

## CHRISTIANS UNDER ROMAN RULE

1 Peter 2:13-17

**Intro:** There are two major passages in the New Testament which have to do with a Christian's relationship to his government. And they were written at two different periods in the history of Israel. The first is in Romans 13, the first seven verses; the second, in 1 Peter 2, verses 13 through 17. It has been estimated that the two epistles were probably written about six years apart (the Roman epistle written first), but the circumstances at the time each epistle was written were very different.

(Read Rom. 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17.)

We also have Paul's exhortation to Timothy regarding prayer for the leaders of government in 1 Timothy 2:1-4:

- 1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;
- 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.
- 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;
- 4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

And we need to add to this list of verses, Titus 3:1-2:

- 1 Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,
- 2 To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.

We know from the Gospels that the opposition which Christ and His followers experienced came, not from Rome, but from their own countrymen, the Jews. And when the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome, he did not write of the government of Rome as an enemy, but as a friend. So it seems at that time, at least, that believers were experiencing little difficulty from Rome, *i.e.*, from the Gentiles. But when Peter wrote his epistle, the situation had changed in that short period of less than ten years. Note in 1 Peter 2:7 what Peter said to those who first received this epistle. (Read.) But one interesting point about both pages is that Peter said just what Paul had said, even though their words were slightly different. Here is what two writers said about the Romans passage, and their words apply equally to the 1 Peter passage:

There is a complete absence of any reference to particular circumstances: the language is throughout general: there is a studied avoidance of any special terms; direct commands such as might

arise from particular circumstances are not given: but general principles applicable to any period or place are laid down (Sanday and Headlam, the ICC commentary on Romans, p. 369).

So these facts would lead us to believe that what the Apostles wrote in these two passages are to be applied by all believers in all ages and in all countries. These express the will of God for all of us in relation to our governments.

Now with these facts in mind, and having looked at all of these passages, let us turn our attention to our text in 1 Peter 2:13. And you will note that the Apostle Peter began what he was saying on this point with a single word.

### **I. THE COMMAND TO SUBMIT (1 Pet. 2:13a).**

This is the Greek verb ὑποτάσσω. This verb is formed by taking the verb τάσσω and putting the preposition ὑπό in front of it. The verb τάσσω means *to put in place*, meaning *to place in a certain order*, or *to assign a certain place to something*. And the preposition ὑπό means *under*. So the two words together mean *to place under*.

The word was a Greek military term and it meant “to arrange troop divisions in a military fashion under the command of a leader.” In non-military use it was “a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden” (copied from Thayer’s definition of this verb in Strong’s Greek/Hebrew Dictionary in BibleSoft).

We know that it would be impossible to have an army or any other branch of the military without the submission of the troops to the officers who are in command over them. In such a case, submission is not an option, but it is demanded, and the branches of the service have the authority to see that there is this submission, this obedience, to those who are in command.

The same is true of governments. They are vested with a God-given authority to enforce obedience from its citizens. No nation can function without this kind of submission. So in our text the Apostle Peter, and in the other passages, the Apostle Paul, were saying that we as believers need to do voluntarily what the government has the power to enforce.

This same need for submission, or obedience, runs all through life, and we see it throughout the Word of God.

When God led the children of Israel out of Egypt, He gave them a Law through Moses. What was the purpose of the Law? It was to tell the

people of Israel what God wanted them to do, and what He didn't want them to do. And along with those laws He told them of blessings they would receive if they obeyed Him, and judgments which would come upon them if they disobeyed Him.

This is necessary in order for a family to have any peace and harmony. In Ephesians and Colossians Paul told the children to obey their parents. So from our earliest years it is the responsibility of parents to teach their children to obey them. This is where children are supposed to learn to be obedient to their teachers in school, and to the police officers who have the authority in our cities to see that we obey the laws we live under.

Now let me show you again in 1 Peter and some other passages in other books of the Bible where this word ὑποτάσσω is used.

