

OpenTheo

1 Peter 2:11 - 2:23



1 Peter - Steve Gregg

In this passage, Steve Gregg discusses the concept of pilgrimage and our role as Christians in society. He emphasizes that we are merely passing through this world, and our ultimate desire is for a heavenly country. Additionally, he touches upon the idea of government authority and submits that while civil disobedience may be legitimate for godly people, we must recognize the sphere of authority that the government has been given by God. Ultimately, he urges us to live among Gentiles in a way that honors God and demonstrates a better way of life.

Transcript

Alright, let's turn to 1 Peter 2 and we are picking it up at verse 11. So, his appeal to us is on the basis of the fact that we are strangers and pilgrims, or as he puts it, sojourners and pilgrims, in this version. And this idea of being sojourners in the world is one that has come up earlier.

I believe it is implied even in the opening verse of the epistle in 1 Peter 1.1 where he says he is addressing it to the pilgrims of the diaspora. Pilgrims are people who are not home. They are making a trip.

They are on their way to some destination. And so we have, of course, the book *Pilgrim's Progress* is about the journey that a Christian is making from the time of his conversion until he goes to heaven. And a pilgrimage, actually for a Jew in Old Testament times, or for that matter a Muslim in modern times, is to make a trip from where you live to the Holy City.

The Jew would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year. The Muslim is supposed to make, one time in his lifetime at least, a pilgrimage to Mecca. Christians are pilgrims and we are making a pilgrimage to, frankly, to God, to dwell with God forever and to be in His city, the New Jerusalem.

And this world is not the permanent place but the route through which we travel in order to get there. He has referred to our sojourning also in the end of verse 17 of chapter 1 where he said, Conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear.

So again, a couple of times previous to this, Peter has introduced the idea that this world is not our home.

We are sojourners here. If you look at Hebrews chapter 11, when Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are being discussed, it says in verse 13, Hebrews 11, 13, These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.

And truly, if they had called to mind the country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

That city, of course, is the New Jerusalem, which is seen in Revelation 21, coming out of heaven, coming down to the new earth, which is where we are planning to dwell. Between now and then we are traveling, and because we are strangers and pilgrims, we have a different relationship to our environment than those who aren't going anywhere. They just live here.

Those who are not Christians just live here in the world. It's their home. It's the only home they know.

But we are passing through, and because we are passing through, we have different loyalties, different values, different culture, even. In our last lecture I mentioned it was sort of like gypsies. Now, gypsies, of course, are not good people in general.

Most gypsies are dishonest, and they are known for the occult, and immorality, and thievery, and so forth. But if you take the character of the gypsies out of the equation, the gypsies have a life somewhat like that of the Christian in the world. They live in someone else's country.

The gypsies are actual nations. They are actual nationalities. But they don't have a homeland, and so they live in other people's homelands, usually not behaving in such a way as to make them welcome there.

But nonetheless, they have their own culture. They have their own languages. They have their own ways about them.

And the people around them have different commitments, different lifestyles. They are not mobile, for example. That is, they are not Bedouin types.

So, we are sort of like that. We are in somebody else's land. Now, the world is really God's land, but it is under the temporary control of Satan, and most of the people are under Satan's control.

So, we are sort of like pilgrims in a hostile land. We are passing through. Now, because of that, Peter says, I am appealing to you as people in that role, that you should abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

You don't live the way the rest of the world lives because you don't belong to the world. You have a different culture. You have a different king.

You have different standards. And therefore, you don't just indulge in those things that the rest of the world indulges in. And you don't have to take your cues, therefore, culturally from the world around you.

And you abstain from certain things that they would have no reason to abstain from because we follow a different authority, a different king. Now, Peter is reminding them that they are sojourners, and perhaps they felt it. In times when Christians are persecuted by the surrounding environment, as Peter's readers probably were, they feel like they are a little away from home.

However, there are times when Christians are comfortable in the world, and they don't feel like they don't belong here. They feel like they do, and they try to settle in, and they try to adopt a way of life that's amenable to the world around them, that's not too disagreeable, not too different. And it often leads to compromise because we become settled in to the world and to its ways.

But Peter wants us to remember that we are just traveling through, and we have other loyalties. In Israel, in the days of Jeremiah, there was a family or a tribe called the Rechabites. They were Jewish, but they didn't live in cities.

They didn't live in Jerusalem because their ancestor had taught them to not settle down, not live in cities, and not farm, but just move about. Now, whether this is good or bad is not really what's at issue here. The interesting thing is that they were Jewish people, but they didn't integrate into the rest of Jewish society quite like everyone else did.

They saw themselves as somewhat aloof from the corruptions of city life. And that's, in a way, what Christians are like in this world, too, sort of like the Rechabites. We don't want to be aloof in the sense of snooty.

We don't want to seem smug or superior or self-righteous. But we do have to remember that we belong to somebody else, and we belong to another country. And, therefore, we do not have to fit in to the culture around us.

And it is when Christians actually take this fact seriously and begin to live by the standards of Christ as a Christian community that they actually provide a stark contrast in many features from the world around them and become a city on a hill that is a testimony for another way. When Christians actually blend in with the world and adopt the world's ways in virtually every respect, except maybe the most immoral, imaginable

ways, Christians often do not present to the world an alternative to the world's own ways. And so there's no reason why people should take Christianity seriously unless they're just trying to escape hell.

