



The First Letter of Peter
Bible Study Session 10
1 Peter 2:13-17
“Civic Duties of Believers”



Study By
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Greek NT

13 Ὑποτάγητε πάσῃ ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει διὰ τὸν κύριον· εἴτε βασιλεῖ ὡς ὑπερέχοντι, 14 εἴτε ἡγεμόσιν ὡς δι' αὐτοῦ πεμπομένοις εἰς ἐκδίκησιν κακοποιῶν ἔπαινον δὲ ἀγαθοποιῶν 15 (ὅτι οὕτως ἐστὶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀγαθοποιοῦντας φιμοῦν τὴν τῶν ἀφρόνων ἀνθρώπων ἀγνωσίαν)· 16 ὡς ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ μὴ ὡς ἐπικάλυμμα ἔχοντες τῆς κακίας τὴν ἐλευθερίαν, ἀλλ' ὡς θεοῦ δοῦλοι. 17 πάντας τιμήσατε, τὴν ἀδελφότητα ἀγαπᾶτε, τὸν θεὸν φοβεῖσθε, τὸν βασιλέα τιμᾶτε.

Gute Nachricht Bibel

13 Fügt euch um des Herrn willen jeder von Menschen gesetzten Ordnung. Ordnet euch dem Kaiser unter, der an höchster Stelle steht. 14 Ordnet euch seinen Vertretern unter, die er eingesetzt hat, um alle zu bestrafen, die unrecht tun, und alle mit Anerkennung zu belohnen, die das Rechte tun.

15 Denn Gott will, dass ihr durch eure guten Taten alle zum Schweigen bringt, die aus Dummheit und Unwissenheit gegen euch reden. 16 Handelt als freie Menschen; aber missbraucht eure Freiheit nicht, um ein zuchtloses Handeln damit zu entschuldigen. Denkt daran, dass ihr nur frei seid, weil Gott euer Herr geworden ist. 17 Ehrt alle Menschen, liebt die Gemeinschaft der Brüder und Schwestern, fürchtet Gott, ehrt den Kaiser!

NRSV

13 For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, 14 or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. 15 For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. 16 As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. 17 Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

NLT

13 For the Lord's sake, accept all authority -- the king as head of state, 14 and the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish all who do wrong and to honor those who do right. 15 It is God's will that your good lives should silence those who make foolish accusations against you. 16 You are not slaves; you are free. But your freedom is not an excuse to do evil. You are free to live as God's slaves. 17 Show respect for everyone. Love your Christian brothers and sisters. Fear God. Show respect for the king.

Quick Links to the Study

I. [Context](#)

- a. [Historical](#)
- b. [Literary](#)

II. [Message](#)

- a. [Acknowledge human authority, vv. 13-16](#)
- b. [Honor everyone by certain actions, v. 17](#)

Introduction to Study. As Peter continues his encouragement to believers to develop proper relationships to 'outsiders' who are not a part of the church, he reaches out in vv. 13-17 to government authorities as the first specific group to be mentioned. This text raises the topic of Christian relationships to government leaders. Closely connected to this text is the related discussion by Paul in Romans 13:1-8,

1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; 4 for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. 6 For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very

thing. 7 Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. 8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Both Peter and Paul work off the foundational principle set forth by Jesus earlier and recorded in Matthew 22:16-21,

16 So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” 18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. 20 Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” 21 They answered, “The emperor’s.” Then he said to them, **“Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”**

By word and action, Jesus set the example of submitting to governmental authority, even though the individual leaders were not godly persons, and they often severely abused that authority in unjust treatment of the people of God. When Paul and Peter had their words penned in the mid 50s to early 60s, the Roman ruler in mind was Emperor Nero, who became the first and one of the worst persecutors of Christians in the first century. In these teachings of Jesus and his two disciples in the NT, the *quality of leadership* and *personal morality* of the individual leaders don’t alter Christian responsibility to accept their governmental authority. The leaders’ attitude toward Christianity, either support of or hostility to, has no bearing on our responsibility to them and their authority. Regardless of who they are, we have responsibilities to them that are spelled out in considerable detail by both Paul and Peter. Our focus is on Peter’s words, but those of Paul in Romans will provide supplementary insight as well.¹



¹But this comparison must keep in mind not just the similarities but also the differences between the two texts, as Achtemeier and Epp point out:

“Similarities in language between 1 Pet 2:13–17 and Rom 13:1–7 have led some to conclude that the passages make a very similar point,¹⁸ and that they may indeed stand in a direct literary relationship to one another.¹⁹ Yet despite such similarities, 1 Peter displays a very different attitude to civil authority, and seeing it in the same light as the passage in Romans inevitably makes inaccessible the intention of the passage.²⁰ A careful comparison of the passages shows their very different intentions.

“Comparison of language will turn up a number of similar words,²¹ but they are used so differently that the similarity is all but completely overshadowed. A consideration of such words will make the point clear.

“1. Both use a form of ὑποτάσσω, in Rom 13:1 referring to ‘superior authorities,’ which the rest of the passage makes clear are of divine establishment (vv. 1, 2, 4a, c). In 1 Pet 2:13 subordination is to be shown to every human creature,²² with no word about their divine authority.²³ In a similar vein, while governing authority (ἐξουσία borne by ἄρχοντες) is established by and subordinate to God in Rom 13:1–2, governors (ἡγεμόνοι) are sent by and are hence subordinate to the emperor in 1 Pet 2:14.

“2. Both use a form of ὑπερέχω (‘be superior’), but in Rom 13:1 it refers to superior authorities of divine establishment, while its use in 1 Pet 2:13 refers to the ‘king,’ who has been identified as a ‘human creature.’

“3. Similarly, the phrases about punishing evildoers and praising those who do good are used in a context of divine action in Rom 13:3–4, but in a context of the purely human emperor and his governors in 1 Pet 2:14.

“4. Most striking is that both passages end using forms of φόβος (‘fear’) and τιμάω (‘to honor’) in the same order. Yet their use in Rom 13:7 is very general, in 1 Pet 2:17 quite specific. More importantly, 1 Peter reserves the use of ‘fear’ for God, while its use in Rom 13:3 refers simply to a very human fear in the presence of overwhelming governmental power directed at miscreants. The use of ‘honor the emperor’ in 1 Pet 2:17 as a direct parallel to ‘honor all people’ specifically divests the emperor of any and all trappings of divine authority or power.

“5. Both passages use θέλημα, but in Rom 13:3 it refers to human will, in 1 Pet 2:15 to God’s will.

“6. The primary motive for subordination in both passages is God’s will (1 Pet 2:12: διὰ τὸν κύριον, ‘because of the Lord’; Rom 13:5: διὰ τὴν συνείδησιν, ‘because of [your] conscience’), but the secondary motives are quite different: escaping fear and gaining praise in Rom 13:3; putting an end to ignorant accusations against the Christians in 1 Pet 2:15.²⁴

“There are other significant differences between the two passages. 1 Peter contains no reference to taxes (as in Rom 13:6–7); there is no use of abstract words for rule such as ἐξουσία or ἄρχοντες (as in Rom 13:1–3); there is no parallel in 1 Pet 2:13–17 to the idea that human rulers are God’s stewards (θεοῦ διάκονος, Rom 13:4, bis) or that opposition to them is tantamount to opposition to God (Rom 13:2); and there is no reference in Romans 13 to the fact that Christians are both free and slaves of God (1 Pet 2:16). Finally, political activities, while the principal concern of 1 Pet 2:13–17, are not the exclusive concern they are for Rom 13:1–7. While Paul deals exclusively with such activity in Romans, the author of 1 Peter begins by treating emperor and governors as subsets of the class κτίσις ἀνθρώπινη (‘human creature,’ 2:13), and concludes with advice on the Christian’s relationship to all people, to fellow Christians, and to God, in addition to the emperor (2:17).

