

Submission as Mission

1 Peter 2:13-25

Temple Baptist Church

November 26, 2017

Reading: 1 Peter 2:13-25 (ESV)

Introduction: In 1967, Gordon Kahl, a farmer – and a name that may be familiar to those of us from South Central North Dakota – wrote a letter to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) stating that he would no longer pay taxes to, in his words the *“Synagogue of Satan under the 2nd plank of the Communist Manifesto.”*

During the 1970s, Kahl spent his time organizing the first Texas chapter of the Posse Comitatus, which in Latin means “force of the country.” This far-right social movement that had begun in the 1960s, was committed to spreading a conspiracy-minded, anti-government, and anti-Semitic message in the name of white Christians to counter what they believed to be an attack on their social and political rights. The Posse Comitatus, which had developed strong ties to the white supremacist Christian identity movement, believed themselves to be the true Israelites, chosen by God. They held the belief that the Jewish people sought to help Satan destroy civilization, and compromise white citizens’ rights by means of the Federal Reserve and the IRS.

In November 1976, Kahl was charged with willful failure to file Federal income tax returns for previous years and when found guilty was sentenced to two years in prison and a fine of \$2,000. He served eight months of his sentence before being released on five years’ probation. Following his time in prison, Kahl spent the next few years recruiting support for the Posse Comitatus amongst Midwestern farmers during the farm crisis of the 1980s.

On February 13, 1983, U.S. Marshalls attempted to arrest Kahl as he was leaving a meeting of township supporters in Medina, for violating his parole. According to testimony, an intense firefight erupted when Kahl’s car – carrying Kahl, his son, wife, and three others – arrived at the Marshal’s roadblock a few miles North of Medina. The gun battle left two U.S. Marshals dead, and three others injured. Gordon Kahl’s son, Yorie, was also wounded during the firefight.

Following the incident in Medina, Kahl became a wanted fugitive by the FBI, which led to a massive manhunt organized by both local and federal authorities. A tip was received by authorities that Kahl was hiding out at a home in Smithville, Arkansas. FBI agents and local PD arrived on site where Kahl and Sheriff Gene Matthews exchanged gunfire leaving Kahl dead and Matthews fatally wounded.

This may be an extreme case of resisting a human institution, but it brings to light the question, *How are we as citizens to respond to governing authorities that have been placed over us?*

In his letter to believers in first century Rome, the apostle Peter makes a point of contact with the household code that would have been known throughout the Greco-Roman world. The household codes would have been characterized by their focus on an individual's obligations for submission, which would have been central to the basic values of Roman culture. Although few first-century Christians would have been Roman citizens, Peter writes that it is the believer's responsibility to "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."

When to submit and when to take a stand

As Christians, this passage more than likely makes us uncomfortable. How can we possibly be subject or submit to every human institution? Aren't some human institutions seemingly corrupt at their core? I'm sure that everyone of us at one time or another has disagreed with the actions and viewpoints of a human institution. To be clear, Peter is referring specifically to those that have been assigned a position of political authority and not simply every person that has authority over another.

In the text, Peter is not encouraging believers to blindly follow a corrupt government, but rather to submit to the positive movements being made by political authorities – even imperial regimes are better than chaos and anarchy.

The author is, of course, speaking to ordinary situations where the emperor, king, or governors have the good of others in mind when implementing policies and procedures. Peter writes in v. 15, "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people." Gentile Christians, let alone non-Roman citizens, living in the dispersion would have often been persecuted for their seemingly foolish belief in the Gospel. Yet, Peter makes it clear that it's not the believers who are foolish, but rather those who oppose Christ and His followers.

The author, by way of the Holy Spirit, commands believers to be good citizens under the rule of Roman officials so that those who persecute them will be silenced. I believe that this command equally applies to us as believers today so that not only will those who persecute Christians be silenced, but also so that they might be exposed to the goodness of the Gospel through our act of submission.

Practically speaking, what does that mean for us as Christians today? Well, I believe that it means we don't always throw out the baby with the bath water. That is, we ought to be slow to speak and quick to listen with those whom we have disagreed with in the past. We need to be asking the questions, *How did they arrive at this conclusion? Are they taking a biblical approach? What is shaping my view of the topic? Is MY view biblical?* In many cases there is common ground to be found, but we're quick to think (or say!) "Oh, you're one of those. I already know you're wrong so I won't even bother listening to you."

Friends, I'm going level with you this morning – we're not going to silence the ignorance of foolish people by slamming liberal politics with a Facebook post. Or by slamming conservative politics or our president. Truthfully, that is getting us nowhere. Peter says, "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God." Our mission is to love God, love others, and make disciples of all nations and when we put up this proverbial wall between *us and them* we are essentially saying that if you're not like me in every way then you don't deserve to have the love of Christ. If this is our approach, then we need to get on our knees, repent, reprioritize, and reassess our intentions for the expansion of the Gospel.

