Sermon Series: The Twelve Marks of Christian Maturity
Sermon Title: You Submit to Authority

Text: 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.

Introduction: Christians make good citizens. We really do! I'm sure you agree that if America's leaders understood that our faith obligates us to this, they would, if not enthusiastically, at least subtly, encourage men and women to follow Christ. Permit me to share just a few ways that we bless our country: **(1) WE PAY OUR TAXES** (**Luke 20:22-25** – Jesus said this to some spies sent by the chief priests to question Him, "**Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?**". Jesus responded, "**Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's**"); **(2) WE DO GOOD TO OTHERS** (**Galatians 6:9 -- And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up**); **(3) WE OBEY OUR LEADERS AND THE LAWS THEY MAKE** (**Titus 3:1 -- Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient**); **(4) WE PRAY FOR OUR LEADERS** (**1Timothy 2:1-2 -- First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way**); and **(5) WE DO THE RIGHT THING** (**2 Thessalonians 3:13 -- And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right**).

In the 19th century, **Alexis de Tocqueville**, the famous French political philosopher, visited America. He came here when this nation was very young to find the secret of our greatness. He traveled from town to town, talking with people and asking questions. He examined our national government, our schools, and centers of business, without finding the reason for our strength. It was not until he visited the churches of America and witnessed the pulpits of this land "***aflame with righteousness***" that he discovered the secret of our greatness. Returning to France, he summarized his findings with a compliment and then attached a word of warning: "**America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great**." ***Christians, of course, have a lot to do with the good character of our country***. In fact, Christ-followers have proven to be a great blessing in any country in which they have lived, though we are actually aliens and strangers in the world because our true citizenship is in heaven (**See 1 Peter 2:11; Philippians 3:20**). **By the way, this was also God's expectation for Israel, even when they lived in exile** (**Jeremiah 29:7 -- But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare**). **Now, a major factor in the way we become this kind of blessing to America is by learning to submit to the authority of those who govern us**. In our preaching series, "**The 12 Marks of Christian Maturity,**" this is the 7th characteristic of a maturing believer. Now, join me as we look at what the Apostle Peter had to say about this subject, specifically as it pertains to Christians and government.

It seems to me that there is a lot of confusion about the principle of submission, and that, in some ways at least, the concept has undeservedly earned a bad reputation here in our great country. We have confused the freedom to govern ourselves***, purchased for us by those who shed their blood fighting for our independence,*** with the right to do whatever we want whenever we want***, a notion that is unsupportable in the Scriptures***. Now, turn in your Bibles to **1 Peter 2:13-17** and join me as we explore **what God expects from us in our relationship with governing authorities**. Let's start with this …

The Choice of Submission (**1 Peter 2:13-14 -- 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). Submission is treated in this passage, not as something God forces upon us, but as a choice that we make.

- **WE ARE TO SUBMIT OURSELVES**. Christians recognize that human institutions are put in place by God (**Romans 13:1 -- There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God**), **and that we are called to submit ourselves to their authority. The failure to do so is considered rebellion**. **Do you remember what the prophet Samuel said to King Saul when he did not submit, but rebelled against the will of the Lord**? In **1 Samuel 15:22-23, the prophet said this to Saul, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination (NAS translation meaning – the defiance of authority) is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king**").
- **WE ARE TO SUBMIT FOR THE LORD'S SAKE**. **What is Peter saying?** We submit to earthly authorities as a way of honoring Christ's authority over us, which, as the incarnate Christ, was delegated to Him by the Father (**Matthew 28:18 -- Jesus came said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me**). So, let's be clear. Jesus has all authority. No one exists outside of His authority. This means at least two things as it pertains to our subject: (**1**) **There are no rulers who rule outside of His authority** (**Daniel 2:21 -- He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings**); and (**2**) **Everything that happens in heaven and on earth is according to the purpose of His will** (**Ephesians 1:11 – (He) works all things according to the counsel of his will**). When we submit to our human authorities, we are submitting to Christ.
- **WE ARE TO SUBMIT TO EVERY AUTHORITY INSTITUTED AMONG MEN**. Peter instructs us to submit because these authorities are sent by God to punish those who do wrong and commend those who do right. Paul says the same thing in **Romans 13:3-4 -- 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.**

