

**Free Servants – 1 Peter 2:13-17**  
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis  
Union Baptist Church – 8/25/2019

**INTRODUCTION**

How do you feel about authority? Do you tend to resent it and rebel against it, or do you willingly come under and submit to those in authority over you? Or a related question: Does a law make you want to break it, or do you try to follow it even when it seems like over-kill or even illogical? When you see a sign that says, “maximum speed 55 mph,” do you shoot for 61 since you’re in a hurry and you’re pretty sure you can get away with it? When a fishing or hunting regulation seems unreasonable, do you just disregard it? When a tax law is going to really hit your pocketbook, do you fudge a little or slip in a few personal expenses? When the government is spending your taxes on wasteful things or using them for priorities you don’t agree with, do you justify some creative methods for paying them less money?

Tough questions as we begin today! Some of you may be wishing you’d stayed home this morning! And I haven’t even said whether you’re right or wrong if you answered, “yes,” to any of these questions. You’ve come to your own conclusions. Well, as I was thinking about one of these questions – the fishing-related one – I was reminded of a situation in Alaska. Some years ago, the Department of Fish and Wildlife made a new law that snagging of red salmon was illegal. So if your hook was attached to any part of the salmon other than its mouth, you had to throw it back.

This law seemed and still seems outrageous to many people I know in Alaska, because they’re convinced that red salmon on their way to spawn do not take bait. And the long-standing method for catching red salmon is simply a little piece of red yarn attached to a big hook. And all you do is throw your line out and bring it across, over and over and over again. When you feel your hook bump up against something, you give a big, strong jerk with your pole, and quite often you end up with a really large red salmon on the line. And occasionally the hook is not exactly in the mouth. A lot of people think the purpose of the yarn is just to help

the big hook float better right into the mouth of one of the thousands of red salmon moving up the river, and that the fish are not actually going after the yarn.

I don't know the science behind it and who's right, but I do know there are numerous Alaskans who commonly disregard this law because they think it's ridiculous. If they catch a red salmon in the tail or the middle of the body, they just take a quick look around, quietly throw it in the bag and no one's usually the wiser. Even though – as I know from experience – you can still catch a lot of red salmon legally in the mouth with the yarn method. So what do you think? Is a Christ-follower free to disregard this law because it seems ridiculous and illogical, and because if they follow it they'll catch fewer fish than those who have no qualms about snagging? I'll tell you, I know a good number of Christians who have no problem ignoring the law. Are they justified? And are we justified in any of the other situations I asked you about this morning?

Well, let's see what Peter has to share with us on this topic in our passage today: 1 Peter 2:13-17. Let's begin by reading it:

***13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.***

***15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.***

May the Lord bless the reading of his word.

Remember, as we begin, that after giving us the overarching principle that should guide our new lives as Christ-followers, Peter's now going to flesh out what it looks like to live by this principle in many different real-life situations...the first of which will be in relation to human authority. And by way of reminder, that overarching principle from last week, drawn from verses 11 and 12, is this: *As dearly loved sojourners, reject destructive desires to instead glorify God in all situations*. Secure in the unchanging love of Christ and recognizing that this world is not our true home, we reject the self-centered passions that used to run our lives and choose instead to glorify God in every situation. Instead of: *What will*

*get me what I want and best benefit me in this situation? We ask: What will glorify God and accomplish his purposes in me and through me in this situation? What a different way of thinking! This is the new way of life for the follower of Christ, and Peter is now going to apply it to many different real-life situations.*

### **BE A RESPECTFUL, LAW-ABIDING CITIZEN FOR THE LORD'S SAKE**

So let's begin looking at these verses in 1 Peter chapter 2. We're beginning our first section in your sermon notes, but I'm going to wait to give you the full heading until we've talked through it a bit. Peter says in 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. Be subject...*** In other words, *submit, bring yourself under, obey*. It's the American way, right? Not so much! Being subject and submissive and obedient is a counter-cultural shift from the American way. These words aren't too popular these days. How do most people respond today when they're told to submit and obey? Not well, usually. These words sound like relics from a long-ago time to most modern Americans.

But we're talking here about the timeless truths of Scripture, and God's truth doesn't change no matter how far our culture moves away from it. Christ-followers are called to "be subject" just as much today as in the day of Peter and the other apostles. And who are we to be subject to? To *every human institution...to every human authority*. Oh my. That word EVERY is a troublesome word, isn't it? It just doesn't seem to leave us any leeway. Every means ALL. Submit yourselves to ALL human authorities.

And the other troubling word is, "human." If something is human, what does that mean? It means it's flawed; it's marred by sin nature; it's imperfect; it's prone to error and excess. And yet still, we are to be subject to all human institutions and authorities, no matter how flawed and imperfect they are. Because – did you notice? – they're sent by God to accomplish God's purposes in the world. They're sent by him to keep order in society, punishing those who do evil and commending those who do good. Paul lines out this God-given commission that human authorities have even more clearly in Romans 13:1-8. It's worth reading and thinking about here. He says:

**1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. 8 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.**

Subject yourselves, submit, obey the governing authorities. Though they're imperfect and flawed, still they hold their position by permission from God and whether they know it or not, they are his servants.

