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| A picture containing object, thing, clock  Description generated with very high confidence | Shining Our Light on Pagan Government |
| MATT BLACK, Sun, Sept 3, 2017 |
| [livinghopechurch.net](http://www.livinghopechurch.net/) | 1 Peter 3:13-17, “Living as Lights” series |

**Introduction**: Open your Bible to 1 Peter 2:11-12. We are continuing in a series in 1 Peter called “Elect Exiles.” This morning’s study is entitled: “Relating to Pagan Government.”

“The kind of trust that we are called to give to our fellow imperfect humans in this life, be they family or friends, employers or government officials, or even leaders in a church, can never finally be earned. It must be given as a gift – a gift in faith, in trust more of the God who gives than of the leaders He has given.”

**~ Mark Dever**

**Introduction**

The entire book of 1 Peter is about living as lights in a pagan world. **1 Peter 2:9** – “We are called out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Today’s message is dealing with how we can be lights in the most extreme situations in this world. Peter talks about various areas, be today we are looking at how we can shine as lights on pagan government. What is our responsibility toward government?

**The Light of the Bayou Moon**

I can remember so many times when my sister and I and our friends would walk down our road at night. We lived a mile into the bayou near Lake Ponchatrain in Louisiana. When it was cloudly, you couldn’t see your hand in front of your face. There were no street lights. This was the day before everyone had a flashlight on their cell phones. There were no cell phones. We didn’t usually carry flashlights, so it was always interesting.

But on a clear night there was the light of the moon and the stars out in the middle of nowhere was so brilliant, so fantastically bright. The moon is a reflector of the sun. The moon could shine its light into the darkest place on earth and light it up.

So it is with Christians. Peter says in **1 Peter 2:9**, you are to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” The entire book is about how to do this. The theme of this book is that we are elect exiles from a foreign, glorious place shining the light of Christ into this dark place.

Peter tells us how to shine our light in every venue of life: civil government, the home, the church, and the world. He begins with how we relate to a government that is hostile toward Christians. He says: submit to every human institution (*office*/literally, “*creature*”).

**Scripture**

**1 Peter 2:13-17**, “**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.”

How should we live as citizens of heaven and yet be governed by a very pagan world? The first major thing Peter says is that we are to “be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution.” Literally every human authority or creature put there by God.

How can we shine our lights in darkness? How can we proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness, into his marvelous light?

By exalting our Master. We need to call attention to our Master.

1. Our **Master**, vs. 13-14a –Be subject for the Lord’s sake

**1 Peter 2:13-14a**, “Be subject **for the Lord’s sake** to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors… 17 … Honor the emperor.”

**Be Subject to Wicked Authorities?**

Wow, be subject to human authorities. The vast majority of human authorities and institutions are **wicked** in some way, so this is at first a perplexing command. What is Peter saying? “Be subject…” notice the qualification, “for the Lord’s sake…” even so much as honoring the emperor Nero who would eventually put **Peter to death by crucifying him upside down**. Here is a ruler, Nero, who murdered his mother and many of his officers. He would actually disguise himself and go into Rome and murder people for sport.

To make more contemporary: “*Submit yourselves to the President and to the Supreme Court, and to the federal judiciary system, and to the Congress, and to Governor Bruce Rauner and the Illinois state legislature, and to the state police and the local police, and to the principal at the school your children attend, and if you live in Roselle, to Mayor Andy Maglio and the Board of Trustees*.” That list could be greatly extended. The truth is, we all live under multiple layers of authority, and it’s very likely that we won’t care for some of those people and for the laws they pass and the rules they make. There will always be:

* Leaders we don’t trust
* Laws we don’t like
* Taxes we don’t want to pay

What do we do then? Peter’s answer is very clear. We are to submit for the Lord’s sake. Brothers and sisters, we have one Master, and his name is Jesus. We are elect exiles from another place. We are under the authority of Christ. And Jesus says: Submit. What does that mean?

**Submit: A Military Term**

The word “submit” is a military term that literally means to “get in line.” Even if we don’t like the rules, we are to “get in line” anyway. Note how specific he is. We are not only to obey “the king,” but also any “governors” (referring to all the various levels of authority) sent by him. And there are no exceptions. That’s the part that gives us trouble.

**Wicked Rulers Cannot Thwart the Lord’s Plan**

What in the world is Peter saying? He’s saying trust that even the most wicked of governments cannot thwart the Lord’s good purposes for his people.

Daniel explained this concept to one of the greatest kings of the ancient world, Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel said: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. 21 He changes times and seasons; **he removes kings and sets up kings**…” (**Dan 2:20-21**).

**Dan 4:17**, “The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom **he will and sets over it the lowliest of men**.”

Paul says it this way in **Romans 13:1**, “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.”

**Be Subject Because of your Heavenly Master**

“Be subject **for the Lord’s sake** to every human institution”—literally to every human “creature” (1 Pet 2:13). Peter is making a nuanced and crucial point about the nature of authority.

