

1 Peter 2:13-16

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[0 : 01] Imagine that you're watching Braveheart for the very first time. Now, if you've never watched Braveheart, this is going to be a difficult thing to do. But for those of you who have watched Braveheart, imagine that you're watching it for the very first time.

And it reaches that critical moment where William Wallace, Mel Gibson, whatever, is gathering every ounce of strength his broken body can muster, and he cries out, Submission!

It doesn't sound right, does it? Submission. It just doesn't work. Now, freedom, that's another matter that can stir our soul. I don't know if it would change the way we'll vote next November, but it's certainly a stirring moment as he cries out, Freedom!

And submission, well, that just doesn't work. Freedom is a great word, and indeed a great reality. It conjures up pictures and images that we can relish and savor, while submission is a pretty miserable word.

It just doesn't have the same feel-good factor that freedom has. However, as we return after a long summer break to 1 Peter, the passage before us begins with this seemingly unattractive, miserable duty, to submit.

[1 : 32] Verse 13 of 1 Peter chapter 2 begins with these words, Submit yourselves. Submit yourselves. Submit yourselves. Submit yourselves to every authority instituted among men.

Now, that's not the most stirring exhortation. And maybe even right now, as you realize that that's what we're going to be thinking about, you're seriously underwhelmed.

Okay, it's in the Bible, we've got to think about it, but, you know, this isn't going to be very exciting to think about and consider this matter of submission.

You may be right. You can come to your definitive conclusion on that in half an hour or so. But the exhortation that we have here in this verse is directed to us by God, and it needs to be considered, it needs to be understood in as much as we're able to do so, and, of course, it needs to be obeyed.

What we're going to do this evening largely is to consider, and I trust, to understand in a measure, and the obeying, I'm not saying it doesn't come into play at all this evening, but it particularly comes into play as we leave this place.

[2 : 51] Now, the way we're going to deal with this subject of submission is by attaching to the word submit, to the verb submit, we're going to attach five wee words.

Okay? And I'll say what the five words are, and it may seem a little bit cryptic, but hopefully as we go through, it will be, all will become clear. So the five words that we're going to attach to the verb submit are to, submit to, and the second one is for, submit for, the third one is if, submit if, I think you're getting the idea, the next one is that, submit that, or in order that, and then finally, submit with, what goes alongside submission.

Well, we'll come to that. So let's do it in that order. First of all, submit to, and we have that in verse 13, in answer to the question, who are we to submit to?

We have to submit, submit yourselves, okay, but to whom? To whom are we to submit ourselves? And that's what we're going to look at, and we have an answer to that in verse 13.

Before we do that, just very quickly, to clarify what the word that Peter is using means, this word translated, submit yourselves.

[4 : 13] To submit means to recognize the authority of the one who holds authority, in whatever sphere it happens to be. It's to recognize that authority, but not only to recognize it, but also to render respect and obedience to said authority.

To submit involves that there is an authority, authority, and one, in this case, ourselves, who are to submit to that authority. So that's what it means.

Well, to whom do we have to submit? Are we to submit to God? Well, certainly, and if you're a Christian this evening, you probably would be willing to say, and I hope you would say, yes, that's something I'm happy to do.

It's not always easy, but yes, I recognize that that's right, that I should submit to God, and certainly we need to do that. But what Peter tells us is that the demand that is placed upon us as believers is much broader than exclusively, if you wish, a submission to God, though as we'll see, ultimately, that's what it all ends up.

The demand that we have is that we are to submit, and I read word for word what we have there in verse 13, to every authority instituted among men.

[5 : 36] Now, that is very broad. To every authority instituted among men, Peter says to the believers reading this letter and to us, you are to submit to every authority instituted among men.

Now, how are we to understand that? What does he mean by saying to every authority? Well, we can begin by noticing two examples that he gives. Peter immediately goes on to give two examples.

I think they are examples. They're very fundamental examples, given the context in which the believers found themselves, but they are examples. It's not an exhaustive list. And the two examples he gives are of the king, and here the reference, though he uses the word king, the reference is to the emperor.

At the time of writing, the emperor, the Roman emperor in power was Nero, who would be responsible in significant measure for Peter's subsequent death.

And so, this is the one that Peter is saying to the believers that they must submit to, to the king, to the emperor. It's one example he gives. He calls him the supreme authority.

[6 : 46] But then he also speaks of governors. There in verse 14, having mentioned the king, he goes on, or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

Now, governors were recognized officials within the Roman Empire. Pilate was a governor. But I think when Peter here speaks of governors, though you could identify individuals who were governors, I think it's legitimate to understand this as being those who represent all the different layers of civil or military authority under the king or emperor.

