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## Into Thy Word Bible Study in 1 Peter

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### 1 Peter 2: 13-17: Responsibility to the Government!

**General idea:** This passage is all about respect. How do you show respect? Do your words line up with your beliefs? Do your actions show that Christ is living within you?

This passage adheres to “household instruction codes,” rules of etiquette and behavior needed to run a household effectively with as few conflicts and problems as possible. This also falls under philosophical ethical codes that the various schools of philosophy had as obligatory for their students. Such rules were for servants, guests, and children and included what was expected and how others were to be treated. Ancient aristocrats ran their estates like mini governments, and this new sect of Christianity needed some boundaries and behavior examples.

This tells us how we are to behave, the management and tempering of our personal freedoms and liberties for the greater good of civil peace and prosperity. God is calling us to be good citizens no matter what government controls us. In this passage, Peter uses some of the same exhortations as did Jeremiah to the captives being taken to Babylon (Jer. 29). This passage calls the early Christians, who were living under a hostile, oppressive government, and who were facing persecution, to still respect and obey the laws and exhibit good character. This call is even for when the government is evil.

The second point in this passage is about our liberty, our freedom in Christ. Christ’s work has freed us, but that does not mean we can do whatever we please. The laws of physics are still in place; thus, if we pray in the street while a truck is coming, it will hit us. If we use an unkind word to someone, we will hurt him or her, and so forth. We are called to use wisdom and restraint, to be discerning, and not overpowering or condescending.

**Vs. 13:** Why must we submit to a government (*legitimate authorities*), even an evil one? God set the governments up and placed people in places of authority. He expects them to be responsible (Prov. 8:15; Dan. 2:21). We are called to obey the will of God; this, as hard as it is to take, is the will of God, no matter what the qualifications or spirituality of the leadership.

- *Be submissive* is a call to voluntarily submit, even though you are not required to do so. Submission is respect, and thus is not to exceed the parameters of the will of God or of love and righteousness. *Submit* translates from a military term (Ephesians 5:22 Greek: *hupotasso*), which means "to place under" or "to subordinate" as a line relationship (1 Peter 3:1). This is not because of

weakness or inferiority, or, that one is better than the other is. This introduces the theme of submission and obedience for the rest of the chapter (Eph. 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5).

- *For the Lord's sake* is about authority. God establishes and *is* the authority. For this reason, Christ is extolled; His name and reputation remain good and shown in good light because we are His windows to the world! When we are submitting to others, we are submitting and serving Christ as Lord (Col. 3:23-24)! When we disobey the government, we are disobeying God who set up those people in their leadership positions (Prov. 16:10; 21:1; Rom. 13:1-7).
- *The king is supreme*. We are to show respect. Keep this in mind: when Peter wrote this Epistle, Nero was the evil, godless, and vicious emperor (A.D. 54 to 68). We Christians are to obey as long as our obedience to the government does not contradict our obedience to the Lord and His precepts. We are never to violate the law of God (Matt. 22:21; Acts 4:19; 5:29). (Incidentally, Peter was martyred by Nero in a heinous way. See background article.)
- *Praise/ commend* possibly refers to legal acquittal or thanking people who provide service for municipalities, such as the garbage man.
- *Will of God* refers to God's sovereignty. He is in control and He places us where we need to be for His glory.
- *King* possibly referred directly to Nero, whereas Governors were identified as local authorities. The emperor sent vassal kings, legates, proconsuls, and governors to rule most of the Roman Empire. They then ruled on Rome's behalf. All of the early Christians were under such authority.
- *Free/free men* means we have freedom from the world's ways but we still are not permitted to do as we please. We can be slaves to sin or slaves to God; it is our freedom to choose. God treats us with respect, while sin destroys! We are to be wise with how we use our freedom and liberty, and pursue virtue and excellence. A balance must arise, through biblical understanding, between boundaries to protect us from tyranny, and character, which upholds the laws in order to show Christ to others. Our true freedom is how God has freed us from the bondage of sin and how we choose to show our gratitude to Him for who He is and what He has done (Rom. 2:23; 6:23). The stoic philosophers at the time advocated obedience to the state.
- *Cloak/cover-up* means to say one thing and do another, to hide your true identity as a Christian, or to act outside of God's call and virtue. It also includes the erroneous idea that because we have grace, we have a license to sin. The historical context cautions Christians not to use the excuse of liberty to violently rebel against Rome (1 Cor. 7:20-24; Gal. 5:13; 2 Pet. 2:19-20).