“It is therefore apparent that while there is similar vocabulary in the two passages, the use to which that vocabulary is put is quite different, and those elements in each passage for which the other has no parallel point the respective passages in different directions,

I. Context and Background²

Understanding the historical and literary background is important for this passage, since the political atmosphere behind Peter's words is very different than what most believers in the modern world experience. Only believers living in oppressive governmental situations in our world where Christianity is not tolerated have a clear sense of the significance of what Peter admonished believers in his day to do.

a. Historical

External History. The history of the copying of this passage reflects a high level of stability for the text. This is signaled first by the absence of any variant readings in the text apparatus of the UBS 4th rev. edition of the Greek New Testament. In the Nestle-Aland 27th rev. edition Greek New Testament, a few variations of wording are listed in the apparatus, which again are mostly stylistic in nature. First, in verse 13, some late manuscripts add οὖν, “therefore,” as the second word of the sentence in order to tie vv. 13-17 back to vv. 11-12 as an implication now being expressed directly. The great majority of early and important manuscripts do not include this conjunction. Several very late manuscripts add μὲν to the contrast in v. 14 between ἐκδίκησιν, “punishment,” and ἔπαινον, “praise.” This grammatical device simply heightens the contrast that is already implied in the conjunction δὲ. But again the early and significant manuscripts do not contain the μὲν. In verse 16, a few copyists were uncomfortable with the phrase θεοῦ δοῦλοι, “slaves of God,” and in its place substituted θεοῦ φιλοί, “friends of God.” But the overwhelming weight of evidence favors θεοῦ δοῦλοι. In verse 17, some confusion over the tense of the imperative verb to love surfaces. Was it present or Aorist tense? That is, is the command to ‘be loving’ or just ‘love’? The verse contains four imperative verbs: τιμήσατε (‘honor’, Aorist), ἀγαπᾶτε (present, ‘be loving’), φοβεῖσθε (present, ‘be fearing’), and τιμᾶτε (present, ‘be honoring’). Evidently their intent was to divide out the four verbs equally between the Aorist and present tense imperative forms, but in so doing they missed the implicit structure in these four verbs with the ‘header’ command coming first as an Aorist imperative, then followed by three ongoing responsibilities (present tense verbs) flowing out of the broad ‘header’ command. We will look at this further in the exegesis section below.

Once more our examination of the copying of this passage over the first eight centuries reveals a high degree of stability for this passage. No major variation in reading occurs, and the very minor variations represent attempts to polish the writing style of Silas.

Internal History. The time and place markers inside verses 13-17 are limited to broad indirect historical allusions. The responsibilities of the believing communities in Anatolia were centered on the government officials in place both in Rome and also in the five specific Roman provinces mentioned in 1:1, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. We know from detailed Roman records that Nero was the emperor from 54 to 68 AD in Rome. The various provinces, as reflected in the map, were controlled either by the emperor (green) or by the Roman senate (brown), and thus had different statuses in the empire. In the late 50s to mid 60s, this region, known also as Anatolia, was securely under Roman control, but a diverse mixture of Roman military officers, local rulers etc. administered the polices of the empire locally. With huge differences in culture, history, population demographics etc. governmental



the most striking of which is that the insistence in Romans 13 that rulers bear divine authority is totally absent in 1 Peter 2.25 The passages are thus quite different,²⁶ and to attempt to find the same point in both because of a superficial similarity of language is to overlook the very different point each passage seeks to make.²⁷ The increasing importance of the emperor cult,²⁸ particularly in Asia Minor, by the time 1 Peter was written, and the different destinations to which Romans and 1 Peter were addressed, are probably to be understood as the reasons for the different emphases in the two letters.” [Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter; Hermeneia—a critical and historical commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996), 180-82.]

²Serious study of the Bible requires careful analysis of the background and setting of the scripture passage. Failure to do this leads to interpretive garbage and possibly to heresy. Detailed study of the background doesn't always answer all the questions, but it certainly gets us further along toward correct understanding of both the historical and contemporary meanings of a text. This serious examination of both the historical and literary background of every passage will be presented in summary form with each of the studies.

authority ranged from a relatively ‘hands off’ approach all the way to rigid control by Rome. Governors and other regional leaders were continually in flux with their positions always dependent on the whims of either the emperor or the senate. The one constant was the presence of Roman soldiers throughout the region. Thus believers in these provinces, along with their neighbors, had to adjust to a constantly shifting expression of imperial authority over their lives. The eastern most province of Cappadocia was the most sparsely settled area and frequently served as a frontier buffer between the Romans and the Parthians to the east.

b. Literary

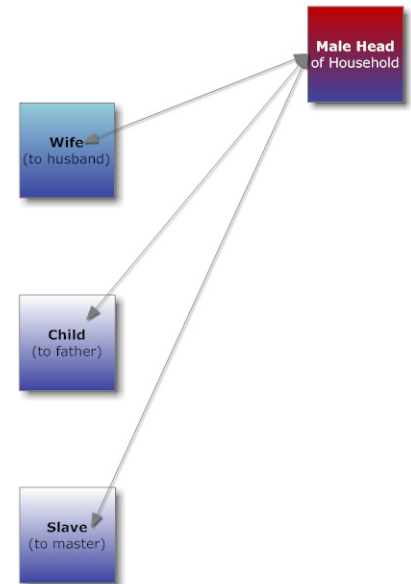
Literary Form (Genre). At the broad genre level, 2:13-17 continues the emphasis of the letter body, and in particular the emphasis begun in 11-12 on relationships to ‘outsiders.’ At the narrow genre level, considerable discussion centers around whether this material, 2:13-3:7, stands as a unit and constitutes Peter’s version of the ‘family code,’ often labeled *Haustafeln* from Luther’s heading. If this material is to stand together, then 13-17 must be understood as the ‘introduction’ to it, because the very well defined structure of the family code in Col. 3:18-4:1 and Eph. 5:21-6:9 is not found here in First Peter.³ In Paul, the *Haustafeln* involved three sets of relationships in the ancient family: *husband to wife; father to children; and master to slave*. Only the first and last of these are touched upon in First Peter: 2:18-25 (slaves/ masters) and 3:1-7 (wives/husbands). And Peter addresses these two pairs of relationships from a very different angle than does Paul.