Governors were one example of that. There were several layers. Peter mentions governors. He could have mentioned others. But he limits himself to this one example.

So, the emperor has a supreme authority, governors, and in a sense, they represent all those who occupy these different layers of authority within the system there at the time that Peter was writing.

The Christians he is writing to were to submit to these. In their time, they could put faces to these titles, to these offices.

[8 : 06] They could put faces that were very unsavory, indeed wicked. And Peter says, submit yourselves to them. Now, for us, the equivalent would be our monarch, would be parliament, be that in Westminster or Holyrood.

It would come down the ladder, as it were, the layers of authority. We could think of local authorities here in the city. And indeed, those who represent these authorities.

And those who, in representing them, ensure that we, as citizens, submit to these authorities. So, you have the police force. You have, in another ambit of national life, yes, even HMRC, who are entrusted with ensuring that we submit to the law as regard taxes that we need to pay.

All of these come under the remit, or the umbrella, of authorities that we need to submit to. But we need to, indeed, the text obliges us to go further.

Because Peter doesn't only give these two examples, he's introduced these two examples by using very deliberate and broad language, when he says that we are to submit to every authority instituted among men.

[9 : 32] And that word, every, in the text, allows us, not only allows us, but requires us, to recognize that there is an even broader application than what we've already suggested.

We are, in actual fact, according to this exhortation, to submit to every instance of authority instituted in the society that we belong to.

We could think of some examples, and this wouldn't be, or it's not intended to be an exhaustive list. Within the institution of the family, there is authority that we must submit to.

Obvious example would be children to their parents. We think of the realm of employment, where we have the boss, or the manager, and we have staff, employees, and there is authority there, that we, who are under that authority, are being reminded, are being told, that we must submit to.

We can think of the realm of education. Many of you here are students, and you're at university, you're at college, and there are authorities there. And those authorities, tedious though it is, require you to hand in essays, and to attend tutorials, and all kinds of things.

[10 : 47] And you can't say, oh well that's not important. It's much more important for me to be involved in the church, and to witness to my friends, and I don't really need to worry about handing in essays on time, that's not really very important.

No. You are to submit to those authorities. And if you have to hand in an essay, indeed if you have to go to a lecture, then you have to go to the lecture. Peter is saying, God is saying in this letter, that you have to submit to the authorities, to every authority instituted among men.

Now it's easy enough to state the case, and maybe to explore, and we're not going to do that this evening, but explore the multiple applications. But a bigger question, and this will lead us on to our second wee word.

The bigger question is, why? You know, why are we obliged to submit to every authority? That's what it says, submit yourselves to every authority instituted among men.

Okay. But why? And as I say, that brings us to the second wee word, and the second wee word is for. Because notice what Peter says in this verse, submit yourselves for the Lord's sake, to every authority instituted among men.

[12 : 00] Peter tells us that we're to do this for the Lord's sake. Now what does that mean? Now this is an expression that's in a way quite slippery, in that it could be understood in different ways.

And similar type expressions we find in the epistles especially. What does it mean here? What would we suggest is the likely meaning?

What does Peter have in mind when he says to the Christians that this submission, that they are to render to every authority, they are to do so for the Lord's sake?

Well, it seems to me that the principal sense of the expression, as used by Peter on this occasion, is that this call to submit for the Lord's sake introduces into the exhortation a recognition that authorities, or the authorities referred to, have been instituted by the Lord.

They've been established by the Lord, and so submission to them constitutes submission to the Lord's authority. Now I don't know if I've got a suspicion I didn't put that across very well.

[13 : 10] What I'm trying to say is this, simply this. That when Peter says that you're to submit to these authorities for the Lord's sake, what he's really saying is, look, it's the Lord that has established them. He is the one that has granted them this authority.

And so in submitting to them, you're submitting to Him. You're recognizing what He has done. You're recognizing the order that He has established. And indeed, if you fail to submit to them, you're really failing to submit to the one who established them.

If God thinks that it's important that there be authority for society to function, and you say, well, I'm not going to submit, then you're not just rebelling against the lecturer that you have to hand the essay into, or the policeman, or the traffic warden, or whoever it is.

Yes, even traffic wardens. That's pushing it, but yes, even traffic wardens. You're actually rebelling against the God who has established that that is the way things should be. And so Peter says, submit yourselves for the Lord's sake.

He's established authority. And so given that He has established authority, then for His sake, in recognizing His right to do so, and the fact that He has done so, you are to submit to them.