And biblically, we only have one exception to this call to subject ourselves to human authorities and laws. Do you know what it is? The only exception we have is if the human authority is requiring us to do something that's unmistakably sinful and contrary to God's revealed will in Scripture. In that case, we always obey God rather than men, no matter the consequences. But in all other cases, which account for about 99.9% of what human authorities ask us to do, we are to subject ourselves, bring ourselves under, and obey, even if we don't like it or think there are better ways to do it or even if it costs us dearly.

And *who* are we doing this for? Why should we walk contrary to a culture that encourages us to do as we please whenever we can get away with it or whenever it's unenforceable or whenever the consequences are minor? Well, Peter tells us in verse 13. We do this *for the Lord's sake*. If we were just living for ourselves and what we can get our hands and enjoy in this world, we would just join the flow of humanity and bend the rules whenever we need to so we can get what we want. But since we've been set free from living for ourselves and our passions

and have now set our hope fully in God, we now want him and his purposes. We want to cooperate with his training plan for eternal life. We've come to believe that his ways are right and good and life-giving and lead down the path to peace and joy and fulfillment in life. So for the Lord's sake, we choose to trust him and we set aside ourselves for his purposes and his glory. In order to follow him and reveal him to others, we willingly subject ourselves to human authority even when it costs us dearly in an earthly sense. Are you on board with this new way of life?

Also notice that this submission to human authority isn't just to the person at the top...the president, the king, the emperor, the prime minister. No. This submission is to all human authorities whom God has allowed to be placed over us, however flawed and inept they may seem to us...the governing authorities, the lawmakers, the bosses at work, the Forest Service, the IRS, the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Peter's message is clear here. And I'll sum it up for you in the heading for this first section of your sermon notes. Are you ready? *Be a respectful, law-abiding citizen for the Lord's sake.* For God's glory and to represent him well, seek to be a law-abiding citizen who respects the authorities and law-makers and bosses who've been placed over you and rejects the human urge to rebel and ignore and justify and get away with whatever you can.

### **TO SILENCE THE IGNORANT CRITICS OF CHRIST-FOLLOWERS**

*Why? – you may ask? This just seems silly and unnecessary and inconvenient. I'm quite comfortable bending a few rules here and there and nobody's getting hurt. Tons of other Christians are doing it as well. And we're Eastern Oregonians after all. This is a way of life out here. You're just nit-picking a non-issue. Well, fortunately, Peter gives us the why in verse 15, so I don't have to make something up. And this will begin the second section of your sermon notes. I'll fill in the blanks for you shortly. Peter says in verse 15: **For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.** Oh. The will of God. Darn it! That sounds serious. I have been trying to figure out God's will for my life, but this isn't what I was hoping for!*

Well, this is God's revealed will for us as we become like Christ in our daily lives: that by doing good relentlessly we would silence the ignorant critics of Christ-followers and take away any ammunition they have...any excuses they have...for

speaking evil of us and concluding that we're just like everybody else in the world. That we would be chipping away at the walls they've constructed that keep them from believing in and following Jesus Christ. And part of that *doing good relentlessly* is willingly abiding by the laws of the land and respectfully submitting to those in authority over us. In so doing, we will shut many mouths as they see our good and radically different behavior flowing out of our love for Christ.

As I think about this, I'm still bothered by a poor choice I made as a freshman in college to accept a classmate's offer to give me the answer to a question that was stumping me on a final exam. How insignificant and unimportant that final exam was in the great scheme of things. Maybe I would have gotten an A- instead of A if I missed that question. And even if I had gotten a C in that class, or failed it altogether – it would have had no bearing on my life today. And yet, out of my desire for a good grade, I let him help me cheat. And what is significant in the great scheme of things is that from that point on he had no more interest in me or in my Christian faith, which had been a curiosity to him up to that point. My poor choice to bend the rules a little for my temporary benefit, very likely caused him to conclude that this Christian thing was meaningless and that I was just like everybody else.

But my friends, we don't have to live that way or give in to these kinds of temptations. God has given us everything we need to be different, as we keep our eyes on the big picture and release our hold on this present world. Just as we saw in verses 11 and 12, God's will for us is that we do good in all situations, seeking to glorify God no matter what people do to us or say about us or how much it costs us. And we're able to do this because God's Spirit dwells in us, we're secure in Christ's unchanging love, and we know that this world is not our home.

The second heading in your sermon notes is this: *To silence the ignorant critics of Christ-followers*. Be a respectful, law-abiding citizen for the Lord's sake to silence the ignorant critics of Christ-followers. By doing good relentlessly and being a law-abiding citizen, we shut their mouths and give them more opportunities to see the living God working in our lives...planting seeds so they too may come to know him.