My personal assessment of this is that 2:13-17 is better taken as a broader ‘community code,’ i.e., *Gemeinde Tafeln*, that is closely related to the Family Code but stands distinct from it. Romans 13:1-8 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 stand as two primary examples with an emphasis upon responsibility of the Christian community to outsiders, and to government authorities in particular. In First Peter the broader community code begins the discussion which then narrows down to the family code in 2:18-3:7. This close linking of the two areas of responsibilities stands as the basis for the continued dominate emphasis in the family code on the believer to the outsider: Christian slaves to non-Christian masters and Christian wives to non-Christian husbands. Even the grammar patterns will reflect this close relationship.

Literary Context. As the outline to the right illustrates, the literary setting for 2:13-17 is clear. First, it continues an emphasis begun in 2:11-12, where abstaining from fleshly desires was seen as a key strategy for defending believers from pagan criticism of their religious commitments. The noble standard of living to be followed by believers is made real by the “honorable deeds” (τῶν καλῶν ἔργων) that pagan neighbors observe in the living of the believers. This will stand as a witness not to the accomplishments of the believers but rather to the power of God at work in the lives of believers.

But what are noble deeds? Verses 13-17 lays out on the table several of these, with the dominant stress on how believers relate to the governmental authorities. Their acceptance of governmental authority stands them apart from their neighbors who complained about the government and especially those who agitated for rebellion against Roman authority. In no way could Christians be perceived

Ancient Family: Haustafeln Ephesians, Colossians, First Peter



Outline of Contents in First Peter:

Praescriptio: 1:1-2

- *Superscriptio*, 1:1a
- *Adscriptio*, 1:1b-2a
- *Salutatio*, 1:2b

Proem: 1:3-12

- *Core*, 1:3a
- *Expansion*, 1:3b-12

Body: 1:13-5:11

- *Holy living* 1:13-2:10
 - *Ideals* 1:13-25
 - *Privileges* 2:1-10
- *Obligations* 2:11-3:12
 - *Civic* 2:11-17
 - *Haustafeln* 2:18-3:7
 - *Social* 3:8-12
- *Persecution* 3:13-5:11
 - *Encouragement* 3:13-4:11
 - *Explanation* 4:12-19
 - *Proper Conduct* 5:1-11

Conclusio: 5:12-14

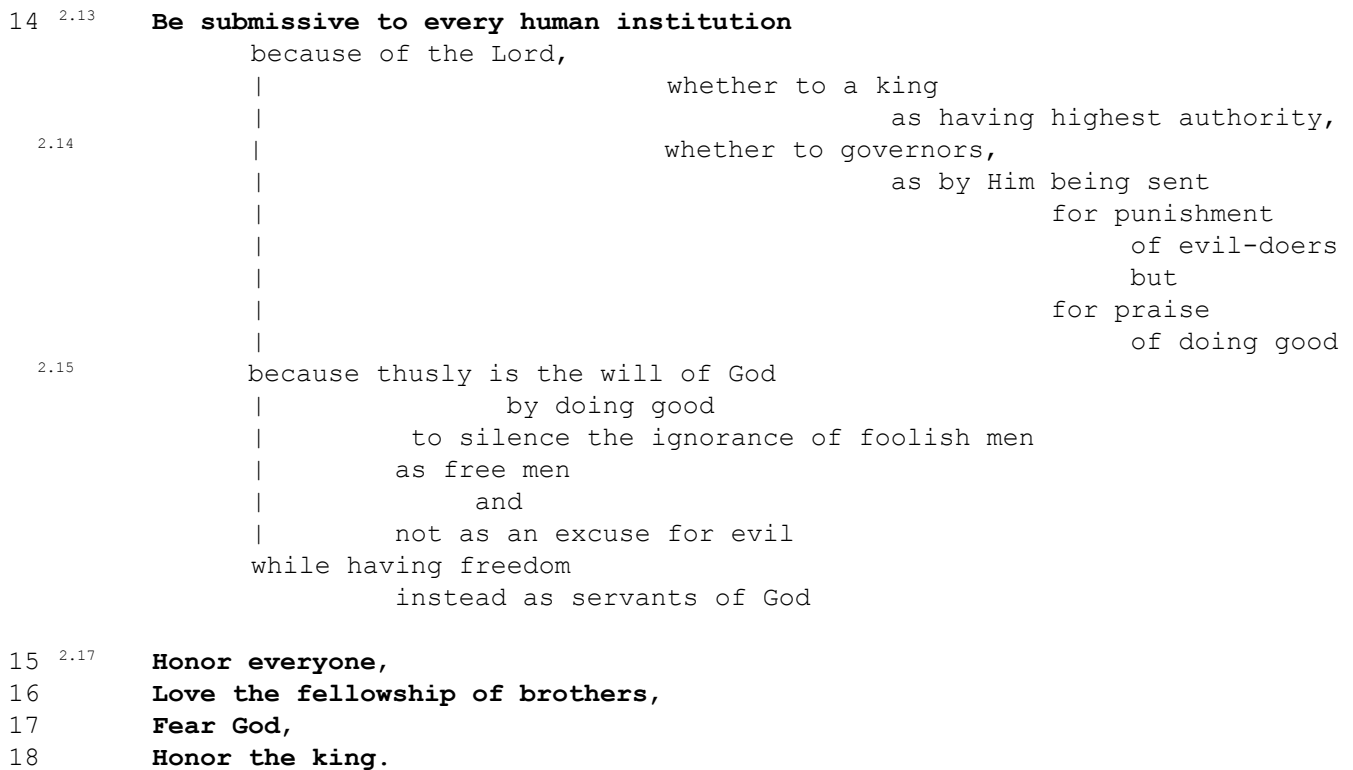
- *Sender Verification*, 5:12
- *Greetings*, 5:13-14a
- *Benedictio*, 5:14b

³The background of the *Haustafeln* surface in the Greco-Roman and Jewish backgrounds, as Michaels notes: “Many parallels have been cited in Greek and Latin literature, but the most convincing ones are those from the Hellenistic Judaism of the NT period (e.g., Philo, Decal. 165–67; Hyp 7.14; Philo, Spec. Leg. 2.226–27; Josephus, C. Apion 190–219; Pseudo-Phocylides, Maxims 175–227).” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 122.]

legitimately as agitators against Rome fomenting civil unrest among the population.

The listing of these 'noble deeds' will continue in the Family Code emphasis for Christian slaves to serve their human masters with honesty and integrity and thus distinguish themselves from the non-Christian slaves. A similar emphasis comes to the wife to live a godly life before her non-Christian husband as the key way to win him over to faith in Christ. This elaboration of specific 'noble deeds' concludes with 3:8-12. In this section, Peter is especially concerned that the believing community exhibit to the outside world that Christ calls humanity to live by much higher standards that make for peaceful relationships and rich life experiences. The impact of such examples upon non-believers will be significant and will be a major avenue by which God can bring them to faith commitment to Christ. Thus, 2:13-17 begins the elaboration of specific examples of 'noble deeds' alluded to in 2:11-12.

Literary Structure. The block diagram below visually highlights the primary ideas with their expansion elements.



The passage clearly divides itself into two sections: statement 14 and statements 15-18. The first admonition is broad and calls for acknowledgement of the authority of governmental leaders, including both the emperor and regional governors. Two religious oriented reasons are given, the first one general (διὰ) and the second one more specific (ὅτι). The second section, #s 15-18, come as a rapid first set of admonitions with a header introduction (#15) and three specific admonitions (#s 16-18) flowing out of the first admonition.

