

## Part 7: Gospel Culture in Politics and Mistreatment

---

Tyler Velin | 1 Peter 2:13-25

May 17, 2020

If you were to look up the origin of the word "atheist" on the internet, you would find that it took root in culture in the 16th century as the title of what we now broadly consider the atheistic worldview. That's the view that there is no god, or gods which can exist or who are responsible for creating this world.

But you might find it interesting to know that the usage of the term atheist began long before then. What makes this all the more interesting is that one of the early people groups to be culturally called atheists were the early Christians.

You see in the New Testament era, the Roman Emperors were seen as divine gods. So when these Christians became converted and stopped worshipping the Emperor, they were first and foremost seen as a political threat. They were a-theists, without a god, at least the god of Rome.

Further, the foundational cornerstone of the Roman economy was the Roman household which would be made up of biological family, and household servants and slaves. Some of those slaves were poorly treated, but most of those slaves were cared for, well-educated and even served as doctors, lawyers and teachers in their master's houses. It was feared that when these servants were converted that they would stop serving their masters and the whole economy would crumble.

Christianity was feared to be the mindset of the anarchist.

In the book of 1 Peter, Peter is writing to such Christians who are strangers and sojourners in their own cultures because they have been born again by the gospel of Jesus. And Peter is writing to these believers who have been made new in every way, and he's after their conduct. How do Christians live as elect exiles: belonging to God through Jesus but living in a broken world?

How did Peter expect these groups of churches to interact with their governments or to work in their places of service?

I saw a political cartoon the other day which showed doctors and scientists pushing a huge rock up a hill, and on the other side was a small man pushing the rock back down and the man was wearing a shirt that said: "Evangelicals."

Just as Peter has done throughout this book, he assumes a tension in this text. The tension is this: Christians will be caricatured, whether that be as cannibalistic atheists in the first century of ignorant evangelicals in the 21st. But the point today is that if we are caricatured, mocked, or even persecuted, let us make sure that it is for things that are actually Christian. If we are to be scorned, let it be for gospel characteristics and obedience to Jesus in all things.

Because when it comes to living life in the authority structures of our world, it's only the gospel which helps us make sense of these competing places of influence. To belong to God is to have a new authority, but this new authority also informs how we interact with the authorities in our world.

The big point we are going to see today is this: Submission to God's authority is what makes sense of submission and suffering under the world's authority. We are going to see this in three parts today: **Submission to God by Obeying our Governments**, secondly **Submission to God in Mistreatment** and lastly **Submission to God by Entrusting ourselves to Jesus**.

Now I must confess that preaching a text like this is a much greater challenge than it would have been to preach this text six months ago. Our nation is clamoring over how we are to respond to our government and its directives surrounding COVID-19. Even our gathering today is shaped by such laws, and there are churches across the country who due to their own laws cannot even gather as such.

I want to make clear that the only political agenda Peter makes today is the agenda of the people of Jesus. He's not making a political point, he's making a Christian point. But I know when it comes to discussions on politics we tend to identify ourselves more narrowly. But it's here that we must remind ourselves that it's taken Peter two chapters to get to this point in his letter. Which means Peter knows that if we are to understand this text we must start with the first identity of us being ransomed children of God before we are any other political party.

Our world wrestles to see how people in different political positions can peaceably co-exist. It is my prayer that the church would be a window into such a world where fidelity to Christ and love for others is a greater force to bind than politics is to divide. May that be true in our body.

In a world where politics is all we hear of, consider Solomon's words in **Proverbs 16:20**. Our conduct in public as Christians is never easy, but God has given us his word which is sufficient to guide us if we submit ourselves to it.

So in an effort to do this I'm going to look at our first point today, **Submission to God by Obeying Our Governments**, by doing three things. First I'm going to cause us to give thought to God's word. Then I'm going to hold up for us the encouragement of Christian history, and finally I'm going to land this where Peter lands this, by looking at the way in which salvation itself shapes us in this area.

So first, let's submit ourselves to what is clear in scripture by looking at Peter's words here: **1 Peter 2:13-17**.

So Peter actually opens up by saying, "Be subject to all human creation" that's the word that Peter is using. There's no word for institution of government, instead it is creation or invention. But then he defines that by showing what he means by it: emperors and governors.