The truth is, we are citizens of heaven. If a ruler were to call us before him and command us to do something, we could say, “I have one master Jesus Christ. He is my only king and sovereign. But he has commanded me to obey you in all ways that are righteous. I therefore gladly obey.

A good example of this is **Daniel and his three friends**. They were commanded to eat things that were not in accordance to the Mosaic Law. They very respectfully presented another option.

**Be Subject But Remember Government is not the Savior**

**1 Peter 2:17**, “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. **Honor the emperor**.”

In his day, the Roman emperor—the authority—was an **object of worship**. But Peter is clear: the emperor isn’t divine, so he’s not to be worshiped. **No human ruler is to be worshiped**.

Yet this practice of ruler-worship isn’t limited to the first century. Aren’t we worshiping a creature when we promote a particular leader (or party) as the answer to society’s ills, the one who can inaugurate heaven on earth?

Aren’t we idolaters when we will sacrifice time, money, and resources for a political party but not to advance the gospel to the ends of the earth? And what does it say about us when we speak of a mere human as an evil power that rivals God, as though the wrong election result might bring hell on earth? Just as J. C. Ryle said “the best of men are only men at their very best,” so too the worst of men are still only men at their very worst.

Our leaders are mere human creatures like us, but as human creatures they bear God’s image. They are to enjoy our submission (1 Pet. 2:13) and our respect (1 Pet. 2:17), but not our worship.

**Really?! Submit to and Honor the Blood Thirsty Emperor?**

Yes, at that time this was written, Nero was in power. He was quite insane. Why would Peter say to “honor the emperor”?

Peter and Paul both lived in the openly sinful, decadent Roman Empire run by insane emperors who were worshipped as gods. Rome was a society infamous for heinous evil (homosexuality, infanticide, government corruption, abuse of women, immorality, violence), and yet both apostles said to obey civil authority.

Paul says that ‘whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted” (**Rom 13:2**).

Jesus Himself had commanded, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (**Mt 22:21**).

1. Our Mission: Live free to serve, vs. 16 – live as people who are free

**1 Peter 2:15-17**, “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.”

**Shining Your Light**

Peter’s thoughts now for the rest of the book are an explanation of 1 Peter 2:12, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles **honorable**, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

Have an honorable (or literally, beautiful) testimony of conduct among the Gentiles so that their persecuting speech against you will be turned into praise and glory when God saves them (“on the day of visitation”). Could mean Second coming or salvation. The latter is clearer and flows best.

**Five Areas Where Christians Display “Beautiful Deeds” to a Lost World**

So how do we have a beautiful testimony among the Gentiles so that their scorn turns into praise? Peter gives us FIVE areas where we can display “good deeds.” Where do we display this beautiful conduct, these good deeds before the lost world?

**Government** (ch 2). How do we relate with government and the church?

**Slaves** (ch 2). Later he will talk about the slaves that were in the Roman Empire and how they are to relate with their masters. Since they are now free people in Christ, should they walk away from their slavery?

**Home Life** (ch 3). He’ll later talk about submission in the home and how husbands and wives are to relate to each other.

**The World** (ch 4)

**The Church** (ch 5)

**The Tension: Live Free and Serve**

There is a tension here. We are to “submit.” He says in verse 16, “**Live as people who are free**, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as **servants of God**.”

This is so interesting. How can we “submit” and “live as people who are free”? First, we are free! We have one master. In a sense we are subject to the laws of another realm above this realm. We are free. We have one Master. It’s not the president or the Supreme court or the Mayor. It’s not the laws of this land. Our Master is Jesus.

***Don’t Use Freedom as Cover-up for Evil***. Some people might say, “Well then, I don’t have to obey the speed limit, pay taxes, get a construction permit for the church or home when we remodel. What I’m doing is more important. I’m free to do this.” No, don’t use your freedom as a cover-up for evil.

As a citizen of heaven, you need to be a good citizen on earth. We obey the speed limit. We submit to the permit laws, and property tax laws. We pay our bills on time.

In other words, God says, you are free! Totally free in Jesus. So should you use that freedom. By serving others. By submitting to the government as long as they are not asking you to break God’s law. Peter says it in **1 Peter 2:15-17**, “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.”

We are free to do the will of God. We submit to God in everything.

**Honor everyone**

Jesus is our Master. He taught us that he did not come into the world to “be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.”

Everyone we meet, we are to look at them as higher than us. We are to “honor” them. We are to be their servant. So perhaps you are rich and well-educated and articulate – you are to see all people whether they are like you or the exact opposite of you as higher than you. You are to have the mindset of a servant for them, a mindset of humility.

**Love the Local Church**

Be present.

Be at the worship meeting

Be at Sunday school

Be at the prayer meeting

Be at small group

**Honor the Emporer (government Leaders)**

Pray for them. Encourage them. Respect their laws.