This twofold structure of the passage will provide the organizing structure of our study of the text.

II. Message

Many Christians in today's world seldom give much consideration to responsibilities to 'outsiders.' Especially is this so in the Americas and Europe where Christianity is the dominate religion of these cultures. But where Christianity is only a minority group, and especially a very small minority, the responsibilities of believers to their non-Christian neighbors takes on significant meaning. Peter makes it very clear that all believers have duties to the outside world. And starting in this passage he lays down a number of those responsibilities.

a. Acknowledge human authority, vv. 13-16.

13 For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme,

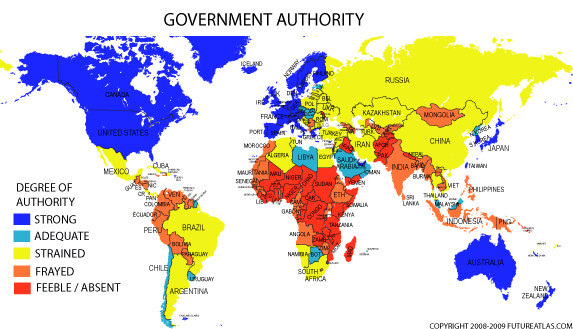
14 or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. 15 For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. 16 As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil.

13 Ὑποτάγητε πάσῃ ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει διὰ τὸν κύριον· εἴτε βασιλεῖ ὡς ὑπερέχοντι, 14 εἴτε ἡγεμόσιν ὡς δι' αὐτοῦ πεμπομένοις εἰς ἐκδίκησιν κακοποιῶν ἔπαινον δὲ ἀγαθοποιῶν 15 (ὅτι οὕτως ἐστὶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀγαθοποιοῦντας φιμοῦν τὴν τῶν ἀφρόνων ἀνθρώπων ἀγνωσίαν)· 16 ὡς ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ μὴ ὡς ἐπικάλυμμα ἔχοντες τῆς κακίας τὴν ἐλευθερίαν, ἀλλ' ὡς θεοῦ δοῦλοι.

Notes:

No English translation can begin to do justice to this long, complex Greek sentence. The English language is just not built to express ideas like ancient Greek could. Consequently no English translation fully captures the meaning of the Greek sentence.

The heart of the sentence (= the main clause) is simple: Ὑποτάγητε πάσῃ ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει διὰ τὸν κύριον, “Be subject to every human institution for the Lord’s sake.” The core idea is Ὑποτάγητε.⁴ The Aorist im-



⁴“Be subordinate (hypotagēte). This is the first of six occurrences of the verb *hypotassō* (2:13, 18; 3:1, 5, 22; 5:5), a term of thematic significance throughout 1 Peter. The verb is a compound of the preposition *hypo-* (sub-, “under”) and the verb *tassō* (‘order,’ ‘place,’ ‘station’), which in turn is a derivative of the Greek noun for ‘order’ (*taxis*; cf. *tagma*, ‘that which has been ordered’). It occurs 31 times in the LXX and 38 times in the NT, especially in contexts of moral instruction.⁹² In profane Greek literature, by contrast, it occurs relatively less frequently and more often in reference to political or military subjection than to moral subordination (Kamlaḥ 1970, 238–39). The LXX employs no less than 45 terms of the *tassō* family and the NT, 21. The verb *hypotassō* (including the middle *hypotassomai*, ‘subordinate oneself to’) and its related noun *hypotagē* (‘subordination’), like *taxis* and *tagma*, presume a concept and standard of natural and social order prevalent throughout the Greco-Roman world. This cosmic and social order, it was held, generated reciprocal relationships in which one or more parties occupies a superior social position and the other, an inferior position.

“The societies of the Greco-Roman period were greatly concerned with the establishment and maintenance of ‘order’ (*taxis*) in all areas of public and private life as a replication of an ordered universe (*kosmos*). The social structure and stratification of society were perceived as manifestations of an order ordained by nature. Superordination and subordination involved the acting out of statuses and roles determined by one’s assigned place in the stratified social order. Focus on subordination is a typical feature of collectivist, group-oriented societies such as those of the ancient Circum-Mediterranean (Malina 1992, 1994, summarizing the anthropological research on this issue). In contrast to modern individualist-oriented societies, where the individual is perceived to be in control of and responsible for his/her destiny, members of collectivist societies saw themselves as under the control of superordinate powers such as God or the gods, angels and demons, the emperor and his representatives, local kings and other elites, the local military, the well born, older relatives, parents, and the like. Appropriate and honorable behavior was measured by the manner in which one conducted oneself according to one’s allotted rank in the social order.

“At the apex of the Roman social order stood the emperor and his retinue. Below the imperial house was the ‘order’ (Latin, *ordo*) of senators, then the equestrians and lesser nobility, then the order of local provincial decurions. From these elites, who constituted from 3% to 5% of the population, was distinguished the remainder of the population, the lower class, ranked in the descending order of urban and rural free plebians (*eleutheroi*, *liberi*), freed persons (*apeleutheroi*, *liberti*), slaves (*douloi*, *servi*), the destitute (*ptōchoi*), and finally the aliens (*xenoi*, *alieni*) at the very bottom of the pecking order. Within the household, the microcosm of the state, beneath the male heads of the household in their roles as husbands, fathers, and masters/owners, were subordinated the wives, children, and slaves, respectively. The subordination of children to their parents (male and female) and of younger persons to their elders (male and female) rounded out the general picture.⁹³

“It was this structure of social order, in turn, that established the ‘playing field’ according to which the ‘game’ or script of honor and shame was ‘played.’ To behave honorably was to conduct oneself in accord with one’s social station and given roles.⁹⁴ To behave shamefully was to attempt to rise above one’s allotted position or to withhold the respect that was due one’s superiors. In his discussion of social duties, Cicero (Off. 2.22–23) lists various motives by which people are led to submit to the power and authority of others, including good will, gratitude, another’s eminence, hope for gain, fear of coercion, and love.

“When the verb *hypotassō* and noun *hypotagē* are used in ethical contexts, they denote recognition of and respect for authority and order, which involve submission, deference to, subjection to, and obedience to superiors, namely God and humans in positions of recognized authority. It is primarily a concept of ‘order’ (*taxis*) that is basic to these terms. This is evident in the Greek (*tass-*, *tag-*) but not always in their modern translations. Since the term ‘subordinate’ conveys in English a sense of the ‘order’ implicit in the Greek verb *hypotassō*, it is therefore preferable in all instances (1 Pet 2:13, 18; 3:1, 5, 22; 5:5) to translations such as ‘be subject’ (RSV, NAB), ‘subject’ or ‘submit yourselves’ (KJV, NEB, Goppelt), ‘accept the authority of’ (NRSV), or ‘defer’ (Michaels). Consistency in English should also reflect that of the Greek, in contrast to the NAB, which prefers ‘be subordinate’ at 3:1 but ‘be subject’ elsewhere.”