[14 : 21] Why submit? Because God has instituted such authority, and we are to respect God's established order. Now the truth that all authority is God instituted, I've just stated that to be so, but the truth that all authority is God instituted is not expressly affirmed by Peter in this passage.

But as we draw on Paul's teaching, and very famously as he deals with these matters in chapter 13 of his letter to the Romans, the matter is crystal clear.

In Romans chapter 13 and verse 1, what does Paul say as he deals with this same subject matter? Well, he says the following, everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, and then listen to what he says, for there is no authority except that which God has established.

Paul is very clear. God has established every authority, and because He has established authority, Peter is able to say, for the Lord's sake, submit to every authority instituted among men.

It's possible that even in what Peter says here in our passage, there is a hint that Peter is also just taking as a given. I'm sure he is taking as a given, but that he does a little bit more than just take as a given.

[15 : 45] He hints at this reality in what he says there concerning the governors. Notice there in verse 14, it's interesting there it says, he's giving these examples, he gives the example of the king or the emperor as an authority, and then in verse 14 he says, or to governors, and then we read, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong.

And we read that, and the obvious way of reading that would be to say, governors who are sent by him, that is the king, to punish those who do wrong. But it's possible that the translation there could go along the lines of, or to governors who are sent through him.

The little preposition there, by, can also mean through. And if that is what Peter is saying, then really what is implicit in that is that God is the one who sends these governors through the offices of the emperor.

And so even in what Peter says, even leaving aside what Paul says, it's so crystal clear that is this recognition that every authority is instituted by God.

So, we don't submit to any given authority because we like them. We don't submit because they're good, or just, or worthy in themselves of respect.

[16 : 59] We don't submit because we agree with them. We don't submit as a reluctant duty because there are consequences of not doing so, though there are. We submit for the Lord's sake.

And if we submit for the Lord's sake, then such submission will be, certainly ought to be, willing and meticulous.

So, submit to, submit for, but then thirdly, submit if. There's always a but, or in this case, an if. Or is there? Is there an if?

Are there any circumstances in which we need not, or even must not, submit to human authority? If we had only what we have here in Peter, it seems as if there isn't.

It's just so absolute, or it certainly appears so absolute, the terms in which Peter expresses what he's saying. But are there circumstances in which, as I say, not only can we, but indeed we must, not submit to human authority?

[18 : 05] Now, Peter doesn't deal with this question explicitly, but it's possible that we can draw a legitimate inference on the basis of what Peter identifies as the core duties or functions of government, whichever form it takes.

And what are they? What are these core functions that Peter identifies? And we can summarize it in a memorable way or an easy-to-remember way as to punish and to praise.

To punish and to praise. That's what Peter says governors are to do. To governors who are sent by him, to punish those who do wrong, and to commend those who do right.

To punish and to praise. Two core tasks of a government. Now, let's be clear, before any who are of a particular political persuasion get all excited and say, oh yeah, small government, that's what I believe in, and that's what Peter is saying.

Peter here isn't giving an exhaustive list of the possible functions of government, but he certainly is identifying two core functions. And let's just focus on these two.

[19 : 11] As we're teasing out, I suppose, circumstances in which we may not have to. Indeed, we could not submit to human authority.

But let's think of these two as we try and get there. To punish and to praise. And what Peter says, it's clear that the authority to punish and to praise is not absolute.

Government authorities do not have absolute authority to punish. And to praise. Their authority is regulated by the grounds established by God.

Notice what those grounds are. They are to punish those who do wrong. Now, that may seem so blindingly obvious, but it's very important. They can't just punish anybody. They can't just punish in some capricious way.

They are to punish those who do wrong. And equally, logically, I suppose, they are to praise, they are to commend, those who do right. And so, their exercise of these functions is regulated by God, who determines what is right and what is wrong.

[20 : 17] Well, we are persuaded that God does. And so, this authority that they have must be exercised within these boundaries that God establishes.

Now, this is where I'm getting to. What happens if the authority, if a government fails to perform these basic duties, never mind other duties they may or may not have, but if they fail to perform these basic duties and systematically pervert the God-established order?

What happens when a government punishes those who do right and praises, rewards those who do wrong? Well, what do you think? What happens then?

Well, I think that scenario at least opens the door to a discussion as to the continuing obligation to submit. And I'm going to be a bit of a coward and just leave it there in saying that it opens the door to that discussion.

But what I would say this evening is that what is clear as we bring to bear the relevant teaching from Scripture is that there are occasions when we not only can but must refuse to submit to human authority.

[21 : 27] When is that? Well, it's been, I think, helpfully phrased in the following way. When the authority commands us to do what God forbids or forbids us from doing what God commands.