But, actually, the Christian community is supposed to be showing the world a better way to live in this life. That's why Jesus said to the disciples, You are a city on a hill. You're a light to the world.

He said in that same place, Let your light so shine, so that men may see your good works and glorify your Father. And Peter apparently has that passage in view here. Because he says in verse 12, Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Now, the day of visitation may be a reference to the second coming of Christ or the judgment day. Then on the judgment day, they will have to confess that although they spoke against you during their lifetime, they have to admit you really were pretty good folks. You really were what you claimed to be.

They may not have liked it during their lifetime, but when it's all over and they stand before the judgment seat of God, they'll have to admit, yeah, God, your way was right, and the people I knew who followed it were wiser than I am. And they'll glorify God. Or, it may even mean that they'll glorify God by being converted.

And this might not even be a reference to the judgment day. It might be a reference to a day of visitation. That is when God brings some kind of, visits them with calamity.

The term visitation in the Old Testament often refers to a day of judgment of some sort. Not the final day of judgment, but God visiting with wrath, God visiting with punishment, some society or something. And it may be that Peter is simply saying when things go badly for them, when God brings some kind of calamity in their life, and they're sensitized more to the things of God, they'll have to admit that the Christians they knew were going the right way.

We may have spoken evil of them, we may have slandered those Christians, but they really were good people. And that's what Peter wants us to do, to live in such a way, is to bring glory to God. Even, perhaps, God being glorified someday by those who are persecutors, who speak evil of us.

Now, part of this is going to require that we fight a spiritual war. He says, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. This war between the flesh and the soul is also spoken of by Paul, though he used the word spirit instead of soul.

In Galatians 5, 17, he said, the spirit lusts against the flesh, and the flesh lusts against the spirit. These two are contrary to one another, so that you cannot do what you want,

or that you don't do it, some translations say. The point here is that there's a warfare going on between part of you and another part of you.

Your soul is committed to God, your flesh, not really. Your flesh is just committed to its own appetites, its fleshly lusts. These appetites war against the commitments you make spiritually.

Not because the flesh is always wanting evil things, it's just that the flesh itself doesn't discern between what things are right and wrong. For example, we all think in terms of the struggle with the flesh, in terms of sexual temptation, but the flesh desiring sex is not itself a bad thing. God's the one who built those hormones and those desires into the body, but it's supposed to be only for a certain narrow range of legitimate use.

Outside of that range of use, it's wrong. Now the flesh is not wrong to crave sex, but it doesn't distinguish between right and wrong sex, it just craves sex. Same thing with food, the craving for food.

The flesh doesn't make a distinction between whether it's food that's really yours to eat or not. You have to make that decision. Your flesh just wants food, your flesh just wants sleep, your flesh just wants drink, your flesh just wants sex, your flesh wants these things, and these things all have a legitimate use, but they also have an illegitimate use.

And therefore these desires of the flesh are not intrinsically bad things, but when you're desiring that which is not legitimate for you to have, the flesh doesn't know the difference, it just wants. It just craves what it craves. So your soul, your mind, your spirit has to limit the exercise of the flesh, has to say no to many of the desires of the flesh.

And the flesh has got a strong craving, you've got to have a strong craving to do what's right in order to resist that. The lusts of the flesh make war against your commitments, your spiritual commitments. And so you are in one sense a pilgrim and a stranger, but you're in another sense at a war.

You're kind of a soldier fighting off worldly and fleshly inclinations and temptations. But this will have a payoff if our conduct is good among the Gentiles, though they don't appreciate the difference. In fact, sometimes if you're living a good life in the midst of people who are pagans, they will resent it because your goodness shows up their badness by contrast.

And they often will persecute people who are good, not because of bad things the good people do, but because they're good things they do. And he says, if you live among the Gentiles that way, and remember Gentiles in those days were pagans. I mean, we're all Gentiles and most of our neighbors are Gentiles too.

They're not necessarily bad people, but pagans in those days, people who weren't Jewish and weren't Christian, they were idolaters. Fornication was actually a value to them.

They actually committed fornication in their temples.

They had temple prostitutes that were functionaries in their worship. The pagan world was far more corrupt than our country has ever yet become, although we're going very far from our Christian roots. We haven't gone to the place yet where we go to a place of worship and sleep with prostitutes.

Even the non-Christians don't do that now at this point. Could come to that. But no one's offering their babies to statues and things like that like they did commonly then.

I know there's parallels. People want to talk about how abortion is sacrificing our babies to the devil or whatever. And there's a sense in which that connection can be made.

But being a non-Christian and a non-Jew, that is being a Gentile, in the old days meant you were committed to evil things. Things that Christians call evil, at least. And therefore, as you are among the Gentiles, you have to remember you don't belong to their world.

You don't belong to their society. You're passing through it like a Christian in Pilgrim's Progress passed through Vanity Fair. That's what this world is like for the Christian.

But as we remain consistent in our resolve and living up to our commitments, as we live a godly life among the Gentiles, honorably, even though they speak initially evil of it, eventually they'll turn. It may not be until they stand before God that they do so, but eventually they'll have to say, you know, you were right. We were wrong.

Your God was right. And our way was wrong. And that's what Peter's saying.