So while he means to talk about obeying governments he opens to his readers by simply calling them to obey human creations. Why is this important? It's important for two reasons the first is that he is reminding and reinforcing to his churches that human government is just that, human. The emperor, the president, the dictator is not God.

And yet, secondly, the only true God is calling his true people to submit to these human governments. Why? Because as Peter says, they seek to police what is wrong and protect what is good. This is what Paul calls Timothy to pray for in **1 Timothy 2:1-3**.

Now we might say that some governments don't do that. And it's true. And I would guess that Peter, who will be killed by his government, and Paul who was imprisoned multiple times by his government, knew those failings even better than we do today.

Yet, it is true that even the worst of all human governments limit to some degree a nature of sin, and for that we should have a sense of gratitude. Because it's only by God's grace that sin would be restrained even if by a broken system.

Paul, who himself has felt the pain of imperfect governments, says this: **Romans 13:1-7, Titus 3:1-5.**

Now let's be clear here. Neither Paul nor Peter describe what disobedience to the government looks like. Why? Because central to both their messages is the assumption that God is the chief authority. If a human government tells you to do something God prohibits, or prohibits something God commands, you are to obey God and not man. This wasn't up for discussion

The same Paul who penned pleas for obedience is the same Paul who refused to stop preaching the gospel under imperial order. Yet the same Paul who refused to stop preaching is the same Paul who when on trial modeled grace and gentleness to those who ruled over him.

It is not a hard position to get to in scripture that Christians, when not in disobedience to God, should always and respectfully submit to their governments. This doesn't exclude lobbying for proper treatment, or using all the means afforded to us by our government in America, but it does get at the posture we have when exercising such opinions.

I was just speaking this week with pastors in Washington who are exploring into what it might look like if the government continues to prohibit their meetings. What would civil-disobedience look like which is respectful and biblical? And is it justifiable in this context?

This is where I find Christian history to be quite helpful. We tend to think that our model of government and our times are unique and require a special exemption to this. But church history lifts us up above the dashboard so that we might see more clearly the way forward.

In the 16th Century, William Tyndale was run out of England and made a fugitive because of his attempts to translate the Bible into English. Tyndale knew that he could not obey the government's orders to stop his ministry of translation because it was simply the ministry of evangelization, given to him by God.

While in hiding in Europe, Tyndale made a plea to the English government and I want you to note his willingness to honor both God and his government: **"I assure you, if it would stand with the king's most gracious pleasure to grant only a [simple] text of the scripture to be put forth among his people...be it of the translation of what persons however shall please his majesty, I shall immediately make faithful promise never to write more, nor abide two days in these parts after the same, but immediately to [return] unto his realm, and to most humbly submit myself at the feet of his royal Majesty, offering my body to suffer what pain or torture, yea, what death his grace will, so this be obtained."**

John Bunyan was imprisoned in the seventeenth century for 12 years for "preaching without a license." His own writing reflects the tension that he didn't want this imprisonment, and found it unjust, and yet his posture was to be distinct. He says that it is quite the paradox for him to give thanks for men whom

he wishes weren't in the place that God placed them, yet **"I will then love them, bless them, pray for them, and do them good. I speak now of the men that hurt me as was hinted afore. And I will do thus, because it is good so to do."**

Or consider Polycarp, an early Christian pastor whose life may have overlapped some with Peter's. Polycarp was on the run for his faith but eventually he was tracked down on a farm. Note how the historian Eusebius speaks of his demeanor towards those who would soon burn him at the stake: **"And when he learned that they were present, as the account says, he went down and spoke to them with a very cheerful and gentle countenance...he did not hesitate, but immediately gave orders that a table should be spread for them. Then he invited them to partake of a bounteous meal, and asked of them one hour that he might pray undisturbed. And when they had given permission, he stood up and prayed, being full of the grace of the Lord, so that those who were present and heard him praying were amazed, and many of them now repented that such a venerable and godly old man was about to be put to death."**

Are there times when Christians disobey the government? Yes. But in those moments we are not to be seen as dissenters to authority, but instead men and women under authority: loyalists to King Jesus in love, liberty and action.

This is what Peter means when he says in verse 15, that "this is the will of God that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish people."

Throughout history the governments have caused great difficulty on the church and in those times those gospel loyalists have been called all sorts of names: violent, incestuous, cannibalistic, anarchists, but it is in our conduct towards those in authority that they will see no ill-will in our hearts but instead an unquenchable commitment to Jesus in all things.