[John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, Bible Study: Page 6

perative verb calls upon believers to acknowledge deliberately the rightful authority of certain individuals in society. Who that is, Peter defines as πάση ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει, which is very difficult to translate accurately into English.⁵ The term κτίσει is personal and not abstract. Against the backdrop of NT usage of the term, as well as the specification of the emperor and governors that follows, Peter clearly admonishes recognition of the legitimate authority of governmental leaders, but not as ‘gods’ (which was a tendency especially in Anatolia) and only as human beings created by God and accountable to God for the conduct of their authority over others. This is clearly implied in the phrase πάση ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει, ‘every human authority.’

With somewhat different words, Paul advocates a similar stance in Rom. 13:1a, Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω (“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities...”). Again the focus is personal, and not institutional. When Paul and Peter expressed these ideas, Nero was the emperor and they both had him in view, not the institution of the emperorship, or merely the abstract concept of the Roman government in mind. And Nero was the ruler who ultimately had them executed! Believers are not called upon to merely accept the legitimacy of governmental authority. Instead, they are admonished to acknowledge the legitimate authority of individual rulers.

The basis for this acknowledgement is given by Peter as διὰ τὸν κύριον, “because of the Lord.” With a similar concept but with much greater detail Paul says (Rom. 13:1b-2), οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ θεοῦ, αἱ δὲ οὖσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσὶν. ὥστε ὁ ἀντιπασσόμενος τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῇ ἀνθέστηκεν, οἱ δὲ ἀνθεστηκότες ἑαυτοῖς κρίμα λήμψονται. (“for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”) After elaborating on this some, Paul repeats the essence of this reason in 13:5: διὸ ἀνάγκη ὑποτάσσεσθαι, οὐ μόνον διὰ τὴν ὀργὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τὴν συνειδήσιν (“therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience.”). Rejection of civil authority will bring punishment down upon such a person, as Paul indicates in vv. 3-4. Additionally, Paul goes on to say that such acknowledgment of legitimate authority by government leaders means pragmatically to pay the taxes owed to them (Rom. 13:6-7): 6 διὰ τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ φόρους τελεῖτε, λειτουργοὶ γὰρ θεοῦ εἰσιν εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο προσκαρτεροῦντες. 7 ἀπόδοτε πᾶσι τὰς ὀφειλάς, τῷ τὸν φόρον τὸν φόρον, τῷ τὸ τέλος τὸ τέλος, τῷ τὸν φόβον τὸν φόβον, τῷ τὴν τιμὴν τὴν τιμὴν. (“6 For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, busy with this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.”). Both Peter and Paul have a common view that such acknowledgement of legitimate authority is not theoretical, but is functional and concrete.

Details of acknowledgement. In the expansion of the core admonition in vv. 13b-14, Peter makes very clear his intentions: “whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right.” (εἴτε βασιλεῖ ὡς ὑπερέχοντι, 14 εἴτε ἡγεμόσιν ὡς δι’ αὐτοῦ πεμπομένοις εἰς ἐκδίκησιν κακοποιῶν ἔπαινον δὲ ἀγαθοποιῶν) In clarifying what he means by πάση ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει, he specifies two governmental leaders, βασιλεῖ (emperor) and ἡγεμόσιν (governors).⁷ The emperor is defined

2008), 486-87.]

⁵“to every human creature (*pasēi anthrōpinēi ktisei*). The expression is without parallel in secular as well as Biblical Greek and poses questions regarding both translation and meaning. The rendition of *ktisis* as ‘institution’ (RSV, NRSV, NEB, Selwyn) is inappropriate, for the abstraction ‘institution’ is a modern rather than an ancient concept. In secular Greek as a *nomen actionis*, it can denote the ‘founding’ of a city (Strabo, Geogr. 12.4.8); in the biblical literature it is used of the act of divine creation (Rom 1:20; Pss. Sol. 8:7; cf. Josephus, J.W. 4.533) or the result of the creative act: individual persons or things created, ‘creature’ (Tob 5:8, 15; Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 5:17; Heb 4:14), or the sum of everything created, ‘creation’ (Mark 10:6, 13:19; 2 Pet 3:4; Barn. 15:3). Here in 1 Peter, its reference to persons rather than ‘institution’ is clear from the qualifying words that follow, ‘whether to the emperor ... or to governors’; see also 2:18; 3:1, 5; and 5:5a, where subordination is to human persons and not ‘institutions’ (so Teichert 1949; Goppelt 1993, 182; and against Gielen 1990, 396–400, who favors institutionalized ‘order’). The rendition ‘creature,’ moreover, is consistent with the identification of God as ‘creator’ (*ktistēs*) in 4:19. In connection with emperor and governors, human creature has a particular salience. With this expression, imperial power is subtly but decisively demystified, desacralized, and relativized (Goldstein 1973, 92). In contrast to devotees of the imperial cult who render obeisance to the emperor as ‘Lord and God’ (*dominus et deus*, a title claimed by Domitian [Suet., Dom. 13.2]), Christians respect the emperor and his representatives only as human creatures, due only the deference owed to all human beings (stressed again in v 17). Ultimate supremacy is reserved for God the creator, and it is ‘because of him, the Lord,’ that Christians are subordinate (Schelkle 1976, 73; Gielen 1990, 401–2).” [John H. Elliott, 1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 489.]

⁶The Greek term Καῖσαρ (Caesar) is not used here because it has the nature of a title derived from a personal name, and thus would not have been a natural term for Peter’s meaning.

⁷“εἴτε βασιλεῖ ὡς ὑπερέχοντι, ‘whether to the emperor as sovereign.’ The transition from ‘every human creature’ to the Roman emperor in particular seems abrupt. The emperor was obviously not typical of the general populace with whom readers of the epistle

ὡς ὑπερέχοντι, as having highest authority,⁸ and this was clearly the case in Peter's day. Also ἡγεμόσιν are specified, which indicates Roman governors in 19 of the 20 uses in the New Testament, especially when distinguished from a βασιλεύς. These rulers over the provinces indicated in 1:1 would have been closer to the readers in terms of interaction and contact.

Thus Peter characterizes them ὡς δι' αὐτοῦ πεμπομένοις εἰς ἐκδίκησιν κακοποιῶν ἔπαινον δὲ ἀγαθοποιῶν ("as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right."). Here Peter echoes the words of Paul in Rom. 13:3-4, "3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; 4 for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer." (3 οἱ γὰρ ἄρχοντες οὐκ εἰσὶν φόβος τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἔργῳ ἀλλὰ τῷ κακῷ. θέλεις δὲ μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν; τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποιεῖ, καὶ ἔξεις ἔπαινον ἐξ αὐτῆς· 4 θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν. ἐὰν δὲ τὸ κακὸν ποιῇς, φοβοῦ· οὐ γὰρ εἰκὴ τὴν μάχαιραν φορεῖ· θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν, ἔδικος εἰς ὀργὴν τῷ τὸ κακὸν πράσσοντι.) Both Peter and Paul agree that the core divine assignment to government authorities is to maintain law and order and to promote the welfare of the people they rule over. Clearly, not every governmental authority either then or now follows this mandate. But the apostles' position is that they are accountable to God who will exact severe punishment on them for stepping outside this mandate.