You may be persecuted for the time being, but if you hold to your integrity and live honorably, there will be some people who will turn around and glorify God who were your persecutors at one time. Verse 13, Therefore, submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme or to governors as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God that by doing good, you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men as free, yet not using your liberty as a cloak for vice, but as a servant of God.

Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God.

Honor the king. Now, in verses 11 and 12, we saw that we're supposed to live honorably among the Gentiles. And although we don't belong to their culture, we don't want to be doing things that they construe as criminal.

And there are ways in which we can and should probably fit into some of the cultural norms that are not evil in order not to simply offend people. When Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11 that the women should cover their head and the men

should not cover their heads. He concluded that discussion in verse 16 saying we don't have any of these.

These are not our customs. So if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom. Neither do the churches of God.

But you people, your culture has those customs. And there's no sense unnecessarily offending your culture by flouting their customs. And there are some institutions in every society that although we belong to another society, we should not necessarily offend people unnecessarily.

And we should, therefore, he says in verse 13, submit ourselves to every ordinance of man. And every ordinance of man, that phrase, has been translated in a variety of ways. It's hard to translate because the Greek word classically, ordinance, in classic Greek before New Testament Greek was around, it meant a human institution.

But in biblical Greek, this word is only used of things that God creates. And so it's not clear whether it should be translated as a human institution or a divine institution. And, you know, perhaps the best way to translate ordinance of man would be every divine institution among men.

That's how some translators and commentators feel it should go. Every divine institution among men. Not something that man has created necessarily, but which God has created among men.

Now, he's referring here, of course, initially, to government power. He's also going to talk about slavery as an institution. He's also going to talk about marriage.

Now, obviously, some of these are human and some of them are divine institutions. God didn't institute slavery, but he did institute marriage. What about government? That's the first institution we come to, government.

He says we should submit to kings as supreme or to governors as those who are sent by him. This is apparently an echo of Romans chapter 13. And Romans 13 and this passage have raised lots of questions in people's minds about church and state.

And particularly to how we're supposed to view human governments, especially tyrannical governments. And usually, of course, in our time, the example they always bring up is who? Hitler, of course. Everyone wants to bring up Hitler.

Was Hitler ordained by God? And if you look at Romans 13, this is what Paul says, and Peter simply says it in fewer words. Paul expands on this idea, and I believe that Peter's deliberately summarizing this section of Paul in Romans 13, 1 through 7. Paul said, And let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God.

And the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God. And those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good.

But if you do evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is God's minister to an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore, you must be subject, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers, attending continually to this very thing. Render, therefore, to all their due taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. You see a lot of parallels here.

Honor all men, honor the king, Peter says. You render honor to whom honor is due. Now Paul's statement in verse 7, Render, therefore, to all their dues, is taken from Jesus' statement.

Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. The word render doesn't mean give, it means give back. When Jesus was shown the coin with Caesar's face, he said give it back, Caesar's face is on it.

Give back to Caesar what is his. Paul uses the same verb here. Render, give back to Caesar.

Give back to all who have something coming back to them. But what is Paul's actual teaching here about government? Would Paul have said these same things if he was living later in Nazi Germany, and said the authorities that be are ordained by God, therefore submit to the authorities? I have reason to believe he would say the same thing if he was living in Nazi Germany, because he was living in the Roman Empire under Nero. And Nero was not really a better man than Hitler.

He was a tyrant too. He slaughtered innocent people by the thousands, millions maybe. He's the first emperor to persecute the Christians.

For no good reason, except that he wanted to turn the attention away from himself as the one who had burned Rome. Nero was as wicked and unjust a man as Hitler was, and yet Paul was writing this while Nero was in power. So what was he saying? He's saying God ordained Nero to rule and do those things? Or God ordained Hitler to do what he did? Or God ordained Obama to do what he does? I mean, has God ordained everyone that we would have objections to as he ordained them to be rulers? Paul seems to say yes.

He says there's no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Now, this bothers people because it makes it sound like God wanted Hitler to kill 6 million Jews. That's not what it says.

It says the authorities that exist were appointed by God. For what purpose? Well, Paul says in verse 4, He, the ruler, is God's minister to you for good, but if you do evil, be afraid. And it says in verse 4 in the middle there, it says he does not bear the sword in vain, for he is God's minister and avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

So God has appointed the rulers to punish criminals, really, to be the avengers of God's wrath on those who practice evil. He says also in his passage, in 1 Peter 2, he says they are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers. This is verse 14, 1 Peter 2, 14.

The governors are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. Now, both Paul and Peter, both of whom writing at the time that Nero was emperor, who was a wicked emperor, they both say that the governors and the kings are appointed for this purpose. It specifically says God has ordained them for this purpose.

To punish criminals, to punish those who do evil, to encourage good behavior, to praise those who do good. This is found in both passages. Now, what we can conclude then about what Paul and Peter believed was this.

God has put leaders in their place with an assignment. Their assignment is to punish criminals, punish bad people, praise good people, protect innocent people, encourage good behavior by their policies, and execute God's wrath on those who do evil. Now, a man who is put into a position with that assignment doesn't always carry out that assignment.

Many men have been ordained by God to preach the gospel, but once they get themselves to church, they preach some other thing than the gospel. The fact that a man is ordained by God to do something or appointed by God to do something doesn't mean he's going to do what he's appointed to do. He may neglect what he's to do or corrupt it.

