intended to be imposed on it. A very fundamental element of proper hermeneutics is that generally Scripture has a simple, plain, and literal sense, and to move away from that governing principle can cause the individual to distort the true meaning of a passage.

In the day in which Peter wrote this passage, it should be obvious to anyone who has both read and studied the Bible that during the time of the writing that there were no good kings, no good governors, and no good emperors. Even the religious leaders of Peter's day were corrupt and ruthless in their dealings with their own countrymen. They literally hated people that were not of their kind. They hated the Samaritans so bad that they would not even travel through their country. Just think of the truth of

the information that Jesus gave in the story of the Good Samaritan and how both the priest and the Levite just walked on by the man who had been hurt. These religious people did not just kill Christ, but they murdered Him. These religious leaders were corrupt, wicked, and self-serving in everything that they did. They had no reservation about doing what they had to do to get what they wanted – and these are the religious leaders. Then, to make matters worse, the emperors of Rome were utterly ruthless and merciless and had no reservation whatsoever about killing just about anyone they pleased, and often without any legitimate basis for their decision. Just think of all of the Christians that were brutally martyred in Rome at the Coliseum just as spectacles of bloodthirsty and gruesome entertainment. They impaled Christians on stakes, used them as human torches, offered them to wild animals, and slaughtered them by the thousands. That was the historical context in which Peter was writing this passage on submission to institutions, governments, kings, and emperors. We cannot remove the handling of this passage from that context. Then to make it even more serious, many of the people who became Christians as the gospel spread were actually slaves. So, no matter what someone may think this passage on submission means for them today, it was certainly much, much more severe of a political and cultural environment in Peter's day than it is today.

In its simplest meaning, what Peter is clearly saying to his readers is that Christians are not to be people who are characterized as those who are consistently breaking the laws to which they have been subjected. At the very core of our behavior, Christians should be people who do everything possible to be honest and people of integrity, and to do so without bitterness or complaint. As we saw previously, that does not mean that Christians do not have the right or the freedom to challenge certain laws, and in some cases not even obey them if they clearly contradict God's laws. However, in the culture in which we live, we do not have anything that even approximates what Christians in Peter's day were experiencing – nothing. We are actually protected by laws that govern our society. [Daniel 2:21](#) is a very pertinent verse relative to this exposition because Daniel is a book about world governments and God's sovereign control over kingdoms and nations and kings.

Da 2:21 (NKJV) And He changes the times and the seasons; He (God) removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.

[Daniel 5:21](#), speaking to Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's son, says,

Da 5:21 (NKJV) Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

In studying [Daniel 1:8-17](#) and what Daniel and his three friends did when they were asked to eat the king's delicacies that were forbidden to them by God's laws, Daniel did not act unbecomingly at all. [Daniel 1:8](#) says that "he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself". He did not just defiantly refuse to eat the king's food, but rather provided a creative alternative which was accepted. In the terms that this study has been using, Daniel genuinely exercised an "attitude of submission" that was readily recognized by the eunuch that was over him. Daniel was gracious, creative, and courteous in his approach. He had already "**purposed in his heart**" ([Daniel 1:8](#)) that he would not

defile himself with the kings delicacies, but that did not make him defiant. I love what [Daniel 1:9](#) says about Daniel's approach.

Da 1:9 (NKJV) Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.

The result of the proper attitude was that God blessed Daniel's approach, gave him favor with the eunuch, and then blessed his request. Please appreciate that this passage is not a guarantee that if a Christian does the right thing that the government, or anyone else for that matter, will respond properly to them just because they did the right thing. In some Muslim or Communist countries, a Christian runs the risk of actually being killed if they honor God and His Word.

The point is simple – God establishes kings and rulers, and His expectation of believers is that they should have an attitude of submission towards them and not a defiant attitude. Notice how Peter emphasizes and reinforces this in [1 Peter 2:15](#),

1Pe 2:15 (NKJV) For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—

The will of God is that of a believer “**doing good**”. It does not say by “doing wrong”. That is a grave difference. We are not called on to do that which is wrong, so if what we are being asked to do is biblically wrong, then we are not obligated to obey those laws. [1 Peter 3:17](#) says,

1Pe 3:17 (NKJV) For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

It is the same Greek word as in [1 Peter 2:15](#). So, Peter says that at times that the believer may have to yield to the higher laws of God and in the process, actually suffer for doing that which is good and right.

One of the attitudes that the American culture has created on people is that they never have to do anything that they do not want to do. It is always about the individual and their personal rights. However, from a biblical perspective, the proper view is that life is always about what glorifies and honors God, and in many cases, what pleases the individual is not what pleases God. God always has a higher purpose than we do. Living a blameless life and one in which the believer's life is beyond reproach is what honors God and allows His greater purposes, such as with Daniel, to be worked out in their lives. Being a good citizen, being honest in our taxes, obeying the laws that do not violate God's laws are what honor God.

It must be understood that one of the sole purposes of government is to limit people's rights in hundreds of different areas. At a personal level, I am extremely glad that people cannot just do anything that they want to do without repercussions. No one has the right to just break into your home because they want to break in and steal things. People do not have the right to just shoot and kill people because they may not like them. Employers cannot just arbitrarily decide that they are not going to pay you your rightful salary. All of that would be total anarchy. So, the laws are given to protect us – and all of us are grateful for that protection. However, the balance for submission to ungodly demands is provided in [Matthew 22:21](#) when Jesus made this clear statement regarding this issue,

Mt 22:21 (NKJV) They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

To be rebellious in our attitude toward the government is an attitude that dishonors God. [Romans 13:1](#) says,

Ro 13:1 (NKJV) **Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.**

The Greek word for “**be subject**” is the same Greek word translated for “**submit**” in our passages in [1 Peter](#) – “*hypotasso*”.