

## The Gospel & True Citizenship: Part 2

1 Peter 2:13-17

*“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”*

Jeremiah 29:7

**Introduction:** Tension. It can cause headaches in our body and brings stress in our marriages. But it can also keep bridges up and cause muscles to grow. Tension is a reality in a life that is between two worlds: **our life that is hidden in Christ** (Col. 3:3) and our **citizenship that is in heaven** (Phil. 3:20-21) on one hand and the life that we find ourselves living today, in the here and now. The one now is tough. Not only are we assaulted by the **sin soaked reality** of brokenness in us, but the whole system seems rigged *around us*. It is not getting better, our options seem limited, and our frustration grows. To top all of this off, we have never tasted of what is **better**, since we have to take that truth by faith, and faith is hard. *So how do we navigate this tension without getting a migraine or causing us too much anxiety?*

This is NOT the first time that God’s people have faced this kind of tension. Let’s look quickly at **Jeremiah 29** to get a little historical perspective. Most of you know a verse from Jeremiah 29, and most do not know the context in which is what written. We know, *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare (peace) and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”* Powerful words for sure, but temporal words they were not. When we hear these words, we interpret the application as something God was doing in the present, like hope was right around the corner (c’mon baby! Tomorrow’s the day!). But the reality is far deeper and more joyous than crossing fingers for peace tomorrow.

This section was written in 597 B.C, a date’s significant for the people of Israel who were taken captive to Babylon, a place they’d live and most would die after continually forsaking God through disobedience and taking matters into their own hands. Babylon had already deported some of Israel’s finest (including Daniel in 605 B.C), but it was beginning to get real for the people. They faced the prospect of being under the thumb of a foreign, wicked ruler, being moved away from their home country, and were going to live in one of the most pagan, cultic, idolatrous places the world has ever known. This was God’s people, the ones who were supposed to be and live differently, to be light to the nations, and be a people for God’s own possession! Now they were relegated to the whims of a foreign power and a ruthless dictator. ***How were they to live in this situation? Where was the hope?***

Jeremiah gives **2 profound** sources of hope that help us think through our situation today:

- 1) **They were to live & thrive in this new setting** - The counsel in verses 5-6: build homes, plant gardens, get married, have kids, have them get married, and continue to multiply in this foreign land (this was the original “bloom where you are planted” speech). But more than that, they were to **bless the people** in the cities they were planted in: *“But seek the welfare (peace) of the city where I have sent you into exile, and **pray to the LORD on its behalf**, for in its welfare (peace) you will find your welfare (peace).”* Jeremiah 29:7 This not only sounds eerily similar to 1 Tim. 2:1-2, but gave a blueprint to a people in tension for **how they were to function in the time of exile**. They were to live and thrive in God’s strength. They were still God’s people. They still had a mission. God still had a purpose.

- 2) **Hope was coming, even if those who heard about it wouldn't taste it** – In the verse preceding the “famous” verse, God declared that He would fulfill His promise (since He cannot lie) to bring His people back to Jerusalem, but that they would have to sojourn **70 years!** He would be with them in the short run and would fulfill promises in the long run, but the hope of things **getting better** would have to wait. We know that under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, God DID bring his people back, but it was not a smooth and easy transition that satisfied everyone's expectations. The group living in exile had to **live by faith and look forward in hope**, even if they did not taste of the final blessing.

This is similar to where we find ourselves in history. We are exiles in a growing pagan culture and we have hope of a future that will be profoundly better, but the time of that experience MAY be after our lifetime. So the question remains: *what do we do now? How do we live well? How does the Bible address our functional role in the here and now, particularly when it comes to our interaction with the government set over us? How do we think through the issues we face Biblically, especially as we head toward another election year?*

**We need to understand the PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT** (1 Pet. 2:13-14)

***Be subject*** for the Lord's sake to every **human institution**, whether it be to the **emperor** as supreme, 14 or to **governors** as sent by him to **punish** those who do evil and to **praise** those who do good.

### **Government is a Gift from God**

Since the Fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, sin has reigned on the earth and in the hearts of mankind. By Genesis 6 after generations began to multiply and fill the earth, the Lord saw the wickedness of man, how every intention of the thoughts of his heart were wicked continually (Gen. 6:5), and wiped the world's population out with a universal flood. To prevent absolute anarchy and a universal "*Lord of the Flies*" scenario, He graciously instituted government to bring order to percolating chaos. Because the work of the law is written on the hearts of man (Rom. 2:15), even the most corrupt of governments in the world are better than having no government at all.

### **Government is Guide from God**

Let every person **be subject** to the governing authorities. For there is **no authority except from God**, and those that *exist* **have been instituted by God**. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities 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**. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive **his approval**, 4 for he is **God's servant for your good**. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not **bear the sword in vain**. For he is the servant of God, an avenger **who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer**. 5 Therefore one must **be in subjection**, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. (Romans 13:1-5)

But what does government do (or what is it supposed to do)?