Here's something else to consider about submission. It is not that difficult to submit when you agree with your governing authorities, but what about those times when your leaders make a decision that you don't agree with? Consider this: ***Peter penned these words during the time that Nero ruled in Rome***, a city that he ordered to be burned to the ground, resulting in great loss of life. Nero blamed Christians for starting the fire and then launched a great persecution against them. It was Nero who forced believers to cover themselves with the hides of animals so that they were attacked and killed by ferocious packs of wild dogs. He had others nailed to crosses and set their bodies aflame, using them as nighttime lamps in Nero's garden. **This is the context in which Peter issues the command to submit.**

Now, there is an exception. When the government makes a law that is explicitly contrary to God's will, we should not submit. We should, however, be willing to face the punishment for our disobedience. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were willing to be thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to worship an image of gold set up by Nebuchadnezzar. The apostles were flogged for speaking in the name of Jesus. Stephen chose martyrdom for confessing Jesus was the Righteous One of God, and Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten, and imprisoned for sharing the gospel.

Things have not changed much in this way. Writer **Jayson Casper** points out that almost **5,000 Christians were killed for their faith in 2023**. Almost 4,000 were abducted. Nearly 15,000 churches were attacked or closed. And more than 295,000 Christians were forcibly displaced from their homes because of their faith. The latest annual accounting from Open Doors ranks the top 50 countries where it is most dangerous and difficult to be a Christian. Nigeria joined China, India, Nicaragua, and Ethiopia as the countries driving the significant increase in attacks on churches. Overall, 365 million Christians live in nations with high levels of

persecution or discrimination. That's 1 in 7 Christians worldwide, including 1 in 5 believers in Africa, 2 in 5 in Asia, and 1 in 16 in Latin America. And for only the fourth time in three decades of tracking, all 50 nations scored high enough to register "very high" persecution levels. Syria and Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, entered the tier of "extreme" persecution. North Korea ranked No. 1, as it has every year except for 2022, when Afghanistan briefly displaced it. **Yet in these countries, Christians are still called to submit to the governing authorities of these countries, all the while following the example of Christ** (**1 Peter 2:20-23 -- If when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly**). (**Review: The Choice of Submission – We submit ourselves for the Lord's sake to every institution among men**.)

The Carrying Out of Submission (**1 Peter 2:15 -- For this is the will of God, that by doing good (submitting) you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people**). The word for **submission** in the Bible is a compound word meaning "***to arrange under***." It was primarily a military term, the concept of which is alluded to in **Matthew 8:8-9.** There, a Roman centurion communicated his understanding of the Roman military system. All "authority" belonged to the emperor and was delegated to others. Therefore, because ***he was under the emperor's authority***, when the centurion spoke, ***he spoke with the emperor's authority***, and so his command was obeyed. To disobey would have been regarded as nothing short of an act of treason in defying the orders of the emperor himself! Here are just a couple of thoughts about submission as it applies to us.

- **SUBMISSION IS A GODLY THING** (**Verse 15a -- "For it is God's will…"**). Just as Jesus lived in complete submission to the Father (**John 4:34 -- "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work**), so we should as well by submitting to those who govern us. In doing so, we are living in subjection to the good, perfect, and acceptable will of God (**See Romans 12:2**).
- **SUBMISSION IS A GOOD THING**. In this passage, Peter refers to it as "**doing good**" in the second half of **verse fifteen**. What's so good about submission? **Think about what a society would look like if it were optional for its citizens to obey the laws. There would be chaos. Police in the Phoenix area** say someone has been putting on **a monkey mask** and then speeding past photo radar enforcement devices. Authorities say they know the "s**omeone**" is **Dave Von Tesmar**, but there is nothing they can do about it. **Von Tesmar** is the owner of a white Subaru that has been repeatedly photographed during the violations. The problem is that the driver wears a mask to conceal his identity. **Police cannot charge the person unless they can prove who it is**. Authorities say they can only hope other people won't do the same thing, but will drive the speed limit or pay the fine. **If drivers don't cooperate, the system falls apart**. Photo enforcement devices are popping up across the country. Authorities say they often see a decrease in the number of speeders when such enforcement begins. They also point to a reduction in the number of traffic deaths nationwide. Despite what authorities say, **Von Tesmar** will neither admit nor deny he was the driver captured by the cameras. He told reporters, "***I would never operate my vehicle in an unsafe manner***." He added, "***I would never admit guilt in that type of situation, but do I own the mask? Yes***." This story may cause you to chuckle for a moment, but think about what our society would be like if everyone followed his example. (**Review: The Choice of Submission – We submit ourselves for the Lord's sake to every institution among men. The Carrying Out of Submission – It is a godly thing and a good thing**.)