And I'll just repeat that. We are able to refuse to submit. Indeed, we must refuse to submit when the authority commands us to do what God forbids or forbids us from doing what God commands.

If we want to think of examples in the Bible, there are a number of them, perhaps the most obvious examples, the most familiar examples. Indeed, of these two scenarios of being commanded to do what God forbids or of being forbidden from doing what God commands.

We can find two of these examples within the book of Daniel. We know the story, don't we? We think, first of all, that Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and how they were commanded by the authority, by the God-ordained authority, to bow down before the idol.

And what do we read was their response? In Daniel chapter 3 and verse 16, What they are doing is rebelling against the God-ordained authority.

[22 : 59] Why? Because that authority was commanding them to do something that God forbids. And then, of course, on the other side of the coin, being forbidden from doing what God commands, we remember Daniel.

When the law came out that nobody could pray other than to the king. And what did Daniel do? Well, we know the story. How he continued his regular pattern of praying three times a day.

He broke the law. Why? Because the authority was forbidding him from doing what God commands. If we turn to the New Testament, maybe the classic incident that Peter himself, interestingly, is involved in is in Acts chapter 4 and verse 19.

Let's just quickly notice what we find there. In Acts chapter 4 and verse 19. What do we read there? Now, the occasion is Peter and John before the Sanhedrin, and they're being told that they're forbidden from carrying on speaking about Jesus.

And how do they respond to that prohibition that is being placed upon them by the authorities? But Peter and John replied, Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.

[24 : 28] For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. They were being forbidden from doing what God commands. And they say, no, that we cannot do. That we cannot do. We recognize that you are the authority.

We would submit to you in anything other than being forbidden from doing what God commands. So, submit if.

If we are not being asked to do that which God forbids. And if we are not being forbidden from doing what God commands. For the next wee word, we've only got two more wee words, and we'll go through this quickly.

The next wee word that I want to think about as we think about this command to submit is the word that. Submit that. Or amplifying it a wee bit, submit in order that.

If we turn to verse 15, moving on in these verses, it's really 13 to 16 we want to get to. But in verse 15, we read, For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

[25 : 30] Now, in verse 15, Peter has not moved on to another subject. He is still, I'd suggest, talking about submission to authority. And he describes such submission as one way of doing good.

When there in 15 he speaks about doing good, obviously doing good is broader than just submitting. But I think it's very clear that Peter has in mind that submitting to every authority is one way of doing good.

And he's saying by doing good in this way, by submitting in this way, which is a good thing to do, there will be an outcome. You do this in order that there might be this good outcome.

You do it because you have to do it, because you're ordered to, but there is in the passing this good outcome. And what is the outcome of doing good? What is the outcome of submitting as we're commanded to do?

We're told by Peter that as the believers do that, they will silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Now, I don't think Peter is saying that this is some absolute rule, that it would silence every foolish man from saying anything foolish.

[26 : 36] Obviously not. But he's saying that in a measure, this will be the outcome. But as believers do good, and as they do good by submitting to every human authority, that will be a means whereby they silence the foolish talk of evil men.

Submit in order that this might be the outcome. Now, this, of course, was particularly relevant for Christians in the Roman Empire, who were viewed by many quite wrongly as a suspect, even a seditious sect.

Their loyalty to King Jesus, as illustrated by the incident we looked at just very fleetingly there in Acts, called into question, in the eyes of some, their loyalty, their submission to the emperor.

And so, on those grounds, they were easy prey for those who wished to insult and malign them. And how could they, at least in a measure, silence such foolish talk, such defamation?

Well, one way in which they could silence such talk was by being model upright citizens, by doing good, by submitting and obeying carefully and meticulously as citizens.

[27 : 47] Some of them as very much second class citizens. By doing so to whatever authority they were subject to. It would have as the outcome, in a measure at least, that they would silence a foolish talk.

Now, it was relevant, very relevant for them in their circumstances. It's also relevant for us in 21st century Scotland. We are, as Christians, increasingly at odds with our authorities.

You know, we are increasingly in disagreement with the laws that they are passing. And we can and we must exercise our democratic right to disagree and to protest.

But we must do so with the moral authority of model citizens, who submit to those in authority, even and especially when we disagree with them, with the proviso of the exceptions that we noted a moment ago.

Submit that. Do good. Submit that in order that you would silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. The final wee word is the word with.

[28 : 54] Submit with. Now, all this talk of submission in verses 13 to 15. And then Peter pulls out an unexpected rabbit from his hat and he says to them, live as free men.

Notice what he says there in verse 16. He's been talking about submission and submission to every human authority. And then he comes out with this seemingly contradictory piece of advice or of exhortation.