Likewise, when God puts a man in power, we're told God put him there so that he would do good for the citizens. He would punish criminals. But many rulers don't do that.

Many rulers don't recognize they are under God's authority. You know, some people are stumbled when it says God ordained the rulers because it makes it sound to them like the rulers then have God's carte blanche to do whatever they want. We just have to put up with it.

Being ordained by God means they're subject to God. They're not self-appointed rulers. God put them in their position, and since he put them there, he gave them an

assignment.

They are therefore subject to God. They are answerable to God for keeping their assignment faithfully or not. The emphasis in saying that God ordained them is not that he's given them carte blanche to do whatever they want with his approval.

It's that if they are ordained by God, they answer to God, the one who ordained them. God is above them. God is above them.

And that's why Pilate said to Jesus, do you not know I have power to kill you or to release you? And Jesus said, you have no power at all unless it was given to you from above. You wouldn't have any power at all if God hadn't allowed you to be in this position. Well, Pilate wasn't doing very well in that position.

He was actually kind of trying to do the right thing half the time in the trial with Jesus, but he got intimidated and he did the wrong thing. Well, he was appointed by God to do the right thing, but he didn't do the right thing. And that's what rulers are put in place by God for the safety of society.

But that doesn't mean that they operate and conduct themselves for the safety of society. Now, what is our obligation to them when they're not fulfilling their assignment? Notice Peter and Paul both tell us to submit to them or be subject to them but he also is describing a situation where they are punishing criminals and praising good behavior. I mean, Paul specifically says if you don't want to be afraid of him, then do what is good and you'll have praise from him.

Paul is essentially saying when a governor is doing what he's appointed to do, then you recognize that he's the agent of God and you submit to him as to God. But what if he's not doing what he's appointed to do? Well, then submission is a different story. What if the leaders build a statue and say everyone has to bow down to this statue or else be thrown in the fiery furnace? Well, godly people say, well, you can blow the trumpets all you want.

I'm not going to bow down to that image. Go ahead and throw me in the fiery furnace. Civil disobedience is legitimate for godly people.

The apostles did it. The Sanhedrin was the Supreme Court of Israel and they said stop preaching in the name of Jesus. And Peter said we must obey God rather than men.

We're going to keep preaching even though you say not to. Why? Not because we're rebellious against authority but because we're submitted to authority higher than you. Is it better for us to obey you or God? We're going to obey God.

In other words, the apostles were not rebellious against political authority but they recognized when that political authority was outside its bounds. And there's a higher

authority than them. The king is subject to God.

If the king goes the wrong way, we remain subject to God and we just recognize he's going the wrong way. We're not going with him. You see, understanding authority is a very important thing.

And we see it in many institutions in the world. In the family, in a corporation, in the military, there are different ranks. In a corporation there's the CEO and the board of directors and there's middle management and there's supervisors and there's the peons at the bottom.

In a family you've got the husband and the wife, that's the father and the mother, and the children are under them. The wife is subject to the husband and the children are subject to both. There's this hierarchy.

In the military you've got a whole bunch of ranks from the top dog down from the president on down to the lowest ranks. Now, here's the thing. In any structure of authority, each person who has authority has a defined sphere of authority.

Within that sphere that has been legitimately assigned to them, they operate with full authority. So that if God says to the husband, bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and the husband does that, the father does that, well the children need to submit to the father as to God because he's operating within his sphere. But if the father says, I'm going to sell my daughters into prostitution, make a little extra money to pay the mortgage off, well that's not bringing them up in the nurture.

That's not what God authorized a father to do. The daughter should not obey in that case because the father is outside his sphere. I had, when my kids were raised, a sphere of authority that included my children.

If I said you go to bed at 8 o'clock, they should go to bed at 8 o'clock. If I say you eat your spinach, they should eat their spinach. They're under my authority, I'm their dad.

I'm their kid. I couldn't go over to my neighbor's house and tell their kids to go to bed at 8 o'clock or eat their spinach. That's none of my business.

They're outside my sphere. Within my sphere that God has appointed me, my children should submit to me as unto God because God has appointed me to operate in authority in that sphere. But outside that sphere, I'm just another guy.

My neighbor's kids, they're not in my sphere. I could tell them everything I want them to do and they don't have to pay any attention to me. I'm just a schmuck.

I don't have any authority over them. The same is true of every office of authority. A person of a certain military rank has authority over a certain sphere, a certain number of

persons under him.

But if he starts to give orders to somebody who's a civilian or somebody who's an officer who's above him or something like that, that's outside his sphere. He doesn't have any authority to do that. And this is true in Scripture.

Paul said when he wrote to the Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians, I'm telling you what to do because you are within my sphere. He actually uses that word. You're within my sphere.

I don't try to exercise authority over people who aren't in my sphere. He means you're my converts. I'm an apostle of the Gentiles.

You're Gentiles. God has put you within my sphere so I can speak authoritative to you. But he says I don't try to build on another man's foundation and operate outside my sphere of authority.

He says no authority has a limited amount. No one has absolute authority except God. Jesus said all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.

So Jesus has it all. Everybody else has just a portion. And that a portion is appointed by God.

Now Paul and Peter say that the government officials have authority that God has appointed them to exercise. There's a certain sphere for them. In that sphere, they operate under God's authority and as God's agents.