Here in 1 Peter, following our text, we have it in:

- 1) 1 Pet. 2:18 for servants, or it would apply to employees in our day.
- 2) 1 Pet. 3:1 for wives. And it is repeated in 3:5.
- 3) It is even used of the submission of angels to our Lord in heaven following His resurrection and ascension. See 3:22.
- 4) And then it is used of the submission of young people to their elders in 1 Pet. 5:5.

It was this same word that Paul used in Rom. 13:1 and 5. And the same is true of Titus 3:1.

Paul said in Eph. 5:21 that in the church we need to practice being submissive one to another in the fear of God.

And this idea of submission to authority carries over even into eternity. Let me read to you from 1 Cor. 15, verses 25-28:

1 Cor 15:25-28

25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.

28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

In all of these passages it is the same word that is used. The idea of submission to authority runs all through life, and it is one of the greatest secrets of true happiness. But our sinful hearts tell us that happiness is

found in being able to do what we want to do. Do you remember as a child how you looked forward to the time when you wouldn't have somebody always telling you what to do? Rebellion against authority is prevalent everywhere, and that is one big reason why our world is in the condition that it is today.

Our Lord is our great and only Example of perfect obedience. He was always submissive to His Father's will, and He lived in absolute obedience to the laws of the land in His own time on earth. I have spent extra time on this today because it is such an important subject. We are all sinners by nature because Adam and Eve were not submissive to the will of God in the beginning of human history.

But now let us go back to our text, and ask the question:

## **II. TO WHAT AND TO WHOM ARE WE TO BE SUBMISSIVE?**

We are to be submissive to all of the laws of the land, and we are to respect the leaders of government. We may suffer persecution because we are Christians, but we must never suffer because we are law breakers. Cf. 1 Pet. 4:14-16. We may have leaders who do not respect our laws, but that does not excuse us from being obedient. In fact, we as Christians are to live by much higher standards than the laws of any nation on earth, and that is what Peter and Paul were both exhorting all of us as the people of God to be faithful. This was what Peter was told by the Lord to tell the people of God in his day, and the same has applied from that day until this, and will continue to apply to all believers to the end of time.

But now let me give you the sweetness of a passage like this, and Peter put a lot of sweetness into what he was saying here. It might seem that he was being unrealistic in the light of the kind of government they lived under, and so he put some spiritual sweetness into what otherwise could have tasted very bitter. And the sweetness can be seen in what he had to say about:

## **III. WHY WE ARE TO BE OBEDIENT TO THE LEADERS OF OUR GOVERNMENT.**

You will find this sweetness that I have been talking about in verses 13 and 15 and 16. There are three very precious points that the Apostle Peter brought out in these three verses.

### **A. In verse 13 don't overlook the words "for the Lord's sake."**

We are coming up to tax time, and I have never met a single person who enjoys paying taxes. Peter did not mention taxes here, but Paul did in Romans 13. Think about this as you prepare your tax report, and pay a lot more than you think you ought to pay. The Apostle certainly was not saying that everything that governments do, is right. Governments can often be very, very wrong. But it helps us to submit ourselves to our leaders and the laws of the land if we remember that, when we are being obedient, we are doing it “for the Lord’s sake.” That is why you should pay your taxes, not because you know you will get into trouble with Uncle Sam if you don’t. That is a good thing to remember. But pay your taxes this year “for the Lord’s sake.” Is there anything that you wouldn’t do for Him?

When you see that sign that says you are not to drive any faster than 35, and a lot of people are going by you 45 and 50, what a difference it makes to remember that you are staying under the limit “for the Lord’s sake.”

Take any of the laws that may be an irritation to you, and remember this every time you think about those laws. You are obeying “for the Lord’s sake.” Doesn’t that take the resentment out of your heart?

But there is a second sweet word that the Apostle Peter has given us.]

### **B. Submission to our government is “the will of God.”**

Notice what Peter wrote in verse 15.

