

We bow our hearts in prayer: Heavenly Father, ad Your Son, Jesus Christ humbled Himself under the earthly rulers and died for our justification, so grant us, by Your Holy Spirit, the honor and respect due our earthly rulers to Your praise and glory now and forever. Amen.

Dear fellow Redeemed,

Religion and politics. Two subjects that are to be avoided.

Church and state. Two things that are to be separated.

But God has things to say about government and so we won't avoid the conversation.

And while we are in this world, we live as citizens of Christendom and citizens of our nation.

We have duties to both, and so we should know what those duties are and how they intersect.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* <sup>(John 17:17)</sup>

We just recited the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment, **Honor your father and your mother....**

Dr. Luther rightly explains that God is not only concerned about the honor due our parents, but all *superiors*, all those in positions of authority over us.

We see that especially in our text where we are given a direct command to **honor the emperor**, or honor the gov'tal authorities, from the highest national positions down to the local levels.

He tells us to **be subject... to every human institution.**

This isn't to say that governmental authority is a human institution, for God says in Romans <sup>[13:1]</sup>:

**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.**

Rather, St. Peter recognizes that while the authority to govern is given by God,

how that government is set up, whether tribal patriarchy, a monarchy, a democratic-republic, or what-have-you, these forms of government have been formed by human choice.

And there is good reason for God to command such honor: these positions represent Him, as He says again in Romans <sup>[13:6,2]</sup>, **for the authorities are ministers of God**, and again,

**Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed,**

**and those who resist will incur judgment.**

Between 1 Peter and Romans, we have the same instructions, but St. Peter puts a finer point on it.

Romans in these verses clearly admonish us against outright disobedience, warning that

**if you do wrong, be afraid, for he [the government] does not bear the sword in vain.** <sup>Romans13:4</sup>

1 Peter shows that God requires more than just the outward acts of obedience,

but also the proper inward motivation of that obedience, **honor** and **respect**.  
God has given the gov't the ability to punish acts of disobedience,  
but they do not punish the dishonor and disrespect that lives in the heart;  
that is God's realm, which makes this an even more perilous offense for, as Jesus' said,  
**Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.**  
**Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**<sup>Matthew 10:28</sup>

The dishonor of gov't is everywhere throughout the world, leading to acts of violence and rebellion.  
Coups are heard of frequently, occupations lead to the downfall of regimes.  
But this isn't just something that happens "out there" on the world scene, it happens here too.  
In fact, you can't even turn on the news, the comedy stations, or read social media posts  
without being bombarded by people deviously, or comedically, or openly encouraging,  
or shall we say, tempting, you to dishonor your national, state, and local authorities,  
or even more, inciting you to open acts of rebellion against them.  
It almost seems out of place when you do honor them.

...  
Now this isn't to say that gov'tal authorities are perfect representatives of God.  
Some of them are genuinely evil, desiring to cause harm on those whom they hate.  
Some of them are selfishly hungry for power and abuse their position.  
Some of them are ignorantly duped by their worldly ideologies or philosophies.  
Some of them have been well intentioned but made poor decisions  
that lead to universal and unintended consequences for the nation, state, or local citizens.  
And there are many more issues that we could identify, but suffice it to say,  
that all of them are sinners, and so offense will always be a constant issue.

Thankfully, the Lord has blessed our form of gov't with a proper and legal way that we can appeal  
and work toward righting these offenses. But even this can fail us.

But St. Peter was not oblivious to the sins of worldly gov'ts.  
He lived under the rule of Nero, who, according to tradition, was the one who had Peter executed.  
He had witnessed first-hand, the Roman governor's unjust trial and condemnation of Jesus.  
He knew very well, even better than us, what evil is possible through the gov't.  
But this unjustness and evil is not a special circumstance that negates God's command to honor.  
As St. Peter goes on to speak to the servants, he tells them, **be subject to your masters**  
**with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.**  
This applies also to gov'tal authorities, including the unjust ones.

This goes against the grain of our sinful nature, that naturally rebels against authorities in general.  
And more so when it feels that it has been wronged.  
It goes against the cultural stream in which we swim in America, the land of the free.  
It goes against the wishes of the devil, who himself rebelled against God's direct authority  
and tempted our first parents to do the same.  
And for this reason, God must teach us and make clear to us His good and perfect will.  
And in so doing, He also shows us our sins and failures against Him and His representatives,  
and so shows us what it is that we deserve for our rebellion in temporal and eternal punishment.

He showed us that punishment on Jesus' cross.

There hung a man who was condemned unjustly for sins of rebellion that He did not commit.

He was accused of setting Himself up as a king against the Roman gov't,

though He Himself had upheld Rome's authority, saying " **give to Caesar what is Caesar's.**"

Even Pontius Pilate knew that Jesus' sentence was unjust, but he gave in to fear of the rebelling mob.

But look what great things God worked through Jesus' obedience & honor of this unjust governor:

the justification of the whole world.

No righteous court would have condemned Jesus, except at the Word of the Lord.

But here, God used His worldly representatives to condemn Jesus as the greatest & only anarchist.

This was so that Jesus would bear your rebellion, your disobedience, your dishonor,  
your disrespect for God and His worldly representatives.

The unjust verdict that Jesus bore for you, now translates into the verdict that you are justified.

You are forgiven, set free from your sin and guilt.

Here we get a glimpse of the wisdom of God hidden by our blindness in sin.

Jesus' perfect humble submission and honor of His earthly authorities, evil as they were,  
is the perfect submission and honor that God gives to you in Baptism.

You have Jesus' righteousness.

You are no longer bound by your sinful rebellious nature to dishonor God's representatives.

Instead St. Peter can teach us to, " **Live as people who are free... as servants of God.**"

You are free from fear of punishment, both from God who judges the heart,

as well as from the fear of punishment of the worldly governments,

whether just, who will not punish your honor and obedience,

or unjust, who cannot punish beyond this temporal body and have no power over your soul.

You are freed from obedience motivated by guilt, to serve God's representatives

with the true honor of a humble spirit motivated by proper fear, love, and trust

in your Lord and Savior, **for this pleases the Lord.**

You servants of God, who are free, He also calls **a chosen race, a royal priesthood,  
a holy nation, a people for [God's] own possession.**

Your priestly sacrifices are no longer animals offered in atonement looking forward to Jesus.

Your sacrifices are your acts of living service to God and your neighbor.

To the earthly authorities, it is the honor & respect, along with the obedience & support you give.

These living sacrifices of honor provide opportunities, especially under unjust authorities,

for those outside the Church to witness God's will in action

and to silence those who would speak evil against the Lord and His people.

While the world would like to completely divorce one's faith from his role as citizens,  
and would silence discussions about God and government,  
we find that God Himself would not have this.

Our fear, love, and trust in God lead us also to *honor, serve, obey, love and esteem*

those God has placed in authority over us.

Grant this onto us all, for Christ's sake. Amen.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,*

*as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen. Soli Deo Gloria*