The mentioning of doing good prompts Peter to inject a related idea in verse 15: ὅτι οὕτως ἐστὶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀγαθοποιοῦντας φιμοῦν τὴν τῶν ἀφρόνων ἀνθρώπων ἀγνωσίαν. ("For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish.") Acknowledging the authority of governmental leaders could also be accomplished by doing good, since it would erase any legitimacy for the authorities punishing believers. Were they to come down on believers, it would reflect their ignorance of the religious commitment of believers, who posed no direct threat to their authority and to the contrary acknowledged this authority as derived from their own God. Peter defines such a stance as τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ (the will of God).

In verse 16, Peter picks up the sentence of 13-14 again with a reminder to believers: ὡς ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ μὴ ὡς ἐπικάλυμμα ἔχοντες τῆς κακίας τὴν ἐλευθερίαν, ἀλλ' ὡς θεοῦ δοῦλοι ("those who do right...as free people, and not as those using freedom as a pretext for doing evil, but as God's servants").⁹ Peter affirms the spiritual liberation of believers (ἐλεύθεροι) meaning that in Christ they are free to serve God and only God. But such freedom

would come in contact. The same transition occurs in 1 Tim 2:1-2, where it is a matter of intercessory prayer:

I urge (παρκαῶ) first of all, therefore, that petitions, prayers, entreaties, and thanks be made for all people (ὕπὲρ πάντων ἀνθρώπων)—for kings and all who are in authority... and—in reverse order—in Titus 3:1-2

Remind them to deter to rulers and authorities and to comply with them, to be ready for every good work, to slander no one, to be peaceable and cooperative, demonstrating humility toward all people (πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους)

"Paul makes a similar transition in Romans 12-13 where the command to defer to ruling authorities (13:1-6) is framed by the more general social obligations, whether to fellow citizens (πάντες ἄνθρωποι, 12:16-17) or fellow believers (ἀλλήλους, 12:10, 16, 13:8)."

[J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 124-25.]

⁸Of the 3 meanings given in BDAG, #2 is appropriate here for ὑπερέχω: "2 fig. **to be in a controlling position, have power over, be in authority (over), be highly placed** (οἱ ὑπερέχοντες='those in authority', 'superiors' Polyb. 28, 4, 9; 30, 4, 1 7; Herodian 4, 9, 2; Artem. 2, 9 p. 92, 17 H. [p. 109, 25 P.]; 2, 12 p. 102, 4 H. [p. 121, 21 P.]; PGM 4, 2169; of kings Wsd 6:5) βασιλεῖ ὡς ὑπερέχοντι **1 Pt 2:13**. ἐξουσίαι ὑπερέχουσαι governing authorities (Syntipas p. 127, 4) **Ro 13:1**. οἱ ὑπερέχοντες those who are in high position (cp. Epict. 3, 4, 3; Diog. L. 6, 78; Philo, Agr. 121) B 21:2, those who are better off (economically) Hv 3, 9, 5. λαὸς λαοῦ ὑπερέξει one people shall rule over the other B 13:2 (Gen 25:23)." [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1033.]

⁹"The use of the nominative instead of the accusative (which would have agreed with the preceding ἀγαθοποιοῦντας and the implied ὑμᾶς) links this verse with the imperatives that dominate vv 13-17—either the ὑποτάγητε of v 13 or the series of four imperatives in v 17—and thus tends to confirm the parenthetical character of v 15. The tendency of most commentators is to link the sentence with ὑποτάγητε (e.g., Hort, 145; Selwyn, 173; Kelly, 111; Goppelt, 187; Brox, 122). Such a link is difficult to express in translation: Kelly's 'Live as free men' (107) virtually makes a new beginning, while Goppelt's '(Tut dies) als die Freien' (180) links the sentence more to v 15 than v 13. Once it is recognized that the four imperatives of v 17 resume and expand on the single imperative of v 13, a better alternative presents itself. The connection of v 16 with the ὑποτάγητε of v 13 is most easily maintained not by suppressing its connection with v 17 but precisely by emphasizing it: 'As those who are free ... yet as God's slaves, show respect for everyone...' [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 128.]

does not provide any justification¹⁰ for evil actions (τῆς κακίας).¹¹ Their commitment to God as His slaves (θεοῦ δοῦλοι) mandates that they follow His directives, which includes doing good and acknowledging the authority of civic leaders.

This emphasis comes back to Peter's general admonition in verse 12: "Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge." His deep concern was that the believers would function as good witnesses of their Christian faith to the governmental authorities. By their lives filled with good actions reflecting acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the governmental leaders' authority, not only these authorities but their pagan neighbors in general would sense that Christianity offered something not found in any other religious tradition. Hopefully some of them would then be attracted to this new religious movement.

One other word needs to be said about Paul's admonition in 1 Timothy 2:1-6¹² and Titus 3:1-2¹³ since they touch on this theme as well. To Titus, Paul urged that he admonish the Cretans "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,..." (Υπομίμνησκε αὐτοὺς ἀρχαῖς ἐξουσίαις ὑποτάσσεσθαι πειθαρχεῖν, πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐτοίμους εἶναι, 2 μηδὲνα βλασφημεῖν, ἀμάχους εἶναι, ἐπιεικεῖς, πᾶσαν ἐνδεικνυμένουςπραῦτητα πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους.) This is entirely consistent with his words to the Romans and to Peter's words in our text. To Timothy, Paul urged him to encourage the Ephesians "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity." (Παρακαλῶ οὖν πρῶτον πάντων ποιεῖσθαι δεήσεις, προσευχάς, ἐντεύξεις, εὐχαριστίας, ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀνθρώπων, 2 ὑπὲρ βασιλέων καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐν ὑπεροχῇ ὄντων, ἵνα ἡρεμον καὶ ἡσύχιον βίον διάγωμεν ἐν πάσῃ εὐσεβείᾳ καὶ σεμνότητι.) The emphasis here is for believers to employ all kinds of prayer to God in behalf of governmental leaders. The goal is so that these leaders will allow believers to live "a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity." This will enable them to do good day by day without harassment from these authorities.

How can we apply this admonition of Peter to our world? At first glance seem easy to apply; every believer today should acknowledge the legitimate authority of the government in the country where he/she lives. This sounds nice, but how should it work in real life? The situation is far more complex than one might assume. These words of Peter, and of Paul, were written in a society that had well designed structures of society with assumed 'stations' of life for every person. This perspective functioned in the context of a collective society, where the individual possessed no inherent rights or value apart from connection to the community. Western idealism with its emphasis upon inherent value and rights for every person is almost completely opposite in its thinking to the ancient world. In modern culture, authority begins with the individual and extends out to society that is given authority through its governing institutions for the welfare of individuals. This is the exact opposite of the world of the New Testament! Authority was a 'top down' process where aristocratic segments of society possessed all authority -- often under the assumption of divine mandate -- and they extended either authority and/or freedom to differing segments of society considered to be inferior to them.