However, to what point should believers submit to governing authorities? I appreciate that Peter takes all the guess work out of this question. Let's re-read the first half of v. 13 to find our answer. "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution..." For the Lord's sake. That means that we submit to human institutions to the point that their laws do not dishonor God's laws. And when human institutions do not align with God's Word then we side with Scripture, but make sure to practice civil disobedience in a way that still shows our concern for a watching fallen world. Peter ends his section with the command to "Honor the emperor" in v. 17. Author Wayne Grudem references this verse when he writes, "Peter.... relativizes that command some by also insisting that believers honor everyone, which includes loving their Christian brothers and sisters, and by reserving the strongest verb (fear, reverence) for God."

How to suffer well

I believe that the apostle Peter separates this passage into three distinct yet cohesive categories. The second (How to suffer well), deals specifically with v. 18 – 20 which say, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God."

I touched on this a little last Sunday, but want to address it again. There are some stark differences between first century slavery and that which took place prior to the American Civil War during the nineteenth century. For the most part, slavery during the first century was nowhere near as brutal as that of the nineteenth century. Frank Gaebelin writes, "Ancient slaves had fairly normal marital lives. Often people sold themselves into slavery (for a period of time) as a way to get ahead in the world. Nevertheless the lot of a slave could be very hard if the master was unkind. Here 'slaves' means 'house-servants' – i.e., domestic slaves. Their Christian duty was submission and loyalty to their master, even if he was harsh."

Let me give you a modern-day example of how this scenario could be played out by telling you about a situation a friend of mine finds himself in.

For the sake of the story, I'll refer to my friend as Brian and his supervisor as Chase. Brian, a believer and man of integrity, had been doing great at his job and was getting along well with his supervisor Chase. A few weeks later Brian receives a text saying that Chase had been

hospitalized and was in critical condition. Brian not only prayed for Chase's healing, but encouraged others to pray, and even visited Chase in the hospital. He often stayed late at work in order to complete Chase's work in addition to his own. After a few months, Chase returned to work. But rather than being grateful to Brian for his exemplary commitment to his supervisor and the company, Chase acted bitterly towards Brian even demoting him from his current position. Brian was frustrated and confused so he decided to meet one-on-one with Chase. It did not go well. Chase made accusations about Brian that were the furthest thing from the truth. Throughout the whole painful ordeal, which remains to this day, Brian has patiently endured unjust criticism and complaints. Brian's submission to his supervisor Chase is a testament to his love for Jesus Christ and His Word.

Peter's words do not give masters a license to steam roll their bondservants nor are they meant to encourage individuals to remain in abusive relationships, but rather says that when people choose to submit themselves to authorities, even at the expense of their own comfort, it is a gracious thing in the sight of God. Folks, if you're currently embroiled in a dispute with an authority in your life, the apostle Peter exhorts you to continue giving them respect even while suffering unjustly.

Look to Christ as an example

Even though our individual suffering presents itself differently, we as believers must look to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to see submission as mission modeled perfectly. In v. 21 – 25, Peter writes, "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. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 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. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

When we want to model ourselves after someone – with the same character, charisma, and skill set – we don't choose someone that is mediocre at the goal, do we? We choose someone that has consistently performed at a high level for a long period of time. Someone that has achieved notoriety and success. When we've been called by Christ, submission becomes our mission. We look to Scripture to see what perfection looks like. We know that Christ is the perfect model not solely because He committed no sin, nor deceit, nor reviled others – all unheard-of characteristics – but we also ought to model ourselves after Jesus because He accomplished that which we cannot do – that is, He became the atonement for our sins! That's not to say that we can remain sinless like Jesus as we strive to live a life of submission as mission, but we can refuse to trade insults and threaten others that have threatened us. David DeSilva writes, "Despite being marginalized by their neighbors the Christians are instructed to behave respectfully in every situation. Christ's example and teaching provide powerful sanctions against indulging in the same kind of insulting speech and behavior as they suffer."

For me, sometimes holding my tongue seems like the most difficult thing in the world to accomplish. Part of the reason for this is because throwing a witty comeback at someone who said something that got under my skin feels good. Even if my remark is lame to everyone else, but awesome in my mind, it seems like a total waste not to use it. Yet, the most disconcerting (sinful!) part is that I fear there will be no justice for the injustice I experienced if I don't take matters into my own hands. Maybe this is your fear as well.

Jesus – the perfect model of submission – didn't take matters into His own hands. In fact, Peter says just the opposite in v. 23 when he writes, "but (Jesus) continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." Friends, as author Howard Marshal says, "we can do so in the same way Jesus did, by reminding ourselves that we can wait for the vengeance a just God will exact from those who oppress us and never repent of their sins.

Peter ends on these words, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." The fact of the matter is that without the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross, which allows us as believers to live transformed lives, we would continue to stray from God as much as our unsaved enemies – as much as those who persecute us.

I don't know what Gordon Kahl's relationship was like with the Lord; from the story we heard this morning it seems severely distorted at best. For Kahl, he took matters into his own hands with those that he believed were oppressing him. The end result was not good. Not for him, and not for his family legacy. What legacy will we leave behind? One that reviles and threatens those who persecute us? Or one that is shaped by our return to "the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls" to live a life of submission as mission like our Savior Jesus modeled for us?

Amen.