

Submission to Civil Authority, Part 2

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:13c–17

Code: 60-25

INTRODUCTION

Both Stephen and Christ illustrate what godly living is all about.

A. The Example of Stephen

1. His opposition

Stephen, a deacon in the early church, "was performing great wonders and signs among the people. But some men ... rose up and argued with Stephen. And yet they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly induced men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.'

"And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and dragged him away, and brought him before the Council. And they put forward false witnesses who said, 'This man incessantly speaks against this holy place, and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us'" (Acts 6:8-14).

2. His response

Stephen responded to their false accusations by giving an evangelistic message (7:2-50). In conclusion he said, "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it" (vv. 51-53).

3. His godliness

When Stephen's enemies heard that, "they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him with one impulse.

"And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him, and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' And having said this, he fell asleep. And Saul [Paul] was in hearty agreement with putting him to death" (7:54-8:1).

Certainly Stephen's death left an indelible impression on Paul. Although there was no just reason for his execution, Stephen trusted God and forgave his enemies. I believe his godly testimony was a key factor in Paul's conversion. Stephen's example was similar to Christ's.

B. The Example of Christ

When Christ was reviled, "He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23). He endured His suffering quietly and patiently, while praying for the forgiveness of His enemies (Luke 23:34). It's no wonder the Roman centurion said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:54).

When you as a believer undergo a trial, know that unbelievers are watching how you respond, and

that will affect how they respond to the gospel. First Peter 2:12 says believers are to be godly, and that includes submitting to civil authorities (vv. 13-17).

REVIEW

I. THE COMMAND FOR SUBMISSION (v. 13a)

II. THE MOTIVE FOR SUBMISSION (v. 13b)

Our motive for submitting to the authorities is to honor Christ. That's illustrated in Matthew 17: "Those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter, and said, 'Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?' He said, 'Yes.' And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, 'What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?' And upon his saying, 'From strangers,' Jesus said to him, 'Consequently the sons are exempt. But, lest we give them offense, go to the sea, and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a stater [a coin worth four drachmas]. Take that and give it to them for you and Me'" (vv. 24-27).

Although Christ was the Son of God, He nevertheless paid the Jewish Temple tax because He didn't want to offend others. Obeying the law presents righteousness in a tangible way to unbelievers and attracts them to the righteousness of Christ and salvation.

LESSON

III. THE EXTENT OF SUBMISSION (vv. 13c-14)

"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."

The Greek noun translated "institution" (*ktisis*) and its related verb refer exclusively to products, activities, or enterprises of God, not man. For example, in Mark 13:19 it refers to God's work of creation and in 2 Corinthians 5:17 to His work of regeneration. Here in 1 Peter 2:13 it refers to what God has ordained, namely, civil government (cf. Rom. 13:1-7).

A. To Unjust Authorities

Believers are to submit to "every" governing authority, even unjust ones. God's Word specifies that there are unjust rulers.

1. Isaiah 3:1-2, 8--"The Lord God of hosts is going to remove from Jerusalem and Judah both supply and support, the whole supply of bread, and the whole supply of water; the mighty man and the warrior, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder.... For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen, because their speech and their actions are against the Lord, to rebel against His glorious presence." God judged the nation because its rulers were evil.

2. Daniel 9:11-12--"All Israel has transgressed Thy law and turned aside, not obeying Thy voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem." The Hebrew phrase translated "rulers who ruled us" literally means "judges who judged us." Because the rulers were evil, God judged them.

3. Micah 7:2-3--"The godly person has perished from the land, and there is no upright person among men. All of them lie in wait for bloodshed; each of them hunts the other with a net. Concerning evil, both hands do it well. The prince asks, also the judge, for a bribe." Micah lived in an evil society that included corrupt judges, so he pleaded for God to execute justice (v. 9).

4. Romans 13:1--"Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities." In Paul's day corrupt judges presided over the trials of persecuted believers.

Although many rulers were unjust in those days, God's people were not to take matters into their own hands. Instead they were to trust God, who has the sovereign right to rule as He pleases. Robert

Culver wrote, "Churchmen whose Christian activism has taken mainly to placarding, marching, protesting, and shouting might well observe [Paul] first at prayer, then in counsel with his friends, and after that preaching in the homes and market places. When Paul came to be heard by the mighty, it was to defend his action as a preacher ... of a way to heaven (see Ac 26:1-32; Ro 1:9-10)" (Toward a Biblical View of Civil Government [Chicago: Moody, 1974], p. 262). If believers are persecuted or imprisoned, it should be for preaching righteousness, not defying civil law.

B. To All Authorities

We are to submit to all civil authorities, "whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors" (1 Pet. 2:13-14). That means we are to submit to every level of leadership in government. "King" (Gk., basileus) refers to the person in charge. Back then the king was Nero. Although he was an evil man, his function as a king was divinely ordained. "Governors" (h[ma]legem[ma]on) refers to all officials under the king. Scripture makes no distinction between submitting to pagan kings and governors and those who are not.

God ordains civil authority "for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right" (1 Pet. 2:14). Its primary function is to punish those who break the law and reward those who keep it. Romans 13:3 says it this way: "Rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil." Civil authorities are ministers of God who bear arms to punish evildoers (13:4). The police, for example, have guns to uphold law and order. Civil authorities not only punish lawbreakers but also recognize meritorious citizens with praise (13:3).