Outside that sphere, they're just ordinary guys. So if a law is made that says if you steal, you're going to jail, well that's a good law. That's a punishment of criminals.

That's what God ordained governments to do, to punish criminals. So we should submit to laws like that. But if they say it's now illegal to meet with other Christians, for worship, well then I don't have to obey that because they have no authority to say that.

That has nothing to do with punishing criminals. God defined the sphere of authority for the government to punish evil doers and praise those who do well. If they tell me how I have to raise my children, if they tell me who I can associate with for fellowship or can't, I have every right to ignore their authority.

They're just ordinary men who are taking on themselves authority that God never gave them. There's a sense in which our country is kind of special in that the really ruling law of the land is the Constitution. You see, before this country was founded, I don't want to get too much into this because I don't want to deviate off into political issues so much, but before this country started, governments were run by kings, not by laws.

And this government was started with the idea that we want to have a rule of law, not a rule of men. Not some authoritative man telling what to do, but there's going to be laws

that even the king, if there was one, would have to obey. Even the president and the congressman have to obey the law of the land because it's a government by law.

And the supreme law of the land was the Constitution that they wrote. As far as I know, we're still the same country and the Constitution is still the supreme law of the land. That means if they make orders and laws that are contrary to the Constitution, they're outside their sphere.

The Constitution doesn't authorize them and God, therefore, hasn't given them some kind of kingly authority that isn't granted to them by the nation's charter itself. It seems to me that submission to government is simply submission to righteousness and God has appointed the governments to enforce righteousness. If they become unrighteous, they don't have any authority because they're outside the sphere that God gave them.

And frankly, if a policeman tries to come into your house without a warrant, he's outside his sphere. He might be bigger and stronger and have a gun and you don't, but he doesn't have the authority to come in there. It's against the law.

He's got to be ruled by laws like everybody else. This isn't a monarchy where the king can just send his agents to come and invade your territory. If it wasn't this kind of a country, they could.

The point being, when we think about government and submission to government, we have to recognize that there are certain things God authorized governments to do. He did not authorize that Hitler would kill six million Jews. He did, apparently, appoint Hitler to rule, but he gave him the assignment of ruling righteously, and the man chose to do something else.

Therefore, those Christians that resisted Hitler, that hid the Jews and did other things to try to prevent his agenda, those Christians were well within biblical perimeters because Hitler was operating outside of the sphere that God defines for the ruler. Hitler, a number of times, had presidents who operated outside the sphere that the Constitution grants them. They do things that are unconstitutional.

To tell you the truth, the Christian has every right, biblically, to simply ignore those things that the government officials do that they have no authority under the Constitution to do. The Bible does not say unconditionally obey all authorities, but obey the authorities of the Christian. Outside that sphere, they are not authorities at all.

They're only pretenders to authority. We see that in other institutions that are hierarchical. If you're a manager in a store, you have authority over the people that you're appointed to be a supervisor over, but you can't tell them how to conduct themselves toward their wives at home.

That's not your sphere. You're in authority over them. We have to understand that

authority, often, when people are in authority, if they have the power to do it, they try to assert absolute authority over all areas of life.

That's not what the Bible is affirming. The Bible does not affirm that a man, anyone other than Jesus, has all authority to do whatever he wants. These authorities are ordained by God.

Therefore, they answer to God, the one who ordained them. Their role is defined by the law. So Peter, I think, his wording is very similar to Paul's, and certainly his concept is the same as Paul's.

We should be obedient to laws insofar as those laws are legitimate and righteous. Now, what about the laws of the road? What about speeding? Does the government have the right to tell you how fast to drive? They do, because they pave the roads. They have the right to maintain safety on the roads.

Does that mean that a Christian is sinning if he speeds? Some might see it that way. I just see myself as being subject to the authorities. If they catch me and give me a ticket, I pay the ticket.

I'm subject to them. It doesn't say obey all the laws. It just says be subject to them.

So I will. If I break a law and they give me a ticket, I'll be subject to that. I don't know if that's a cop out, but maybe it is.

But the truth is that Christians often take these passages and without thinking very carefully about them, they just take it as a blanket statement, do everything the government says. So that's, for example, if you're in the military and you're commanded to go wipe out men, women, and children in a village in Vietnam, you have to say, sorry, I can't do that. And I must obey God rather than man.

And there have been people who've refused to take those kinds of orders because of their conscience toward God. And I think, frankly, they're within the biblical mandate. So he tells us in verse 14, 1 Peter 2.14, to submit to governors as unto those who are sent by the king for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.

And to obey God that by doing good, you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. You're putting to silence the ignorant accusations against Christians. You see, Christians were often accused of being anti-Rome.

In Thessalonica, Paul was brought before the Roman courts and he was accused of teaching things that are unlawful for Roman citizens to do because he's teaching there is another king, one Jesus. The religion of Christianity was actually illegal under Roman law because the Romans had a policy that if they conquered a territory, any religion that was already there before they conquered it could continue. But no new religions could be

introduced after it was a Roman territory or province.

Judaism therefore was legal because the Jews had their religion before Rome conquered Israel. But Christianity came up later and therefore was technically an illegal religion. And Christianity was able to operate for a long time under the umbrella of Judaism because the Romans couldn't tell the difference.