When you consider your own attitude towards the government is what is seen a passion for the gospel? Or a contemptuous heart towards those whom God himself has placed over you? Liberty is a wonderful thing, but even human liberty itself is not God.

But, look at how your salvation itself shapes this: **1 Peter 2:16-17**. Here Peter concludes with four commands in case you missed his tone: honor everyone, love the brotherhood, fear God and honor the emperor.

And what does this come after? The liberty that Christians receive in faith. Because Jesus has freed us from all things, we are truly free in all things. Which means most ultimately we are free from sin.

If we are not careful, we can find things which the government demands (and I speak of demands only), which are not regulated themselves by God, and we can in a sort of arrogance refuse to submit to such things on grounds of our own liberty. But Peter actually makes the opposite point here doesn't he?

It is actually a sign of a Christian's freedom to obey the government because we realize that we have been freed from sin. And if it is a sin to disobey those whom God has placed over us, then it is a trumpet of freedom and proper fear of God to live as such freed men.

It's only when we see all the things that Jesus did for us in the gospel that we can begin to see our greatest threat is not unjust treatment by the government, but the just punishment of death our sin

demanding of us. In Jesus, we have been delivered from that greater enemy so that we can submit ourselves without fear of consequences to those who may at times be lesser enemies.

Peter's summary is that we act as such because as free men, we are God's servants, God's slaves. It's in this vein that Peter transitions away from the specifics of government and speaks to those who are under authority in any other place in culture. This is our second point today: **Submission to God in Mistreatment**. Let's read what Peter says next in **1 Peter 2:18-20**.

So here Peter is speaking specifically to household servants or household slaves in that day, but he's also seamlessly applied what follows to all Christians when he called all Christians "servants to God" in verse 16.

Just because you have been freed by Jesus, doesn't mean your freedom is used to justify disobedience and evil in places where you are still under the authority of men.

For Peter's audience he's saying that just because you have been ransomed by Jesus Christ and that he is now your chief loyalty, does not mean that you get to show disrespect to those who do not know Jesus yet are in authority over you.

For modern readers this can apply almost anywhere that you find yourself under authority, but perhaps most closely when it comes to where you work. When it comes to our conduct in public, Peter is like a dog with a bone. He will not let up on the need for godly conduct. You are to show respect to those who are over you and that includes those who are noble and good, and it includes those who are unjust and morally debased.

In this passage Peter doesn't really define the clear grounds for suffering, but he does define our response to it. Christians are to continue to do good, with all respect, even when those in authority treat them in unjust or harsh ways.

Now there's a big truth we can't miss here: **1 Peter 2:19-20**. The truth is that Peter assumes that his readers are suffering for good conduct and not for evil or sinful conduct. We can't neglect this.

I've seen many times, and I've heard many times, Christians saying that they aren't fully accepted at work because of their faith. People don't like working with them because they are Christian. I don't want to deny that that may in fact be true in some circumstances. But I also know places where their suffering had nothing to do with their faith and more to do with their status as simply a bad employee.

We shouldn't assume that all suffering is unjust suffering. Peter wants you to explore the grounds for your own suffering when you encounter it. If we are suffering for what is good and righteous, then we ought to continue to trust God with it. But if we see that we are suffering for what is sinful, silly or unrighteous, then we should consider that there is no credit in this. It's empty and foolish suffering.

So don't be so quick to assume that all suffering is on account of your good conduct. A good Christian must assess why they are suffering and respond accordingly. Those two responses being repentance or endurance.

Speaking of endurance Peter calls us in all things to be mindful of God. Peter says, it's of no credit to suffer for sin. But his assumption is, it is of great credit to suffer if it is for doing good. In fact twice he

says that such suffering is a gracious thing. Literally he is saying it is grace that we suffer as such. Why? Because it is in this sight of God a wonderful thing.

You will encounter bosses, managers and authority figures in your life who are petty and broken. But Peter says even in those instances, work respectfully for them. Why? Not because we want to shame them and show how much better we are, but because we want to please God in all things and we want to enjoy God in all things.

When Peter talks about grace and credit, he is talking about a reward. And as we work in less than just climates, we are reminded of the rewards we have in the gospel.