Obey the speed limit, traffic laws

Pay your taxes

File for renovation permits

Pay your property taxes

Be honest in all you do

1. Our **Message**, 2 Peter 2:9 proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

vs. 16 – Doing good…Don’t use your freedom as a cover-up for evil so you can silence (and save) those who are now in the dark ignorance and foolishness of this world.

**1 Peter 2:15-17**, “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.”

Notice what Peter says: honor everyone… honor the emperor. The emperor is just a man. He is not to be worshiped. Fear God. Worship God. But honor the emperor.

**Proclaiming Christ’s Eternal Government**

Jesus is Lord! Jesus is our governor. Just as Isaiah 9:6 says, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the **government** shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father [*Father of the world to come*], Prince of Peace.”

Realize that he says in **Ephesians 1:11** that he “works all things after the counsel of his own will.” Nothing and no one is going to thwart the plan of Jesus. He is almighty.

**Proclaiming Christ’s Excellencies**

What is our message to the authorities and powers in this world? Jesus is Lord! We are to be “proclaiming the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). What are these excellencies? He is an excellent governor not only of the earth, but of the universe. He’s an excellent Savior and Redeemer. This is what Paul says in **Colossians 1:15-20**. Turn there.

**Colossians 1:15-20**, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

There’s coming a time when Christ returns and renews this earth, and heaven and earth are one. And Christ will rule as King of kings and Lord of lords!

Knowing that Christ is our Master, Savior and Redeemer, Christians should promote the welfare of their society and government while waiting for their eternal home (cf. Jn 14:2–3; Heb 4:9–10; 11:13–16; Rev 21:1–4).

**What about Civil Disobedience?**

This raises the question is it ever right to disobey the government? Granted that the authority of rulers is derived from God, but what happens if they abuse it, if they reverse their God given duty, commending those who do evil and punishing those who do good? What is the right thing to do in those situations?

The answer is that we should obey the authorities in all that is moral and right, but obedience to God, always comes before obedience to the state.

If the state commanded us to do something that God forbids, or forbids what God commands, then our Christian duty is to resist, not to submit, to disobey the state in order to obey God. Our moral duty is always to put God’s will first, and so whenever laws are enacted that contradicts God’s law, civil disobedience becomes a Christian duty.

We see a number of examples of this in scripture.

Hebrew **Midwives**. When Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill the newborn boys, they refused to obey. ‘the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.’ (Ex 1:17)

When King **Nebuchadnezzar** issued an edict that all his subjects must fall down and worship his golden image, **Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego** refused to obey (Dan 3).

When King **Darius** made a decree that for thirty days nobody should pray ‘to any god or man’ except himself, Daniel refused to obey (Dan 6).

**Peter and the Sanhedrin**. And when the Sanhedrin banned preaching in the name of Jesus, the apostles refused to obey saying ‘We must obey God rather than men’ (**Acts 5:29**). This is the strict meaning of civil disobedience, disobeying a particular human law because it is contrary to God’s law.

Today there are Christians who face imprisonment and persecution in many different countries around the world, because the civil laws of the country where they live are in conflict with the laws of God.

For example, **Bonhoeffer**, who in defiance to the Nazi Government, helped smuggle Jews out of Germany and into safety. Corrie Ten Boom did the same thing in WWII and was imprisoned because of it.

In situations like this, there is often great personal risk involved, but the **primary concern** of the people involved is to demonstrate their **submissiveness to God**, *not their defiance of the government*.

**Current Situations**

And so we say no to **government sponsored abortion**. We stand against it. We support pregnancy centers and we work to change the laws of our land so that one day, the safest place on earth will truly be the womb of a mother.

We say no to promoting a **transgender** agenda. We stand against it. God made people male and female. You can’t just choose to be something you are not. Transgenderism is mental illness. It’s like saying “I feel like I’m a bird” or “I feel like I’m a fish.” Well, look if God made you male, then you are male. By the way, it is cruel to encourage anyone to have reassignment surgery. That is self-injury.

We say no to promoting the **homosexual** agenda. That’s asking for the destruction of our society. God told married people to “be fruitful and multiply.” Look at the plumbing and you’ll realize that homosexual marriage is absurd and hurtful.

For those with same sex attraction, you can renew your mind and your heart. You may need to live as single for your life and be a eunuch for the Kingdom. There is hope in Christ!

**In these areas where our government is wrong, we are not trying to defy our government. We are instead submitting to a higher authority: Jesus Christ.**

In these situations we say: “We must obey God rather than men” (**Acts 5:29**), demonstrating our submissiveness to God. Even though the government is often hostile toward the church, we must submit as much as we can, in all things. The only exception is if we are told to sin.

**Conclusion**

What a joy to remember in this dark world that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords! Let us trust that he is working all things “after the counsel of his own will.”

In spite of the world’s hostility against the church, Jesus will come in glory and power. He says, “I make all things new.”

You may look around and feel discouraged. Don’t be discouraged. The story is not finished yet. There’s coming a day when “every knee will bow, and every tongue confess… that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2).

Amen.