The Jews knew that Christians weren't of the Jewish faith, but the Romans didn't know that because Jews and Christians both believed in one God, the same God. The Romans and everyone else believed in a whole bunch of gods. So since the Jews and Christians worshipped the same God, the Romans thought it was the same religion.

There were occasions when the Jews took the Christians before the Roman courts and said, these guys have an illicit religion. And the Roman governor in Corinth, for example, Gallo, said, this just looks like an intramural dispute between you Jews about your religious practices. You handle it.

I'm not going to handle it. And he just, he wouldn't rule against Christianity because he thought it was part of Judaism. But technically, Christianity was illegal.

And it soon became clear, especially after the temple was destroyed in Jerusalem and the Christians flourished without the temple. That means they weren't part of the Jewish religion. And then the Romans began to persecute the Christians in a bigger way, more officially.

Now because of this, the Romans often saw the Christians as lawbreakers, as criminals, as bad people. It was their ignorance that made them speak this way. The early church was accused of being cannibals and being incestuous and of being atheists.

Strange that they would. But the church fathers mentioned this frequently. They argue against their Roman critics, saying we're not cannibals, we're not incestuous, and we're not atheists.

But why would they be called that? They were called atheists because the Romans all worshipped gods they could see, made of wood and stone. The Christians claimed to worship a god that no one has ever seen and therefore probably didn't exist. They were denying the existence of all gods except for an invisible god, which the Romans thought must be imaginary.

So they don't really believe in any real god at all. And they were called atheists. When Polycarp was told to renounce his faith before he was burned at the stake, the authorities said, say, away with the atheists and we'll let you go, meaning away with the Christians.

But that's the way that the Romans looked at Christians. They were atheists. They

thought they were cannibals because they misunderstood what was going on when they took communion.

They thought they were eating the actual body and blood of somebody. They didn't understand, but they took Christians to be cannibals. Likewise, they thought they were incestuous because they called each other brother and sister, including their own wives and husbands.

And so the outside world didn't understand the culture of the Christians and thought weird bad things about them. This was the criticisms of ignorant men who didn't understand the way the Christians really were living. The Christians really were good people, law-abiding people, but they were accused, ignorantly, of lots of things.

And so Peter says, you need to live a good life, obey the laws as much, of course, as you can in good conscience, so that you will this way put these criticisms, these ignorant criticisms, silence them by your good behavior. If somebody is criticizing and slandering you and calling you an evil person, in time you should be able to live that down. You should be able to change their opinion if you are very obviously a good person.

It becomes more and more hard for people who hear the bad news about you to believe that it's true. But those Christians, those people who are out there saving the abandoned babies, those Christians who are out there taking care of all the poor, those Christians who are out there obeying the laws and being good citizens, you say they're cannibals? I can hardly believe that. And these ignorant criticisms of Christians would be put to silence by the overt good behavior of the Christians, which included keeping the laws and not being seen as rebels against the Roman authority.

And by the way, at times of persecution, it's very easy for Christians to sometimes justify just plain rebellion and say, you know, we don't recognize these authorities at all. They're just evil men. But we still have to recognize them within their proper sphere.

Just because they're evil men doesn't mean they're not in office. And if they're in office, there's a sphere that God recognizes them as having legitimacy in but not outside that. And he says, we should do this, verse 16 says, as free, yet not using your liberty as a cloak for vice, but as the servants of God.

That is, we have liberty in Christ, but we don't want to use that as an excuse for bad behavior. Paul talked a lot about this in First Corinthians and Romans, how that we have the liberty to do many things that we won't do, because if we did them, it would stumble other people. If you have the right to eat meat, sacrifice, idols, that's liberty.

If you do it in a situation where it's gonna make someone stumble, that's not being good. That's not using your liberty properly. And likewise, Christians might have liberty, even in some cases, to violate unjust laws.

But he says, you want to be as well-behaved publicly as you can. You don't want to use your liberty in a way that promotes vice. Some people think they have liberty to sin because they're saved by grace.

And Paul said, shall we then continue in sin that grace may abound? Of course not. You may have liberty, but it doesn't mean you have liberty to do evil. And you shouldn't use your liberty that way.

He says, don't use it as a cloak or to cover for vice. But you use your liberty to serve God. We're liberated from sin.

We're liberated from the bondage of sin so that we can serve God. Now, this statement, verse 17, honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. He says, honor all people.

He says, honor the king. It sounds like redundant. In fact, it seems to make honoring the king not any different than honoring anyone else.

And maybe that's what he means. Maybe he's saying you should honor the king, give honor to whom honors due. But since you're supposed to honor all people, that just means that you treat the king like anyone else.

That may be what he's saying there. We're supposed to have special love for the brotherhood and special fear of God. But toward other men, we should honor them.

And what does that mean? I think it means to honor their legitimate rights. A king has the right to govern and we honor that. Other people have rights to their whatever, their property, their privacy, their life.

We will honor that. We'll honor them in their in their rights. It doesn't mean that we we give honor to dishonorable things.

I remember back when there were scandals about President Clinton some years ago. And a lot of Christians were criticizing him for his immorality. Some Christians said, well, you shouldn't speak against him because it says honor the king.

And he's like he's he's the president. So you should honor the government authorities. But he's being dishonorable.