Peter and Paul call upon believers to acknowledge this authority of the upper levels of society, and then to live out their lives within the framework of that ancient model of human authority. We, however, live in a world

¹⁰“ἐπικάλυμμα, lit., ‘covering,’ is used here metaphorically in relation to evil or misconduct (κακία; cf. Menander, Fragments 84 [90], ed. A. Koerte [Leipzig, 1953], 2:41: ἐπικάλυμ’ ἐστὶ κακῶν). The expression could refer either to something before the fact (i.e., an excuse or pretext for evil) or after the fact (i.e., a cover-up). The context supports the former; Peter’s assumption is that his readers have put aside the κακία of their past life (cf. 2:1), and his concern is that they not take it up again.” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 129.]

¹¹“Peter has in mind not political or social freedom (which for household servants [2:18–25] and wives [3:1–6] was limited at best), but freedom in Christ from the ‘ignorance’ (1:14) or ‘darkness’ (2:9) of paganism. The freedom of the epistle’s readers was the result of being ‘redeemed’ (ἐλωτρώθητε, 1:18) with the blood of Christ. For Peter, as for Paul, this freedom is part of a paradox. Christians are free from all that bound them in the past, but at the same time they are slaves of God committed to full and unqualified obedience (cf. Rom 6:18, 22).” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 128.]

¹²“1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. 3 This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, 6 who gave himself a ransom for all —this was attested at the right time.”

¹³“1 Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, 2 to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone.”

that rejected this model with the Enlightenment and the democratic revolutions beginning in the 1700s. The possession of authority was flipped on its head and replaced by the individual who then in community agrees to grant authority to elected individuals so that they can govern society. The previous 'divine right to rule' by kings that dominated Europe until the Enlightenment was totally rejected. The individual retains the ultimate right to take away governing authority from those who do not rule within established law. Systems of checks and balances have been put in place by different countries in order to guarantee this ultimate authority of the individual.

In theory, it should be easier to apply these biblical principles of acknowledging the authority of governmental leaders in our day. But in reality, it was easier in the apostles' day than in ours. Western democratic societies based upon individual rights necessitate citizens, including believers, to be deeply involved in the governing processes. How to do that as Christians is not easy, as a quick survey of religious involvement in the political processes of different countries in Europe and the Americas will dramatically illustrate. Great wisdom and profound understanding are essential, or else, Christians make fools of themselves with dumb mistakes. The harm done to the credibility of the Gospel in the eyes of non-Christians is immense.

What Jesus, Peter, and Paul advocate as foundational is that believers accept the legitimate power of government leaders to govern, whether they do it well or badly. This works well even in modern western society as long as the values of the believers from God's Word don't collide with the values being advocated by these government leaders. When, on the other hand, these two sets of value do clash with one another, clearly the believer is obligated to remain true to his/her Christian values while being willing to suffer punishment from these government leaders. First Peter 3:8-22 will address this issue more directly. Early on in his service to Christ, Peter expressed the core principle well in Acts 5:29, "[We must obey God rather than any human authority.](#)"

The great caution here is to make sure that our Christian values are grounded in clearly expressed biblical principle. Often what parades itself as 'Christian value' is really nothing more than regional cultural values with little or no biblical basis whatsoever. For example, note the use of the Bible to justify slavery in the US until the American Civil War. Christian values often get mixed up with local cultural values while still being considered to be Christian. Then when they clash with the prevailing values of governing leaders, Christians falsely claim persecution. Much of what is going on in the US these days reflects this false perception of things. A US oriented civil religion is gradually replacing biblically based Christian values in issues like prayer in the schools etc. with disastrous consequences to the Gospel. When the government comes down hard on such, Christians falsely scream persecution and rejection of Christianity. But such is not the case.

One major difference between believers today and those in Peter's day is that we have the opportunity to modify or change not only who governs but also the way they can govern over us. Such an option to the first readers of this letter from Peter would not have even been considered imaginable. The only way to curb the abuses of governing authorities in that world was through brute force and violent rebellion. But the New Testament is abundantly clear that such action was not allowable to believers. Jesus, in His trial before Pilate, set the example of passive submission to abuse, and New Testament writers will use that as a model for believers to follow, as we will see in 1 Peter 2:20-25. This raises the issue of 'civil disobedience' and 'non-violent resistance' by believers to governmental abuses. But this topic is better treated in the subsequent texts in First Peter that come closer to how believers are to respond to injustices inflicted upon them.

To live in obedience to God's demand that we acknowledge the governing authority of our leaders today is quite challenging, and requires real wisdom and sensitivity to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

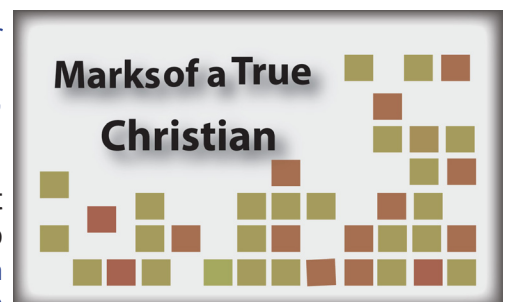
b. Honor everyone by certain actions, v. 17

17 Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

17 πάντας τιμήσατε, τὴν ἀδελφότητα ἀγαπᾶτε, τὸν θεὸν φοβεῖσθε, τὸν βασιλέα τιμᾶτε.

Notes:

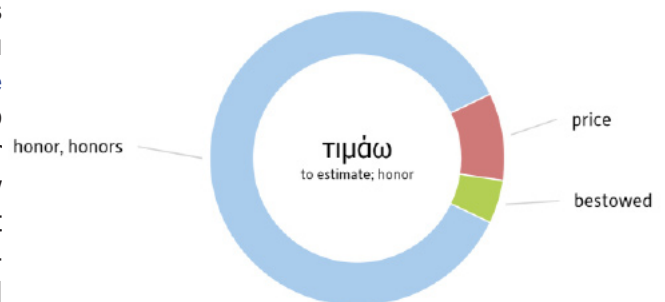
Just as Peter moves from the more specific admonition to a set of more general admonitions, so does the apostle Paul in his words to the Romans (13:7b-10): "[...respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.](#) 8 [Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one](#)



who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet’; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.” Paul built his general principles off the OT principle of loving one’s neighbor. Peter opted to issue a set of rapid fire admonitions covering a broad range of responsibilities.

Some points consistent to all four admonitions. *First*, the object of each admonition is placed before the verb. The limits of English will not allow such in a translation, but in the Greek this was done to highlight emphasis upon who is to be the object of Christian responsibility. Whom we honor, whom we love, whom we fear -- these are special points of emphasis in Peter’s words. *Secondly*, the first and fourth verbs are the same, from τιμάω. This sets up boundary markers, i.e., inclusia markers, holding these admonitions together as a unit expression. *Third*, the tense of the verbs is important, although obscured by translation. The first verb, τιμήσατε, is Aorist imperative, thus intensifying the thrust of the command. Given its inclusive object πάντας, ‘everyone,’ it functions as a ‘header’ admonition laying down a basic principle. The remaining three verbs, ἀγαπάτε, φοβεῖσθε, τιμάτε, are present imperative verbs. The significance of this is to emphasize that these three responsibilities grow out of the first ‘header’ admonition. And also the use of the present tense verb stresses ongoing responsibility, rather than a momentary obligation. *Fourth*, these admonitions, as reflected in the larger context of 2:11-3:7, emerge, in a general way, from the inclusive designation in 2:13 πάση ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει, “every human creature.”¹⁴ To acknowledge the authority of such individuals is expressed concretely in honoring, loving, reverencing. But one must not press this too far since the third admonition to fear God doesn’t easily fit this structure.