IV. THE REASON FOR SUBMISSION (v. 15)

"Such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men."

The Greek term translated "silence" (phimo[ma]o) means "to muzzle." Christ used the word in commanding a demon to be quiet (Mark 1:25) and the sea to be calm (4:39). "Doing right" means "to do good." The term "ignorance" (Gk., agn[ma]losia) refers not to a lack of knowledge, but to a willful, hostile rejection of the truth. The believer's critics are also "foolish." That refers to reckless thinking. God's will is that we silence our critics by righteous conduct and good citizenship.

That's why Titus reminded believers "to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." Believers were to submit to a pagan government, knowing they had received God's kindness and love in salvation (Titus 3:4-5). The church is to be gentle, gracious, and obedient toward civil authorities, not retaliatory or rebellious (cf. Titus 1:6).

The same is true of the church's leaders. An elder "must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:7). Often the basis of the believer's reputation before the lost is how he conducts himself as a citizen. An impeccable and virtuous character gives credibility to one's witness and honors the Lord.

V. THE ATTITUDE OF SUBMISSION (v. 16)

"Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God."

We are no longer slaves to the world, sin, or Satan because we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19). However, we are not to use that freedom "as a covering for evil" (2:16). "Covering" refers to a veil and "evil" to baseness. We are not to use our liberty in Christ as a license for sin. I've heard people say things like, "I don't pay my taxes because I'm a citizen of heaven" and "I don't obey trespass laws because everything belongs to my Father. All that's His is mine." That kind of reasoning is wrong.

Believers are free to obey and serve God, not themselves. First Corinthians 7:22 says, "He who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave" (cf. Rom. 6:22). Galatians 5:13 says, "You were called to freedom, brethren; only do

not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." Our citizenship in heaven and our freedom in Christ do not allow us to disobey civil law.

VI. THE APPLICATION OF SUBMISSION (v. 17)

"Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king."

That verse specifies four parameters of submission.

A. To All Mankind

"All men" refers to humanity. Because all persons were made in the image of God (cf. James 3:9), all are to be shown respect. In the Roman Empire many slaves were deprived of their dignity as human beings, but believers weren't to treat anyone that way. Every person deserves respect, regardless of his or her race, color, religion, or status in society. We might not agree with what others believe or do, but we are to value them as God's creation.

B. To Christians

"Love the brotherhood" refers to love for other believers.

C. To God

To "fear God" is to trust God in all situations, no matter how difficult circumstances might be. We are to reverence Him as the sovereign God who works all things by His perfect and unrestricted will. Our fear of Him will restrain us from disobedience.

D. To the Authorities

To "honor the king" is to respect the ruling authorities or leaders. Proverbs 24:21-22 says, "Fear the Lord and the king; do not associate with those who are given to change; for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin that comes from both of them?" Both the Lord and the king will afflict the rebellious and disobedient.

Honoring all mankind, loving your brothers and sisters in Christ, fearing God, and respecting the authorities give credibility to your gospel witness. Are you willing to be that kind of citizen?

Focusing on the Facts

1. How did Stephen respond to his opposition (Acts 7:2-50)?
2. Stephen trusted God and his enemies _____.
3. What person was affected by the godliness of Christ in Matthew 27:54?
4. A believer's conduct affects the way unbelievers respond to the _____.
5. What does "institution" refer to in 1 Peter 2:13?
6. What are we to submit to every level of leadership in government?
7. What is the primary function of civil authority (1 Pet. 2:14)?
8. Civil authorities are of who bear arms to punish evildoers (Rom. 13:4).
9. What is the positive duty of civil authorities (Rom. 13:3)?
10. What do "ignorance" and "foolish" mean in 1 Peter 2:15?
11. What does 1 Peter 2:15 teach about God's will?
12. According to Titus 3:1-2 how is the church to behave toward civil authorities?
13. Spiritual leaders are not to be (Titus 1:6).
14. What is often the basis of the believer's reputation before the lost?
15. We are not to use our liberty in Christ as a _____ for sin.
16. According to Proverbs 24:21-22 who will afflict the rebellious and disobedient?

Pondering the Principles

1. The Puritan Richard Baxter said, "Consider how great a crime it is, for a worm to usurp the authority of God, and censure him for not doing justice, and to presume to anticipate his judgment, and take the sword as it were out of his hands, as all do that will be their own avengers. It is the

magistrate, and not you, that beareth the sword of public justice; and what he doth not, God will do in his time and way.... He that becometh a revenger for himself, doth by his actions as it were say to God, Thou art unjust, and dost not do me justice, and therefore I will do it for myself" (The Practical Works of Richard Baxter, vol. 1 [Ligonier, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990], p. 783). Obey God's Word by not being a troublemaker in society. Instead, be an evangelistic light of godliness (Matt. 5:14-16).

2. Both Stephen and Christ exemplified godliness in unjust situations. Meditate on the following verses. They will help you follow the example of Stephen and Christ and respond to injustice in a biblical way.

1 Samuel 24:3-19

Job 31:29-30

Psalms 35:11-14

Proverbs 20:22; 24:29; 25:21

Matthew 5:43-48

Romans 12:17-21

1 Thessalonians 5:15

1 Peter 3:13-18

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