Live as free men. Now, is this not contradictory? Is this not incoherent? What's it to be? Is it submission or is it freedom? You can't surely have both.

Can you imagine Mel Gibson shouting both freedom and submission? It just, it doesn't make sense, or so it would seem. But the genius of the gospel life is that you can have both.

Submission with freedom. This is exactly what Peter wants his readers to understand. His call to submission does not at all compromise or qualify the believer's freedom as redeemed sons and daughters of the Almighty.

[30 : 02] Now, to understand this, we need to appreciate, albeit very swiftly, in what sense we are free men and women. Now, for the readers of this letter, this was especially poignant, given that just a few moments later, he's going to be giving this very jarring instruction, slaves submit to your masters.

So, he's speaking about freedom, and then he goes and speaks about slaves submitting to their masters. So, in what sense are we as Christians free? How are we to live as free men?

What is that freedom? Well, there's so much that could be said, but as believers, we are free from the obligation to earn or merit our salvation that is the lot of all man-made religion, where we are enslaved by this burden of trying to do the right thing and to please God.

We're free from that obligation to gain our salvation in the light of what God has done, fought us in Jesus. We're free from the guilt of forgiven sin.

We're free from the enslaving power of sin in our lives. We're free from the fear of death, and no doubt we could go on. But that freedom that we enjoy, and we are indeed to live as free men, that freedom is not licensed to live as we please.

[31 : 25] It's not, says Peter, a freedom to be exercised as a cover-up for evil. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil, as a cover-up for anarchy and saying, I don't need to submit to these authorities.

My only master is God, and I can ignore these other authorities. Using your freedom as a cover-up for evil. This freedom that we enjoy is a freedom to serve.

It's a freedom to live as servants of God. It's the freedom to submit to God in all that God has ordained. True freedom. The genuine ability to choose and to do what one really wants to do comes paradoxically in the measure that we submit to God as His grateful and obedient servants.

Speaking about this very passage, the reformer John Calvin puts it very, what could we say, very helpfully when he speaks of this Christian freedom.

He says, it is a free servitude and a serving freedom. That is what we enjoy. Freedom, the believer's freedom, will result in the great joy of doing and wanting to do what is right.

[32 : 42] And that includes submitting to every authority instituted among men. Submit with. Submission with freedom. They go together.

They seem unlikely bedfellows. But in the genius that is the gospel and the gospel life, they are a marriage made in heaven. Freedom with submission.

Submit yourselves, for the Lord's sake, to every authority instituted among men. Live as free men. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You that it is so eminently practical in dealing with the matters that we have to deal with day in and day out.

And we have instruction in these things. And sometimes it's unwelcome instruction. Sometimes it's not what we want to hear. But we pray that You would grant to us a willingness and indeed a desire to submit to You.

[33 : 43] That we would see that that is indeed an exercise of our freedom. That we are free to obey. That we are free to serve. That we are free slaves of You, our God and King.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close our service this evening by singing again. We're going to sing from Psalm 119.

Psalm 119 in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 119 in the Scottish Psalter. And we're going to sing from verse 33.

You'll find that on page 402. Psalm 119 from verse 33 through to the end of that section. We'll sing to the tune Warrington. Teach me, O Lord, the perfect way of Thy precepts divine.

And to observe it to the end, I shall my heart incline. Now, did I sing psalms, isn't it? Did I? Yeah, okay. Let's just ignore what I just said.

[34 : 46] Don't ignore everything, but one part of it is actually sing psalms. So, let's start again. Psalm 119. I'm just giving Samuel a bit of a wee shock there.

So, page 159. Psalm 119 on page 159 from verse 33 through to the end. Teach me to follow your decrees, then I will keep them to the end.

Let's stand to sing. Teach me to follow your decrees, then I will keep them to the end.

Give in sight and have keep your love. With all my heart to its last end.

Lead me in your heart, O Lord, the bright side mine.

[36 : 12] Lift my heart to the end. Lift my heart to the end. iver by my heart to the end. I'll bow for it. liner Wilson, there makes no prayer to be olla. O criminal verse 34 through to whom I realize and see it in the end.

Get the slides if you add mould over each other. O criminal verse 34 through to the end. Season 3 through to the end. O criminal verse 33 through to the end. salvation of substitution.

Chapter 34 through to the end. How drum verses 35 through to the end. ■ Friday through to the end. Psalm 119■ Oh ful matéri. to your world.

To be your servant, keep your flesh, so that you may keep it, O Lord.

Remove from me the shame I tread, your bones excel in uprightness.

[37 : 28] O how I long for your decrees, please serve me to your righteousness.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.