Honor everyone: πάντας τιμήσατε. Paul comes at this with slightly different words in Rom. 13:7: ἀπόδοτε πᾶσι τὰς ὀφειλάς,...τῷ τὴν τιμὴν τὴν τιμὴν (Give back honor to the one whom honor is due.). What is showing honor? The verb τιμάω is used some 21 times in the New Testament either with the meaning “to set a price on” something, or “to show high regard for someone”, which is more commonly how it is used in the NT.¹⁵ Both in attitude and actions we demonstrate respect and appreciation to the other individual when we ‘honor them.’¹⁶



Love the family of believers: τὴν ἀδελφότητα ἀγαπάτε. The second admonition, now in the present tense as an ongoing responsibility, relates to loving the τὴν ἀδελφότητα. Used only twice in the NT and only by Peter in this letter, the term refers to the communities of believers scattered in the provinces specified in 1:1 and in a broader setting in 5:9, τῇ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ὑμῶν ἀδελφότητι, ‘your family of believers in the world.’ It also

¹⁴Not every commentator agrees with this understanding, but in reading several alternative explanations, most of which made little sense and seemed very artificial, this seems to me to be the better understanding.

¹⁵“2. to show high regard for, honor, revere τινά someone God (X., Mem. 4, 3, 13; Diod S 6, 1, 4; 8 τοὺς θεοῦς; Strabo 16, 2, 35; Dio Chrys. 16 [33], 45; 58 [75], 8; Ael. Aristid. 13 p. 297 D.: πρὸ τῶν γονέων; freq. in honorific inscriptions, s. indexes in the various corpora, also New Docs 3, 37 no. 9, 3 [96/97 A.D.]; Is 29:13; EpArist 234; Philo; Jos., Ant. 9, 153; 256; Just., A I, 9, 1; Orig., C. Cels. 8, 56, 35) Mt 15:8; Mk 7:6; 1 Cl 15:2; 2 Cl 3:5; cp. 3:4.—J 5:23bd; 8:49 (Jesus honors his Father). Christ J 5:23ac. On GPt 3:9 s. τιμή 2a (cp. Just., A I, 6, 2; 13, 3). Parents (Ex 20:12; also Ar. 15, 4) Mt 15:4; 19:19; Mk 7:10; 10:19; Lk 18:20; Eph 6:2. Cp. Mt 15:6. Elders (older members of the community) 1 Cl 21:6. The supervisor (ἐπίσκοπος) ISm 9:1a. Teacher of the divine word D 4:1. Those who are really widows 1 Ti 5:3 (though the mng. of τιμή 3 may be influential here; cp. Sir 38:1). πάντας (JWilson, ET 54, 42/43, 193f), τὸν βασιλέα 1 Pt 2:17ab. (Opp. προσκυνέω Theoph. Ant. 1, 11 [p. 82, 5]). τ. πολλαῖς τιμαῖς (τιμή 2a) Ac 28:10; cp. GPt 3:9. Abs. Dg 5:15.—Of God (Soph., Fgm. 226 TGF ὃν τιμᾷ θεός; pass. 4 Macc 17:20) or Christ: (show) honor (to) or reward the Christians (so Isocr. 9, 42; X., An. 1, 9, 14; 5, 8, 25, Cyr. 3, 3, 6; Diod S 2, 3, 2 τιμᾶν δώροισι; 2, 6, 9; 14, 42, 1; 16, 13, 1; Ps.-Callisth. 2, 1, 2 τιμάω τινὰ χρυσῷ; pass. Hdt. 7, 213; Lys. 12, 64; 19, 18; Diod S 15, 74, 1.—On the rewarding of devout persons by God: Ps.-Aristot., Mund. 6, 23 τιμᾶν; Simplicius, In Epict. p. 79, 11 Düb. τιμᾶν κ. κολάζειν; Mel., P. 73, 535 ἡτίμησας τὸν τιμήσαντά σε) J 12:26; 1 Cl 59:3; IPHld 11:2; pass. ISm 9, 1b.—The officials of a congregation are called οἱ τετιμημένοι ὑμῶν (partitive gen.) the honorable men among you D 15:2 (οἱ τετιμημένοι of persons in high standing: X., Cyr. 8, 3, 9). For ἡ αὐτοῖς τετιμημένη λειτουργία 1 Cl 44:6 s. λειτουργία 1b.—DELG s.v. τιμή. M-M. EDNT. TW.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1004-05.]

¹⁶In Matthew 15:1-9 is a graphic illustration of phoney ‘honoring’ of parents that Jesus soundly condemns. The decalogue commandment to “Honor your father and mother” meant the concrete action of financially supporting them in their old age, although some in Jesus’ day had tried to find a loophole around this. Deeds cannot be separated from attitude!

repeats what Peter already encouraged in 1:22: “love one another deeply from the heart” (ἐκ καρδίας ἀλλήλους ἀγαπήσατε ἐκτενῶς).

Mutual love for fellow believers is a critical means of giving witness to the outside world of the difference that Christ makes, as Jesus declared in John 13:34-35: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Peter’s repetition of the command here, with different words, underscores this principle in his emphasis on Christian responsibility to outsiders in our text.

Fear God: τὸν θεὸν φοβεῖσθε. This admonition, also as an ongoing responsibility, repeats 1:17: “live in reverent fear during the time of your exile” (ἐν φόβῳ τὸν τῆς παροικίας ὑμῶν χρόνον ἀναστράφητε). Another clear signal to outsiders of Christian commitment is our stance toward God. If we treat Him casually or superficially, the outside world quickly senses that God is unimportant. But if genuine honoring of God is expressed by our reverence for Him in attitude and actions, the outside world realizes that God matters. Of course one place where this is most visible is in Christian worship. How we worship Him reflects whether or not we revere Him.

Honor the emperor: τὸν βασιλέα τιμᾶτε. Peter concludes where he began in verse 13 with believers showing proper respect for the emperor. The majority of them never saw Nero in person, and he never visited where they were living in Anatolia. But the local governors stood as his representatives and the believers did have some interaction with these men. Thus how they treated Nero’s representatives indicated whether or not they respected the emperor.

Wow! Peter has loaded up our spiritual plate heavily! We stand under heavy obligation to make sure our attitude, words, and actions about and toward governmental leaders are acceptable to God. For this to be true, these must stem from an acceptance of their authority to govern as God given. And this acceptance of their authority is reflected in concrete actions showing honor and respect. This responsibility also extends to fellow believers and to our God as well.

One application side note. I don’t read in any of these texts where a political campaign provides an exemption from these responsibilities. Seemingly in the political patterns emerging in western cultures, with the US perhaps being the worst example, the attitude is that political campaigning gives one an open door for every conceivable kind of denigration of character, the telling of outright lies, and a whole host of other character slandering words and actions. It will be an interesting day when believers who have engaged in this kind of sinful conduct are called upon by Almighty God to try to justify every word and deed done in these situations.