

**Free to Submit**  
**1 Peter 2:13-17**  
**7/23/2017**

### **Introduction**

This last Thursday, the King County Board of Health passed regulation requiring crisis pregnancy centers to put up large signs stating, in ten different languages, "This facility is not a health care facility." If they refuse to comply, heavy fines will ensue.

Crisis pregnancy centers, like Care Net of Puget Sound, and other similar ministries are being accused of not caring for pregnant women, of not providing appropriate care and services to them. What should these centers do? What is the relationship between Christians and the governmental authorities over us?

### **The Context**

Up to this point in the letter, the apostle Peter has emphasized to his audience (primarily Jewish Christians dispersed throughout Asia Minor) first and foremost who they are in Christ, who they are in the hand of God (1:1-6). He has shown that, even in the midst of persecution and suffering, Christians have hope and confidence because they are bought with Jesus' blood and held fast by the word of God and His promises (1:7-2:2). Peter has told his readers that they are sojourners and pilgrims. They are not one with the world, they are different and stand apart because they have been set apart as a holy nation. Because of this, they should abstain from the lusts which war against their souls and instead live in such a way that causes their persecutors to glorify God in the day of His visitation (2:3-3:12). Peter spends much of the rest of the letter explaining what the good works are that Christians should be pursuing, even in the midst of slander and persecution.

### **Submit for the Lord's Sake**

Peter begins his applications addressing the relationship between Christians and earthly rulers (vv. 13-17). Christians are to *submit to every ordinance of man*. "Ordinance" here broadly means a "creation" or a "creature". So, Peter wants his audience to submit to every creation of man, which clearly refers primarily to civil government from the examples Peter lines out. Whether it's *to the king* (likely a reference to the Roman Caesar) *as the supreme ruler* or to any of his appointed *governors*, Christians are to submit to their ordinances *for the Lord's sake*. As we know from elsewhere in Scripture, kings and kingdoms are established by God (Daniel 2:21, 4:25, John 19:11, Romans 13:1). So, to refuse to submit to the authority that God has established is to refuse to submit to God (Romans 13:2). God has established human authorities *to punish the wicked and praise the good*.

### **Silencing Foolish Men**

The main reason that Peter gives for the command to submit is that *this is the will of God*. By being a people that submits to the rulers God places over them, Christians will *silence the ignorance of foolish men*. Christians are *free*, but this doesn't mean we can use our freedom as a *cloak for vice*. When you claim that you are free to do some evil because you are a Christian, you demonstrate that God is not really your master. You are still a slave to your flesh. Remember, Christians are *bondservants of God*. You are not slaves or bondservants of the government over us. We have been bought with a price by Jesus, and He is our true

Lord. If you believe in Jesus, if you have been bought by His blood when He died on the cross, you are free from any other duty-bound bondage. This in fact is what enables Christians to submit rightly to other men. Men bound by sin are either in constant rebellion because of their selfishness and covetousness, or they are in constant enslavement as they more and more sell themselves to their masters. But Christians are free and able by the Holy Spirit to submit peaceably to inconvenient laws and regulations. This passage is full of this tension: you are free to submit. This means you ought to be able to observe the speed limit because you are so full of the joy and peace you have in Christ.

### **Two Ditches**

There are two clear ditches that we must avoid when walking through this passage. First, we must resist the temptation to overqualify what the Bible says. When God commands us to submit to every ordinance of man, our first response *may not be* "Except when...". Our first response must be, "Yes, Lord."

And yet, given where our culture is today, it is difficult to preach on civil obedience without also teaching on civil disobedience. We may not take this passage as though it were the ultimate or only command in Scripture. In giving this command, God has not subjected the rest of His law to the commandments of men. We are commanded here to obey *for the Lord's sake*. If submitting to the authority of men causes us to disobey or go contrary to God's law, then this submission is no longer for the Lord's sake. We must hold up all of God's law and not take this passage and elevate it above the rest of Scripture. Remember the disobedience of Daniel and his three friends in Babylon (Daniel 3:16-18). Remember Peter's own disobedience to the rulers of Israel (Acts 5:27-32). And so, in a similar way, we should not submit to commands that tell us to treat the murder of children like a health service. Care Net does provide health care to pregnant women, and this should not be determined by whether or not they are willing to slaughter babies on the altar of personal choice.

### **Honor and Love, Fear and Honor**

Under this exhortation to submit to government, Peter sums it all up with four short commands: *honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, and honor the king*. Breaking these four commands into two couplets shows once again the tension that holds this passage together. Christians must honor all people, and Christians must especially love the brotherhood. Christians must fear God, and in so doing Christians also must honor the king.

### **Conclusion**

Obviously, many scenarios require wisdom in applying this. And, Peter does not lay out how this pushes into all the corners. But we must start with the easy situations. There are plenty of examples in the Bible of civil disobedience. But in order for civil disobedience to be effective, it must stand starkly against a background, against a norm, of submission to civil authority. But this is only because this submission is obedience to God. In Christ, you are free to submit to the authorities He has established over you.

Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.