

**"Place Yourself Underneath
Your Governing Authorities"
Sermon on 1 Peter 2:13-17
Weekend of July 4, 2004
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
Pastor Karl Walther**

Scripture says: *Blessed are the people of whom this is true; blessed are the people whose God is the Lord.* Amen.

God's Word for our special consideration during this week of Independence Day is First Peter, chapter two, verses thirteen through seventeen. Here the Apostle Peter writes, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

Introduction: Patriotism toward Our Nation Has Been in the News

Dear fellow citizens of the United States of America and of the Kingdom of God:

Patriotism toward our nation has been in the news a great deal in recent weeks. Given that today is the Fourth of July – the two hundred twenty-eighth anniversary of our nation's independence – such patriotism is to be expected. With this year being a year of a tight presidential race – and of the Summer Olympics in which our nation competes – our patriotism is that much greater. And then also in recent weeks, one former president published his memoirs – and another passed from this world to the next – and a person can practically feel our patriotic fever.

It couldn't be more appropriate, then, for us to turn our attention today to our relationship to our government. Now, what do the Scriptures say about that? What does God say about that? Well, at least in the Word of God before us today, he urges us: PLACE YOURSELF UNDERNEATH YOUR GOVERNING AUTHORITIES. He gives us three good reasons to do so. Place Yourself Underneath Your Governing Authorities, first of all, (1) BECAUSE OF PUNISHMENT AND PRAISE, secondly, (2) BECAUSE OF PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS, and finally (3) BECAUSE YOU ARE YOUR SAVIOR'S SERVANT.

Theme: Place Yourself Underneath Your Governing Authorities...

It was the Apostle Peter who write this letter of "Hope While Suffering For Christ". He did so in approximately the year sixty-seven AD, some thirty-seven years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Peter himself was in Rome, the capital city of the world, at the time. And he was writing back, eastward, more than a thousand miles, to congregations in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey.

Well, Peter has spent the first part of his epistle detailing the very certain hope of heaven, which Christians have through Jesus Christ. Now, the very first specific application Peter makes of that – and this is our sermon text – is this: *Submit yourselves*

for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him.

Now, let me portray Peter a little more exactly here. Really he says: *Because of the Lord* (because it is, finally, the Lord our Savior who arranges every government) *place yourselves underneath every human arrangement of government* (obey it and honor it): *whether to the king, as the supreme authority* (usually these “kings” were the several supreme rulers in each of the Roman territories, but this “king” could also refer to the Roman Emperor himself), *or to governors, who are sent by him* (usually these “governors” were the rulers over minor Roman provinces).

That’s what God was ordering the Christians in Asia Minor through the Apostle Peter in sixty-seven AD. Translating that to American Christians in two thousand four AD, God is saying this: “The Lord your Savior made you a citizen of the United States of America, a citizen of the State of Wisconsin, and a citizen of the City of Watertown (or whichever nearby community in which you live). So, place yourself under these governmental institutions. Honor them! And obey them!”

“Obey the laws against littering, even if they’re inconvenient. Obey the speed limit, even if it seems too low. Obey the music piracy laws, even if you don’t think you’re going to get caught. Pray regularly for the president, the governor, the mayor, and other governmental officials—no matter what you think of their policies. Be sure to speak well of these governmental officials—as much as you can. Willingly, even happily, pay your sales taxes, your property taxes, your income taxes, your payroll taxes—even if you do think that they’re too high. After all, it is finally God himself – God the Lord your Savior – who has arranged this for you.”

Part One: ...Because of Punishment & Praise

The dear Lord couldn’t be more clear, could he? “Place yourself underneath your governing authorities!” he says. And why? Well, now he proceeds to give three good reasons for us to submit to our government.... First, the Lord has sent governing authorities: *to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.*

That’s addressed to our old sinful nature, isn’t it? ...I mean: Why avoid littering, why obey the speed limit, why not download copyrighted music? Well, one good answer is that you can avoid some pretty hefty fines! You might even get a break on your insurance! And you’d like to stay out of jail! ...Why pray regularly for our governmental officials? Well, if our prayers are answered, we’ll all live better! But if we fail to pray, we’ll all have to suffer together! ...Why willingly pay your taxes? Well, you don’t want the IRS on your back, now do you?! Besides, maybe you’ll even get some money back!