Are you supposed to honor dishonorable people? Well, no, you don't have to honor dishonorable people. But you still recognize that until he's out of office, he's still the president. He may be very unworthy of the title, but you still recognize that he is he's got some authority and where he operates in proper authority.

You submit to that. You honor that. You honor legitimate authority and legitimate rights of people, even though some of those people might be really people you would never

wish to have much respect for.

Honoring doesn't always necessarily mean that you have a lot of respect for them. Now, he addresses slaves next to the end of the chapter. He's talked to subjects to honor the king.

Now he's going to talk to slaves to honor their masters. Now, Paul does this, too, although he also turns to the masters and tells them how to behave. Peter doesn't do that here, but it's not as if he wouldn't.

He just either his focus is on the fact probably that in Rome and in the Roman Empire, a very large percentage of the population were slaves. Now, when we think of slavery, we have a really different picture than what Roman slavery was. We think of what's called Atlantic slavery, where Africans were kidnapped from their home in Africa and taken across the Atlantic and sold in the New World and and treated as chattel and so forth.

Now, it's true that slavery, even in Old Testament and New Testament times, slaves were pretty much like chattel, but it wasn't like the slavery here. Slavery here involved some great injustices that were not implied in biblical slavery. A slave in the Old Testament might have, in fact, sold himself into slavery because of his economic circumstances.

He couldn't pay his debts. It was easier for him to just sell himself into slavery and let someone else pay his debts for him. A man who couldn't handle himself economically would be more secure in the home of a master who could house him and feed him and take care of him all his life.

All he has to do is work for the guy all day long. But at least he's got a home to go to and three square meals. Whereas a man who's not a slave in those days sometimes could not afford to house himself and feed himself.

And he went into debt over his head. So to get out of that, he'd sell himself into slavery. He wasn't kidnapped.

He, in many cases, voluntarily went in. In other cases, people who were prisoners of war were made slaves. Rather than being killed, they were brought home alive to serve their masters.

We don't have that in our society anymore, thank God. But every society in the world had slavery until England abolished it. And then we did shortly afterwards, I believe.

And now, of course, slavery only exists in Muslim countries for the most part and pretty much illegally in this country. You've got sex slavery. There is slavery still.

But you see, when we say slavery, the term doesn't just refer to one thing. But we often

only think of one thing. We think of African slaves in this country.

And we know very well that that was an unjust thing. In fact, even though the Bible speaks about slavery as something legitimate, it would have condemned American slavery because the law of Moses would put to death anyone who kidnapped somebody. And essentially all the black slaves that were brought over here were kidnapped from their homes.

They weren't prisoners of war. They didn't sell themselves. They're just minding their own business.

And some slave traders came with guns and put them in ships and brought them over and sold them. Slave traders under Old Testament law would have been put to death, not because slavery is wrong, but because taking slaves against their will, kidnapping people and making them slaves was wrong. To be deprived of the rights that we have constitutionally guaranteed to us was not in itself always considered to be wrong.

I mean, like I said, some people would voluntarily give up those rights. Under the law of Moses, a slave in Israel is to be given his freedom after six years. But if he didn't want his freedom, he could make a commitment to be a slave for life.

It says in the law, after six years, you give him his freedom. But if he says, I don't want to go, I love my master, I love my family here, I want to stay a slave. Well, then he could have his ear pierced and he was a slave for life.

But by choice, you see, we can't hardly imagine that kind of situation. We think of slavery as always abusive and degrading. And it is in many societies.

In our society, it was a hundred and something years ago. Now, it was very degrading and it should have been illegal a lot earlier. It should never been permitted at all.

It was evil. But slavery in the Roman world was often just an economic necessity for the persons who couldn't take care of themselves. They could be taken care of much better by someone rich who would buy them to serve them.

Now, there were slaves who were owned and there were slaves that hired out. And there was different kinds of slaves. But for the most part, a slave was someone who didn't have any rights because in most cases they had surrendered them on purpose.

And so in the Roman Empire, a very large percentage of the people there were slaves. Some historians say over half of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves. Now, slaves would tend to come to God more readily than free people because, like it says in James, God has chosen the poor of this earth to be rich in faith.

People who are poor often or more desperate often turn to Christ in larger numbers than

people who are fat and sassy and feeling good. And so there were more slaves in the church than freemen in many cases. And so lots of times the instructions in the epistles written to the churches are written and addressed to those who are in that circumstance.

This is the case here. The word servants is used in our translation, but it's the word slave in the Greek. And it says servants be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

For this is commendable if because of conscience toward God, one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But if when you do good and suffer for it, you take it patiently. This is commendable before God.

For to this you were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow his steps. Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in his mouth. Who, when he was reviled, did not revile in return.

When he suffered, he did not threaten, but he committed himself to him who judges righteously. Who himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls." Now, this last part, especially verses 24 and 25, we will not have time to get into this morning.

We'll have to save that for the next session. But I do want to say a few things in the few minutes we have left about his instructions to slaves in general. Just as he has told citizens to submit to rulers, he tells slaves to submit to their masters.

He also is going to tell women to submit to their husbands. And if he did what Paul did, he would also say children should obey their parents. There's a lot of hierarchical structures in society where one person's role places them in a subordinate place to another.

All citizens are subordinate to the government. All children are subordinate to their parents. In a society that had slaves, slaves were clearly, by definition, subordinate to their masters.