The same John Bunyan who was unjustly imprisoned for twelve years also says this: "**Suppose some men in authority are to act beyond a measure and cruelly? What? Can no good thing come to us out of this? Do not even such bitter things to the flesh tend to awaken Christians to faith and prayer, to a sight of the emptiness of the world, and the fickleness of its best rewards? By these things doesn't God often call our sins to remembrance and provoke us to changed living? How then can we be offended at things by which we reap so much good, and at things God makes so profitable for us?...We must learn to see good in that which others can see none.**"

Do you see how wonderfully world-proof our hope is as Christians?

We endure unjust treatment for the sake of righteousness because we know that such events remind us more and more of the goodness we have in Jesus Christ. That it is for our credit, it is for our glory, it is for our joy that we are submitted to such things.

We don't, like stoics or fatalists, seek out suffering but Christians understand that there are times where God's sometimes calls us to suffer so that the world might see the beauty of the gospel and that Christians might taste again the sustaining power of it.

This is where Peter goes with our last point today: **Submitting to God by Entrusting ourselves to Jesus.** Read with me: **1 Peter 2:21-25.**

When Peter says that Jesus was our example, the Greek word he uses was the word used to teach kids to draw the alphabet. My daughter is doing the same thing right now. We gave her white board with all the letters and numbers on it and she is to go and trace over those to help her understand how to write on her own.

So it is learning to see and trace the suffering of Jesus that we learn from our own suffering and submission.

Peter quotes from Isaiah 53, to show the posture by which Jesus himself suffered. Let's not forget that it is a Jesus who submitted himself to an unjust death at the hands of a Roman governor, who still calls us to obey our own governors and masters even in times when it might lead to our harm.

Peter builds on the work of Jesus in three ways, and each of those three ways shape your perspective on submission and suffering.

First we see that Jesus did not revile, sin, lie or slander when he was oppressed. Why was he able to do this? Because he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

You see Jesus, even in all his loving mercy knew that everyone who sinned against him would one day answer to that judge on their own. And he trusted that he didn't need to sin in order to receive vindication on his own terms.

It will always be a struggle for us to respond in such ways to those around us if we too do not entrust ourselves to a God like this.

But, secondly, this is where Peter goes and shows the fruit of Jesus' trust: **1 Peter 2:24**. Because Jesus was unjustly treated on the cross, we who were justly condemned could be freed from sin!

Why would we be able to trust God in our own moments of suffering or injustice? Because God worked the greatest moment of injustice for our good. Jesus, the only righteous and sinless lamb, took our sin, not because it was fair, but because it's what we needed.

The gospel is the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God, and if you've never responded in faith to King Jesus, I pray you would today. Because the fruit of this salvation is true freedom. Freedom which Peter described as this: "that we might die to sin and live to righteousness."

Gospel conduct in all places is the fruit of liberty rooted in the blood of Jesus.

Make no mistake. There will be times where obedience to your government or in your workplace will be costly. And there will perhaps be times where godly disobedience in those places might be even more costly.

But, thirdly, look again at the comfort of redemption: **1 Peter 2:24-25**.

We can put up with mistreatments, because in Jesus we have been healed. We can put up with feeling like outsiders on the run, because in Jesus we have been returned to our shepherd. We can handle mistreatment and false caricatures because we are not ones without an authority, but Jesus is the overseer of our soul.

Don't you see that here Peter holds out two wonderful truths when it comes to our conduct in places where we might at times feel the pinch of culture? First, in such places we are reminded of the goodness of Jesus which saves us, frees us, and comforts us.

Secondly, we are reminded that in these times, our witness of suffering is picture of the gospel to the world.

In Korean in 1948, Pastor Yang-won Son's older sons were executed due to their faith by a band of communist insurrectionists. After the insurrection was put down, the gunman who killed the two young men was identified and his own execution was scheduled. But it was Pastor Son who requested the charges be dropped against the murder, whose name was Chai-Sun. Both Pastor Son and his daughter pleaded with the courts for Chai-Sun's release under one condition: that Pastor Son be allowed to adopt

Chai-Son. The courts accepted the request, and it was in the loving family of Pastor Son, that the murderer of his two children grew up and came to be a believer in Jesus himself.

Who could suffer such a violation of liberty and respond like this outside of one who has seen the work of Jesus? And who can see the love of Pastor Son without also seeing a glimpse into the greater love Jesus has for us? May we too seek to live out this text with gospel wisdom so that we might taste God's sweetness and our world might see God's sweetness.