You see: it’s worth placing ourselves underneath our governing authorities because of punishment and praise! That’s what God lists first.

Part Two: ...Because of People’s Perceptions

Now, do you want another good reason to place yourself underneath your government—to honor it and to obey it? Here’s what the Lord says: *For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.*

That, by the way, was quite compelling for Peter’s first century listeners. See, in the Roman Empire of the year sixty-seven AD, there was spooking around this notion that the Christians were not good citizens. “They’re different than us,” others would say. “They think they’re better than us, because they follow God, not Caesar.” And, “How

can they be good citizens when they fail to acknowledge Caesar as god, the way we do?” But if the Christians really behaved themselves, if they were really upright, if they were squeaky-clean citizens, then they could muzzle the senseless ignoramuses who were saying these things.

You know, it’s not so very different for you and me these days. The major media – like network TV and the big eastern newspapers – still insinuate, “Those Bible-bangers are different. They think they’re better than everyone else. They want to control everyone else. That means they’re not really good citizens.” Well, if we Christians really do behave ourselves, if we are really upright, if we really make ourselves squeaky-clean citizens, we can shut them up.

If we uphold marriage – not pursuing sexual relations outside of it, not looking to flee from inside of it – then we can more persuasively argue against pervert marriage. If we avoid substance abuse – if we stay sober, if we use our medications only properly – then we can more persuasively support the present laws against the abuse of substances. If we love others, and care for others, and help others, then we can more persuasively argue against the medical termination of the lives of folks at the very beginning and the very end of their lives.

So, you see: it’s worth placing ourselves underneath our governing authorities also because of people’s perceptions! That’s what God lists second.

Part Three: ...Because You Are Your Savior’s Servant

And how about one more good reason to place yourself underneath your government—to honor it and to obey it? The Lord says: *Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.*

Is that contemporary, or what?! I mean: do you follow the line of thought here? It’s basically this attitude—prevalent at the time of Peter, rampant nowadays. It says, “I am a free and independent person. I am not a slave. Even my government says so. And that means I am free to do anything I want, even if it is wrong, as long as it’s not against the law, and I can do something even if it is against the law, as long as I can get away with it, and nobody can tell me differently!”

But we Christians don’t think that way! See, we know we are slaves. We were born into this world slaves of Satan. Ever since he led our very first parents into the slavery of sin, all of us (their children) were born as slaves to Satan. But Jesus Christ freed us from slavery to Satan. His blood broke our chains. His death delivered us from the devil. His resurrection set us free from sin. Jesus paid the price to buy us back to be his servants. We’re free – yes! – free to serve him. And which one of us doesn’t want with all our heart to do that?

So, now I’m free—free not to litter, but rather to keep God’s creation clean; I’m free not to be a hazard on the roads, but rather to obey the traffic laws; I’m free not to steal music, but rather to support the artists who wrote it. And you’re free, too! ...Now I’m free—not to curse or disrespect my governing officials, but free to pray for them and speak of them as well as I can. And you’re free, too! ...Now I’m free to pay all those lovely sales taxes and property taxes and income taxes and payroll taxes—and do you know what? My dear Jesus will still give me what I need to live and then some! And he’ll do the same for you! After all, he gave for us his life’s blood and his final breath, so that we would have what we need to live with him in glory.

Conclusion: Our Relationship to Our Lord Trumps Our Patriotism

What attitude will Christians take toward the governing authorities? We will place ourselves underneath them—because of punishment and praise, yes; because of people’s perceptions, yes; but especially because we are our Savior’s servants.

And that reminds us that our relationship to our government merely fits into the rest of the fabric of our Christian life. Peter knew that. That’s why he concluded by saying: ***Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers*** (*love*—that’s an even closer concern than the obedience and respect we owe our government), ***fear God*** (*fear God*—that’s an honor, an awe, a reverence for God so high that “honor” and “awe” and “reverence” are words too small for it, we *fear God*), and: yes, we ***honor the king***.

God grant that’s the way we treat others, for Christ our Savior’s sake! Amen.

Scripture has us praying: *May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you.* Amen.