- *Bondservants /servants.* We are called not to abandon our responsibilities and duties, because Christ, as our ultimate Master, is the one we obey, respect, and worship (Rom. 1:1; 6:22; 9:3; 1 Cor. 15:3-8; James 1:1). A *bondservant* was the lowest form of a slave in Greek times, totally at the master's disposal, and even expendable. He, along with others like him, rowed the boats of war with a whip at his back. For us, it means total, surrendered devotion to the Lord; our will has been sacrificed to God's will and thus we are totally at the disposal of our Lord (Acts 6:1-6; Rom. 12:7; Gal. 1:15; 2:20; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 2:8-3:13; 4:6)!
- *Silence the ignorance/ ignorant talk.* Christianity was getting a bad reputation from rumors and false allegations, and was being expounded by the bad actions of some Christians. When we are good citizens, and when we are behaving with good character, we prove false allegations wrong. When we act foolish, we prove our accusers right. This is an important call and is instrumental in countering false accusations and persecution; it also shows a better picture of the Gospel to unbelievers!
- *Honor all peoples/ Show proper respect.* We are called to recognize and respect those in authority (Ex. 22:28; 1 Kings 21:10; Prov. 24:21). We are also called to recognize, respect the significance, and value the personhood of all people—regardless of race, color, or creed (Prov. 1:7; 8:13; 16:6; Rom. 2:11; James 2:1.)! As human beings, we are all the same, and we bear the image of God (Gen. 1:27; 6:9; 1 Pet. 1:17)!
- *Fear God* means to reverence God as Lord, not as an afterthought or when it is convenient. We are to come before God in this way, along with humbleness (1 Pet. 5:6). It is a term of endearment and respect that is supercharged with more meaning and power because it infers intense reverence and awe of God and His holiness (Job 28:28; Prov. 1:7; 3:5; 8:13; 9:10; 16:6; 31:30; Psalm 2:11; 34:11; 111:10; Isa. 12:6; Eccl. 12: 13; Mal. 1:14; Matt. 10: 27-33; Rom. 2:11; James 2:1). It does not mean we are afraid of Him; rather, we are fearful of His wrath (Romans 3).

Why? It is about respecting the order of society and the structure for the greater good of all people. Otherwise, things would be worse and anarchy would result. If we model goodness, it is convicting. The misdirected leaders may get the message that their ways are not so good. They need examples of character and virtue, especially when they do not have it or have never experienced it. God is the One who appoints leaders. He is still sovereign, even when a Nero or a Hitler is running things, because God is still ultimately in charge. The leaders will be held accountable for their ways, whether good or evil; we are to remain faithful to God and show our love for Him by being respectful to others around us. They will see His love in us; love *does* drive out fear (1 John 4:18). Foolishness and the misdirection of government authorities will be more thwarted by good

examples than by terrorist hostilities (Rom. 13:1-7). By being the good example, and by ethics, the Christians can prove that they are not the evil government-haters for which they were being accused. By remaining good examples, they showed support for the Roman government; thus, persecution was frustrated as such threats and gossip fell on deaf ears!

Imagine if the people in Palestine stopped their violence against the Jewish government, and begin a campaign to show the Fruit of the Spirit? The Jewish officials would have no reason to retaliate, no reason to build a wall, no reason to oppress them. The Palestinians would be in a position to negotiate for freedoms and privileges that the Jewish citizens get—a higher standard of living, an end to Fourth World living conditions, an end to preventable disease and hunger, and clean, nice, affordable housing. However, the problem of the violence continues; thus, the problems do not go away, but, rather, escalate.

Yes, there are times to fight back, and we should never do what is contrary to the will of God just to obey a government. If the government wants us to kill babies or those who are invalids, we should fight back with force, but as much as possible in the parameters of His Fruit.

Our Founding Fathers in the U.S. struggled over this issue to remain loyal to England or proclaim liberty and freedom. England was oppressing and robbing us, and many early Americans, especially Christians, sought to continue to allow it. Other Christians sought to fight. Our country was divided then over this issue as we are divided today over recent national elections.

We must strive to remain loyal and model good character in all we do, especially to our government, even at the DMV, trying to get a driver's license after several weeks of run-around and, while waiting in line, discover we are in the wrong line, were given the wrong forms and instructions, so we have to start over. The more important issue is not how they treat us, but as Christians, how we respond and treat them!

***The Essential Inductive Questions*** (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me? How am I encouraged and strengthened?
4. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
5. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?

6. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
7. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
8. What can I model and teach? What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. What kind of household instructions did you have growing up? What about now? Were such rules needed? How so?
2. Have you ever had problems respecting authority? What about a Governor or President you just cannot stand? How should you see them?
3. This passage is all about respect. How do you show respect? Do your words line up to your beliefs? Do your actions show Christ is living within you?
4. Why are proper etiquette and behavior needed to run a household or a government effectively? Why would people be opposed to this? How can we thwart the misdirection of government authorities more by good examples than by terrorist hostilities?
5. How do rules counter conflicts and prevent problems? Why is it important to manage our personal freedoms and liberties? What happens when it goes unchecked? How does our personal behavior help promote a greater good of civil rest and prosperity?
6. During this Epistle's writing, a hostile, oppressive government was persecuting the early Christians. How would you feel if you were told to temper yourself and respect those who were doing these things to you and your family? Why would heeding such advice be beneficial to you? What would be the consequences?
7. Why is it a bad idea to think that because we are made free by Christ's work, we can do whatever we please? What would happen if Christians did this?
8. God is the One who set up the governments and He holds them responsible: How can this point help you respect and obey the laws of the land?
9. How would you define *submission*? Why would you submit, even though you do not have to? Can you give an example? How is submitting to those in authority serving Christ as Lord?

10. The important issue is not how the government treats us, but how Christians respond and treat it! So, what can you and your church do to be better examples of this?
11. How can you make sure that your obedience to the government does not contradict your obedience to the Lord and His precepts, knowing that we are never to violate the law of God?
12. How can you come up with a balance, through biblical understanding, between boundaries to protect you from tyranny and still model character by upholding the laws, and showing Christ to others? How would you react to an unjust law? Can you give an example?

*As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Colossians 3:12*

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