The Consequence of Submission (**1 Peter 2:15c-16 -- 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**). When Christians submit ourselves to the authority of human government, we ***'silence the ignorant talk of foolish men***.' The word '***silence***' is the translation of a Greek word which means ***'to close the mouth with a muzzle*** (**See Matthew 22:23-34** *where he uses it of Jesus as he silenced the Sadducees so they had no reply to Him*). It speaks here of **'reducing to silence'** those who

are critical of Christianity and seek to cause the movement harm. So, it is with our submission. It takes away any opportunity for others to slander the reputation of Christ. That's why he says, "***Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God*** (1 Peter 2:16)." It is interesting to note that we form the public's opinion of Jesus not just by helping others, but by our willingness to submit to those institutions established by Him (See Matthew 17:24-27). (**Review: The Choice of Submission – We submit ourselves for the Lord's sake to every institution among men. The Carrying Out of Submission – It is a godly thing and a good thing. The Consequence of Submission – We silence our critics.**)

The Circumstances of Submission (**1 Peter 2:17 -- Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor**). **When should we submit?** Peter gives us **a general command** to show proper respect to everyone, believing that this is the ultimate outcome of submission. Then he provides greater detail by giving ***three specific circumstances in which it is to be evidenced***.

- **When it will result in loving our Christian brothers and sisters. Ephesians 5 tells us that wives should submit to their husbands, the church submits to Christ, children submit to parents, slaves to their masters and masters to their slaves**. THIS IS HOW WE DEMONSTRATE HUMILITY AND CONSIDER OTHERS AS MORE IMPORTANT THAN OURSELVES (**Philippians 2:3**).
- **When it will result in fearing God**. Note that Peter does not tell us to fear the king, but God. Fearing God means that we obey Him knowing that He disciplines those He loves that it might yield the **peaceful fruit of righteousness** in our lives (**See Hebrews 12:11**).
- **When it will result in honoring the King**. When we honor someone, we ascribe value to them. Submission to the king will ascribe value to him as one who has been placed there by God for His purposes. We might consider these words when we are critical of our political leaders!

Conclusion: It is important to learn to submit to the authorities God has placed over us. This only becomes possible when we recognize that all authority rests with Jesus (**See Matthew 28:18**), so that everything and everyone is ultimately under His sovereign control. Then we can obey our parents, spiritual leaders, or, in the case of the passage we've been addressing today, the government, ***because we are confident that God is using them to shape and mold us into the very character of Christ***.

What if God took away our choice to submit to our governing authorities and instead chose to force us into compliance by zapping us with a taser each time we failed to obey? A taser gun shoots an individual with a **temporary high-voltage current of electricity**. The makers of these guns claim that a shock lasting **half a second** will cause intense pain and muscle contraction. **Two to three seconds** will cause a person to become dazed and drop to the ground. Anything longer than **three seconds** will drop an attacker for up to fifteen minutes. The makers of the taser boast of a **95 percent compliance rate**. **In other words, hit a person with enough electricity and you can get him to do just about anything**.

How would this work? **Well, when someone decided to rebel against God's appointed authorities over us, and thereby His authority, He gets us to comply with his wishes by shocking us.** Start to drive too fast, and you are hit with a half-second zap. Try to rob a person, and you get two seconds of shock. Try to intentionally injure a person and you are incapacitated. **However, knowing that evil thoughts often lead to evil actions, God also zaps us for sinister thoughts that lead to disobedience**. But God's still not finished. **Since it's evil to fail to do good when given the opportunity, God zaps us for failing to show mercy, kindness and justice**. ***As a result, people are zapped for doing evil acts, thinking evil thoughts, and failing to do what is right***. What would be the result? We'd have a world of twitchy people who obey God like cowering, beaten dogs. That isn't what the Lord wants, especially from His people. So, instead, He convinces us that submission to authority is good because in the end it's about submitting to and honoring Him. **And that is the best choice we could ever make**!