- **Restrains Evil** - It is a **terror** or literally "fear" for those who do what is inherently evil. "For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but bad". Because of the **sin nature of man**, there will ALWAYS be those who do evil. Utopia on this side of the eternal state is a myth, and since sin will always push the line of morality for personal gain at the peril and detriment of others, there must be a restraining force put into place.
- **Promotes Good** - Not only should it make those who commit evil works afraid, but it should "give approval to those who do what is good". Government is set up by God as a Servant of Him

to promote the thriving of communities, the well being of its citizens, and the overall good of those living under its authority.

- **Brings Punishment to lawbreakers** - The Bible teaches us that there are absolutes when it comes to good and evil. Every culture has standards of theft and murder since everyone knows that killing someone or taking his property is wrong. As God's servant, government has the right to **bear the sword** and **carry out God's wrath on the wrongdoer**. This is why we have both **laws and law enforcement officers**. In the OT, we see that those who did not obey God's law were subject to **death, banishment, the confiscation of goods or imprisonment** (Ezra 7:26). In the NT, we see the disciples willingness to go to prison when disobeying the authorities set over them. We also see Jesus placing Himself under the authority of the Romans to allow them the opportunity to exercise the death penalty over Him.

### What is our response to Government?

#### **Submission for the sake of the FEAR OF THE LORD**

This is undoubtedly difficult, and not the least bit complex. However, it is also a clear Biblical teaching that must be taken seriously and humbly. **Submit is a word that means to place oneself under the authority of another**. It was a military term that meant a soldier that ranked under another would be subject to the authority of the superior officer. It's used in the *passive imperative*, which not only denotes a **command** but also that **believers submit willingly and volitionally**.

We do this because we **fear the Lord**. We know that whoever is placed over us is placed there by God Himself, and rebellion against government is ultimately rebellion against God. **John MacArthur said** "*We are to obey every civil authority, no matter how immoral, cruel, ungodly, or incompetent he or she might be.*"<sup>1</sup> I was challenged this week that the reason we have not opened our doors on Sunday morning to worship inside was because of a hidden fear of repercussions from government. They were absolutely wrong and right at the same time. We don't fear anything our government can do to us, but we do **fear the Lord** who placed this government over us, and will walk in wisdom to obey Him by submitting to the government over us.

#### **Submission for the sake of CONSCIENCE**

Romans 13:5 is really important. We not only submit out of the Fear of the Lord, but out of **conscience**. This means that we must exercise discernment like the disciples in the first century. When they were told to cease proclaiming the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18, 5:28), they respectfully declined (Acts 5:29), knowing that at times our obedience to God trumps what government calls us to do. This is exactly the choice that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego chose in Daniel 2, and Daniel himself in Daniel 6. Christians throughout history have faced death, torture, imprisonment, and loss of property (Heb. 11:36-38) because they are willing to obey God rather than man. Whether it is to **deny Christ, stop translating the Bible into English, or go where Christianity is forbidden**, Christians have always been WILLING to obey God. But this also means we must exercise a great amount of wisdom in deciding when this is justified rather than preferential, that we still do it respectfully, and are willing to take all the consequences that surely will come.

***Takeaway for our time: Our job is to align our objectives, particularly in voting and political engagement, with the purposes which God gives to the government in Scripture.***

<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, "Why Government Can't Save You", p. 21.

As people who do have a say in who serves in our government and what laws of the land get passed, we must seek to be informed as to which of these BEST upholds the purpose of government and allows us to be at peace, living in a dignified, quiet, godly way (1 Tim. 2:1-2)

**We must comprehend the PRIVILEGE OF BELIEVERS in this world** (1 Pet. 2:15)

*For this is the will of God, **that by doing good** you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.*

Followers of Christ are marked by a different perspective of life since we have a different Savior and Lord, based on a deep belief in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross and the revelation of Scripture itself. But we are not merely known by **what we believe but how that belief translates into good works** (Eph. 2:8-10, especially verse 10!) We have a distinctive message that should absolutely be known by a distinctive morality, lifestyle, and hope. So in the midst of a terrible government situation, Peter not only calls for **submission, but also for PROACTIVE GOOD WORKS in the culture they were planted in.**

What was the motivation and purpose of this?

- **Fulfills the will of God**

Have you wondered what God's will is for us as individuals, families, and the church? We seek to do good in the community around us, not in a way to earn salvation or gain favor per se, but because we inherently value the people around us.

- **Demonstrates the integrity and character of new birth**

What does it mean to "silence the ignorance of foolish people"? Ignorance here is not a mere lack of knowledge, it means those who are hostile to the truth and senseless toward it. Truth divides, and the light of the truth is hated by the darkness (John 3:19), so it is imperative that we do not needlessly divide over **how we act in the world.**

- **Flows from the Grace of God** (Titus 2:11-12, 3:1-2)

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age*

*Remind them to be submissive 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 perfect courtesy toward all people.*

We live as people marked by **grace. Grace saved us, changed us, and moves us now.** Because we are ongoing products of grace, we should look at people, especially those who disagree and think differently, not as the enemy but rather as objects of grace. That should affect the way we speak (evil of no one), interact (avoid quarreling), treat others (gentleness), and disagree (perfect courtesy). We are always in need of grace, and grace is always available to us, since it is God who lavished it on us (Eph. 1:7-8).