Now, Peter is not necessarily favoring slavery. No biblical writer is necessarily favoring slavery, but they're speaking realistically. A lot of Christians were slaves.

They didn't have the right to just walk away. They were owned. In the economic situation they were in, they couldn't just walk away and say, I'm a Christian, I'm a free man.

Well, if the owner wanted to give them that liberty, that's fine. But if he didn't, they had to just be good Christians as slaves. And so he says, submit to your masters, not only the

good ones.

It's pretty easy to submit to good people, especially if you sold yourself into slavery for economic security and your master is very kind and generous to you. Well, that's a gravy train. Sure, you have to work, but you've got to work anyway, whether you're a slave or not.

You've got to work for a living. This time you're working for, you've got guarantees of housing and food and all that stuff. That can be a good thing.

It can be a pleasing thing for someone who doesn't have American ideas of human rights and so forth, which were not very, I mean, those were new ideas when this country was established. Throughout most of history, people didn't have the assumption of human rights that we have. That's a post-enlightenment kind of mentality.

In all societies, in ancient times, it was understood. Some people were just subject to other people. It's just the way life is.

That's the way the world is. And so he's saying, even when your masters are harsh, you need to be just the same kind of Christian as if they are good to you. In other words, you sometimes have to take unjust treatment.

Now he says, there's no special commendation owed you if you do evil and you get beaten for it and you take the beating patiently. Well, you asked for it. You did evil.

It's an earned punishment. But he said, but if you do good and suffer for it and you take it patiently, then you're exhibiting the grace of God. You're being distinctly like a Christian.

And the grace of God is mentioned, though you don't see it here. In verse 19 and verse 20, where it says in verse 19, for this is commendable. The word commendable in the Greek is *keres*, grace.

It's the ordinary word that's used for grace throughout the whole epistle. It's translated commendable here. Likewise, at the end of verse 20, if you take it patiently, this is commendable.

Actually, *keres*, grace. This is grace. Remember, we're talking about how grace is that which enables us to go through hardship in a different way, in a gracious way.

You could translate this quite consistently for this is grace. Verse 19, if because of conscience toward God, one endures grief, suffering wrongfully, for what credit is it if when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently, but when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is grace before God. As God sees you as exhibiting his grace in that situation, you receive grace to endure wrong treatment and

take it patiently.

Now, people can endure wrong treatment, whether they take it patiently or not. Many people in prison are abused in prison. Many slaves are abused.

Many people in their homes are abused. They're taking it, but they may not be taking it patiently. He says, if you can take this patiently, that's grace.

That's God's grace enabling you to do that. That's God's grace in your life. That's pleasing to God.

He says in verse 20, for this you were called. Now, he's still talking to slaves. He's not saying you were called to be slaves.

He's saying that since you are slaves, God is calling you to be good ones. Just like if you were something else, you'd be called to be good. That if you're a good ruler, if you're a good child, if you're a good parent, whatever you are, God calls you to be good in that role.

And if you are a slave and you're unfortunately being your master is not a good master and you're taking it patiently, this is what God has called you to do. He says, because that's what Christ did. Christ suffered abuse wrongfully.

He says in verse 20, for this you were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow his steps. That is when you suffer wrongfully as he did follow his example of taking it patiently. What was that example? It says in verse 22, he committed no sin, nor was guile found in his mouth.

That means he was innocent when he was abused. He hadn't done anything wrong. That's a quotation from Isaiah 53, nine.

And it says in verse 23, when he was reviled, he didn't revile back. When he suffered, he did not threaten. That is, he took it patiently.

It was wrongful. He was not sinful. He hadn't done anything wrong.

He didn't deserve that. But when they abused him, he just kept quiet. He didn't threaten back or anything like that.

He exhibited grace even toward his persecutors. And it says, but what he did do positively is he committed himself to him who judges righteously. Remember Jesus said, father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.

Instead of taking matters into his own hands, he could have called 12 legions of angels and they would have come and killed his enemies and released him. But instead he didn't. He just committed himself into the hands of God.

That means he just kept going on the path that God wanted him on and left the matter in God's hands. Now, if you look forward just a little bit and then we're done here in chapter four, verse 19, it says to Christians, therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God, commit their souls to him in doing good as to a faithful creator. That's what Jesus did.

When he was suffering wrongfully, he committed himself to God. Peter says, when you suffer wrongfully, you commit yourself to God too. That Jesus is the example.

How do you commit yourself to God? By doing good, he says in chapter four, verse 19. Instead of retaliating, instead of taking matters into your own hands to settle the score, you just keep doing the loving thing. You keep doing the gracious thing to the person who's your persecutor.

In doing that, you're leaving the matter in God's hands. You're committing your situation to God's hands. And he then is given the freedom to do with it what he wants to.

And that's what we're supposed to do. Submission to the will of God often means submission to suffering that's unjust. But it's not as if Jesus hasn't modeled it for us.

He has. And that's the point Peter's making. Christ has modeled this kind of behavior for us.

And therefore, we follow his example. We follow his steps, he says in 1 Peter 2, 21. Now, these last two verses of chapter two, I'm going to have to hold off and take those another time.

It would make no sense since we're out of time to try to just rush through them. There's too much in them that needs to be discussed. And so we will break here at something of an unnatural spot, but only because of the constraints of our time.