This ought to be a major consideration for every single one of us. Think of what it would mean to live in a country where there were no laws, and no law enforcement officers. Or think of what a obstacle it would be to learning if we were not required to go to school. God is the One Who established governments, and their authority is a God-given authority. They may be corrupt in many ways, and we have the right to vote to correct the things that are wrong, but whatever the circumstances might be, for good or ill, the powers that be are ordained of God, and to resist the powers is actually to resist God.

You see, the people of the world are inclined to look upon those of us who are Christians as being a strange lot because we are concerned about pleasing God, but it is by our submission to authority that we “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” On the other hand, when we do what is wrong, and engage in anything that is contrary to the laws of the land, we not only bring reproach on our own names, but we bring reproach on the name of the Lord. That is why we need to be so careful that we are doing the will of God, and that is the highest objective and the highest motivation that

we can possibly have.

But there is one more element of divine sweetness in this passage, and you will find it in verse 16.

**C. We are not only citizens of our city and our country, but we are “the servants of God.”**

We have a paradox in this sixteenth verse, don't we? Peter said that we are “free,” but then he went on to say that we are *the bondservants of God*. “Free bondservants” – doesn't that sound like a contradiction? It does until you understand what the Lord has done for us.

In John 8:32 we have our Lord's words Who said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” But then He went on to say, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant,” the bondservant of sin. That is in John 8:34. And then He added, “If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” “Free indeed” means *really free!*

People who don't know the Lord think they are the ones who are free, and yet the truth is that they, too, are bondslaves, not bondslaves of God, but bondslaves of sin! We are the ones who are free – not free to sin, but free from sin, free from sin's bondage, free from the enslaving tyranny of sin! And having been freed from our sin, we have a choice every day as to whether or not we are going to obey our government, or not obey. And it brings the greatest glory to God when having a choice to obey or to disobey, we, because we are the Lord's free bondservants, choose by His grace to be obedient.

We don't use our freedom in Christ as a reason for disobeying the laws of our government, but it is because we are free that we show that we are *the bondservants of our God* by our obedience to the laws of our city, our county, our state, and our country.

There are problems to be sure, but we need to start where the apostles have started, and make sure that we understand what they are saying. And in these matters, as in all other matters that have to do with our obedience, only by God's grace can we ever do what pleases Him. “For it is God which worketh in you,” Paul said, “to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

I have one more verse before I close, and it is verse 17. What do we have here?

#### **IV. OUR GOD-GIVEN OBLIGATIONS WITH REGARD TO PEOPLE (1 Pet. 2:17).**

##### **A. Honor all men.”**

The Greek actually has, “Honor all.” But the implication is as the KJV has rendered it, that we are to show respect for and under all conditions be courteous toward everybody. And since Peter included the people of God under the next point, in this one he had to be thinking about people who do not know the Lord. And perhaps since he had just been speaking of kings and their governors, he may have been thinking that we need to obey our leaders in government even when they do not know the Lord. But all people need to feel the effect of our desire to please the Lord.

##### **B. “Love the brotherhood.”**

Cf. 1 John 3:14. There is a special affection that we are to have for all who know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

##### **C. “Fear God.”**

We are fearful that we may not please Him. This is the greatest point that the Apostle Peter was making. Under all circumstances and in all of our relationships, it must be our main concern that we do what pleases God.

##### **D. “Honor the king.”**

Peter used the same verb here that he did with “all men” at the beginning of this verse. The king is just a man, but we are to respect the position that he has.

**Concl:** Why did the Apostle Peter begin with kings and governors when he spoke of various ways in which we need to be submissive toward people? It must be because our obedience here probably reflects the reality of our obedience in the other relationships of our lives. This is undoubtedly one of the hardest of all submissions, and yet it is a vital part of our total submission to God. It is especially difficult because of the way things are going in our own country right now. But let us remember that the Lord is the One Who sets up leaders, and He is the One Who removes them. We can’t ever fully understand His purposes, but we need to remember that He is all-powerful and infinitely wise, and we can safely and peacefully leave the affairs of government in His hands. Let us pray for our leaders, but trust God to carry out His will in just the way that will bring the greatest glory to His Name and the greatest blessing to us as we

make it our business to make sure that we are pleasing Him.