- **Marks the perseverance of our faith** (Gal. 6:9-10)

And let us **not grow weary of doing good**, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup>So then, as we have opportunity, **let us do good to everyone**, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

We talked a few weeks ago that a mark of salvation is **perseverance or endurance**, since God is the One who saves and completes the work in us. We've observed how wearying the last 6+ months have been, and how we've felt in the midst. But we are compelled to continue to proactively **do good in our community**, especially now since everyone is feeling the tension of isolation and change.

**Takeaway for today:** What does this mean for our voting and political involvement? We should seek to do good in our community, State, and nation. That is what drives our decision making process. Take a critical issue like **abortion**. We know that the killing of the unborn violates God's moral law and rebellious against His creation and those made in His image. We do not want to sit idly by like Israel of old as they sacrificed their children to foreign gods (2 Chron. 28:3) and say or do nothing. In doing good for our community, we want to **vote and engage in a way** that upholds all life, especially those who face death so easily. We can disagree on many other issues (taxation, prison sentences, school vouchers, etc), and perhaps how to best vote for the protection of life, but we believers can agree that abortion is murder and violates God's law.

Now, in all of this, our **motives matter**. If we are voting this way not just out of **truth but also in light of doing good**, we are going to engage in **comforting those who've had abortions and live with the repercussions of it**, we should advocate for and consider **adoption of those in need of homes**, to involve ourselves in ministries like the **CPC** that help counsel those who are considering abortion, and training our children to understand God's design for sex, marriage, and procreation. In other words, our fight for **truth politically should be matched by our opportunity to do good with the people that political leaders and laws affect**. In this, people in our community may disagree with our political bent or values, but they should not be able to say we do not actively live out and engage in what we truly believe.

**We must maintain a PERSPECTIVE OF TRUE FREEDOM** (1 Pet. 2:16)

*Live as people **who are free**, not using your **freedom** as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God*

**The Gospel Frees us From:** As Christians living in the U.S.A, we enjoy political freedom, but as believers of Jesus Christ, we enjoy freedom at a much more profound level. We are free from **sin** (Rom. 6:6, 17, 19), the **Law's penalty** (Gal. 3:13), **Satan's bondage** (Rom. 16:20; Col. 1:13), **the world's control** (1 Cor. 9:19, Gal. 4:3--5), and **death's power** (Rom. 8:38-39)

**The Gospel Enslaves us To:** We are now **slaves of righteousness** (Rom. 6:18-19), **slaves of God** (Rom. 6:22), and **bondservants of Jesus Christ** (1 Cor. 7:22). Slavery to Christ is the greatest freedom anyone can every experience or enjoy. We are freed to obey, to stop living for ourselves, and live for his glory in all of life. This is so important to remember as Christians living in a free, democratic nation like the U.S. We are free, but we are still slaves. The fact that Jesus is our Master and Lord should mark our lives.

**Gospel Freedom Allows us To:** Our freedom does not allow us to veil disobedience, particularly with governments, but rather embrace the fact that we are **God's servants and slaves**. This frees us to be able to:

**Disagree well** - The gospel frees us to disagree on areas that the Bible does not define or clarify. Disagreement is inevitable since we do not live in **legalism**, which seeks to define all the white spaces of Scripture, but rather in wisdom and faith. Unity in God's church comes through the Holy Spirit, through our commitment to the same Lord, the same God, the same gospel, and the same Scripture. Political affiliation or type of schooling do not define us.

**Listen Humbly** - Listening is an active discipline, not a passive one. Listening well demands humility since I must recognize the value of the person speaking, see him/her as having value surpassing my own, and desire to actually **hear what they have to say**. The overall culture around us listens poorly, so we talk more, filling up the space with many words which lends itself to much foolishness. (Prov. 10:19). We will do good when we listen to each other more, talk less, and do more.

**Learn Intently** - We do not know it all. In fact, we should always take a posture of learning, both in knowledge, grace, but also the people we interact with. We learn much through disagreement, especially when our words are seasoned with grace. Most often, the issue someone is passionate about exposes an experience they've had, and in understanding where they are coming from, we are able to make inroads of truth and love.

**Love Relentlessly** - In this time of tension filled, fear driven, anger right below the surface, frustrating time, we must remember what Peter commanded the church in chapter 1: "***having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again*** (1 Peter. 1:22-23). Love covers a multitude of sin and disagreement. Love dictates that we look past disagreement, especially in the church, and see the person.

*The wider our disagreements **inside** the local church on debatable political issues, the more testimony we can give to the gospels clarity and uniqueness – Mark Dever*

**Conclusion:** The simple conclusion of this section made for a good meme or bumper sticker in the 1st century:

***Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.***

We would all do well to seek to honor/respect everyone, including our governing officials, to love each other, and to fear our God.