## USE YOUR FREEDOM TO FREELY SERVE GOD INSTEAD OF YOURSELF

And this brings us to the final section in our sermon notes and in our passage today. Peter says in verses 16 and 17: ***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've been set free by Christ from slavery to our passions and to the way we used to live our lives. Through Christ and the power of his indwelling Spirit, we are no longer under the thumb of sin. It no longer has control over us, and we can now say no to it! If you're in Christ today, this is an absolutely true reality right now.

But the other truth about our freedom is this: It is now within our power to freely and voluntarily choose to serve God instead of ourselves...to be *a free servant*. God's given us everything we need to do this, and it's where we find our life. Yet still it's a choice we have to make daily and multiple times a day. You see, God gives us freedom about how we spend our time and how we conduct ourselves. He does not force us to serve him or to always do what's right. We have the freedom to get serious about following him and choosing his ways; or we can do it half-heartedly and allow ourselves to mostly keep following our passions and our worldly desires. We know this is true as we look at our own lives and the lives of other Christians. We're all in progress and some are moving at a much slower pace than others.

But what if we all got serious about becoming free servants of God? If we willingly and happily used the glorious freedom God has given us through Christ *to serve him and each other, instead of ourselves*. That's what Peter invites us to do in these last 2 verses. Live the freedom you've been given and use it as intended, to serve God instead of yourself. Too many times we've used our freedom as a justification to continue chasing after our earthly desires and passions...to continue seeking after our own interests above all. Too many times Christians have justified a little law-breaking here and there, because they're free in Christ and don't feel they need to submit anymore to human laws and authorities.

But that's certainly not the message of Peter here, and certainly not the message of Christ, or the other apostles, or the rest of Scripture. Jesus himself freely and voluntarily chose to submit to the governing authorities and continued to do good in the face of incredible injustice, ineptness, and shameful treatment. As his

disciples, let's learn to be like him. Let's not use our freedom as a cover-up for a life where we continue to serve our earthly wants and desires above all. Let's use it as God intends, to freely, happily and willingly serve him and others and live out the fullness of the new life Jesus purchased for us on the cross. We follow in his footsteps as we take up our cross, denying ourselves daily for God's glory and the good of others...and we find the abundant life as we do.

Peter closes these verses with a summing up of what our lives and words will look like when we daily choose to serve God by being a law-abiding citizen and relentlessly doing good in all circumstances. Four simple commands to guide us: ***Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.*** In other words, show proper respect to all people – no exception – and be subject to those in authority over you. Love your brothers and sisters in Christ at all times. Live sober-minded and worshipful and thankful as you remember that the holy God dwells inside of you...your body is his temple. And show proper respect at all times to those in governing positions, even when you don't agree with their views and their priorities. You can disagree with them, but never disrespect them. In living this way, you'll be serving God and accomplishing his purposes in the world. This is all summed up in the last heading for your sermon notes: *Use your freedom to freely serve God instead of yourself.* Be a free servant of God!

## CONCLUSION

As we close today, let's try to make this a little more tangible to our daily lives. Some questions to ask yourself: Are you giving non-believers food for criticism as you roar past them way above the speed limit on the way to work? As you talk disrespectfully about your boss or the governor or the president or others in authority over you? As you fudge a little on your taxes here and there? Or as you flippantly disregard laws as a proud eastern Oregonian? These are just a few ways we may be hindering our witness and detracting from the glory of God.

Is it worth it? What's our great need to do these things? Can we change for the glory of God? Certainly we need to be careful here. A danger is that we get fixated on perfect law-keeping and that becomes the main focus of our walk with God. Legalism takes over. We pat ourselves on the back because we don't speed and we don't break laws and we don't cheat on our taxes; while we ignore harsh treatment of our brothers and sisters in Christ; or unresolved bitterness in our

lives; or pride; or greed; or other “logs” in our eyes that need to be yanked out. But the other extreme is probably more of a problem for most of us these days: a casual disregarding of laws when they’re inconvenient or seem illogical or will cost us financially...Which amounts to a misinterpretation of our freedom in Christ, and too often gives food for criticism to non-believers, putting road blocks in the way of them coming to know Christ.

Praise God for grace. Amen? Our following of Christ is not boiled down to perfect keeping of every law that’s out there on the books. And our call is not to walk around judging other believers and pointing out every place in their lives where they’re not following our personal convictions. But as Christ-followers – free servants of God instead of ourselves – let’s live our freedom by being respectful, law-abiding citizens who willingly come under those in authority over us...even when it costs us. We’re really serving God and living for his glory when we do. Let’s be people who talk respectfully of others at all times, even when we strongly disagree with them. Still we can be respectful and God-honoring in our words and our treatment of them as human beings made in the image of God. Let’s be people who pay our taxes and let God hold leaders accountable for how the money is spent. May we relentlessly do good as free servants of God and watch mouths shut as our actions become consistent with our words and what we say we believe.

I love how Scripture is so consistent and how different passages affirm the same truths over and over again. This is true, of course, because the Bible has one ultimate author...God himself. I want to close with a perfect sum-up of the truths we’ve learned today, found in Titus 3:1-8. See if it sounds at all familiar:

***1 Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, 2 to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. 3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being***

***justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 8 The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.***