

SONGS:
CLOSE:

Silencing the Critics

Above Politics and Parliaments, Part 1

TEXT: 1 Peter 2:13-15 << **Don't Read**

AIM:

INTRODUCTION:

A. When the Apostle Peter wrote his first recorded letter, times were troubling.

There was political upheaval – moral deviance – philosophical and religious confusion – governmental corruption – rising taxation and economic burdens. Society lowered the value it placed upon human life, AND for Christians there was the gathering clouds of persecution.

Christians were now scattered throughout the empire ... misunderstood, mistreated, maligned, rejected by family members, singled out by employers ... some were even beginning to experience imprisonment and abuse and even martyrdom.

In addition to all of that, they were living under the reign of an emperor who was growing increasingly insane. What was even more alarming, was his increasingly brutal and openly hateful treatment of Christians.¹

So when *"the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,"* under the reign of Nero, received Peter's inspired letter – and when *the latter part of chapter 2* was first read, people might have concluded that Peter was actually the one losing his mind.

Now if you will please turn to **1 Peter chapter 2**, we will read **verses 13-15**, as we begin a new series in our study through **1 Peter**. This is a new subject Peter brings to our attention – I'm simply going to call this new series of studies, *"Above Politics and Parliaments."*

I. I WANT YOU TO IMAGINE A CONGREGATION OF BELIEVERS SHOCKED AND SOMEWHAT STUNNED TO THEIR VERY CORE AS WE READ VS. 13

A. Let us lay a little groundwork and context.

1. In the minds of the early Christians, questions would have been flying left and right ... which is why both the Apostle Paul, and the Apostle Peter elaborated on this subject.
2. The immediate context for **vs. 13** is provided in the previous **vs. 12**, which informs us that the believer is to demonstrate to **HIS CULTURE** an excellent behaviour – and such an excellent work ethic and personal life of integrity that any slanders against him won't have a foot to stand on.
 - a. Peter reminds them in **verse 12** that the world will closely scrutinize their good works.
 - b. It is without question, some of those good works are going to spill over into what it means to be a good citizen. **That's the immediate context.**
3. **The larger context** – is one that every believer grapples with in every generation – it is simply this – *how do I respond and interact and even influence my governmental authority?*
4. Carry that question into the 21st century and you're likely to get a number of answers.

¹ Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter (Zondervan, 2010), p. 178

- a. Some would say that we ought to effectively abandon politics and government entirely—concentrate just on emphasizing the preaching of the gospel to the exclusion of any kind of attempt to influence governmental institutions.
- b. Yet those same people who would suggest such an isolationist viewpoint, at the same time seem to admire **William Wilberforce**— a converted Member of Parliament who spent his wealth and influence in the political arena attempting to end the slave trade throughout Great Britain. He died in 1825.
 - 1) He was a political leader, driven by his Christian conscience.
 - 2) **BOTH** the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter clearly emphasize the point that God chooses and appoints political leaders.
 - 3) **DON'T** we all rejoice when one of them – is like a Daniel or Joseph of old – when a politition happens to follow after God after being elected?
5. While the mission of God's churches is spiritual—and the gospel is our primary message—God does calls godly men and women into spheres of commercial, social and political influence.
 - a. These men and women carry with them their Biblically informed conscience – their godly character, and their biblical wisdom and skill set into each field.
 - b. It is impossible to prevent those true to their Saviour from spreading their influence in the worlds of law, business, finance, labour, education, medicine, industry, construction, agriculture, and on and on—**AND** even into the world of politics and government.

B. Wayne A. Grudem is an evangelical theologian, seminary professor

In his recent (Sept. 8, 2010) book entitled *Politics – According to the Bible*, he summarizes the influence Christians have had on governments and cultures throughout history. He wrote:

- Christians were primarily responsible for outlawing infanticide, child abandonment and abortion in the Roman empire by AD 374;
- They outlawed the brutal battles-to-the-death of gladiators by AD 404;
- They outlawed the punishment of branding the faces of criminals;
- They instituted prison reforms that included segregating male and female prisoners;
- They stopped the practice of human sacrifice among the Irish and Prussians;
- They argued and eventually outlawed paedophilia
- Christians primarily were the reason behind the granting of property rights and other protections for women;
- They prohibited the burning alive of widows in India (by 1829)²

C. William Wilberforce

Who I mentioned earlier, gathered weekly with a group of wealthy and influential believers and they strategically developed plans and methods to bring their Christian conscience to bear within their culture:

- They not only successfully ended slave trading by 1840 throughout Great Britain;
- They also organized the Society for the Education of the Africans;
- The Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor;

² Wayne Grudem, *Politics – According to the Bible* (Zondervan, 2010), p. 49

- The Society for the relief of Debtors – by the way, they saw the release of 14,000 debtors over a five-year period, which allowed them to actually get jobs so they could pay off their debt – *what a novel idea!*
- They also established hospitals for the poor and the blind;
- They helped war widows and veterans in need of medical and psychiatric help.

And listen to this – because of all these endeavours – Wilberforce and his friends were nicknamed – “**The Saints**” – a name they bore with gladness.

D. Then There Was Hannah More

Hannah More was an English writer, philanthropist, a poet and playwright who died in 1833. She was a woman who greatly influenced her world in Great Britain and was a close friend of both William Wilberforce and John Newton, the converted slave trader and author of the great hymn, Amazing Grace.

Hannah More’s biography includes the time when Wilberforce struggled with his religious commitment and his political involvement. *Did they coincide? Could he do both?*

Wilberforce’s mentor was John Newton ... who at the time was a Pastor ... and Newton answered Wilberforce’s question by writing him in a letter, *“Stay at your post and do not give up the work, for you have been placed there by God.”*³

And that’s biblical advice; because Paul wrote in **Romans 13** that God has appointed governmental authorities – more on that later.

By the way, Hannah More devoted much of her life to teaching and educating women in languages, mathematics and the sciences – another radical idea.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the writer, composer and political philosopher of 18th century largely influenced the prevailing thought that women – (he wrote during the same time Hannah More started her school for women), *he wrote that women were only to be educated in whatever related to men; how to please them, to be useful to them, to raise them when young and to care for them when grown; they are expected to know just enough to be entertaining for an hour or two.*⁴

So Hannah More’s ideas about educating young women wasn’t welcomed at all. In fact, one medical doctor agreed with Rousseau by speculating that if women were educated in the same subjects as men, it would harm their reproductive organs!

And what compelled Hannah More to violate the status quo and seek to influence her culture otherwise?

It was nothing less than the biblical doctrine of the individual priesthood of the believer – and she was convinced that women should be able to read the Bible for themselves.⁵

E. The mission of God’s churches

1. The mission of the church **IS NOT** to set up or officially influence governmental forms of education, or the world at large in areas of law or medicine or industry.
2. The mission of individuals within the church is to accept their post – the position where God has placed them – enabling them to bring their Christian character and conscience and Biblical conviction to bear upon their world—whether it is in field of education, or medicine, or science, or law and government.
3. I don’t know of any believer who looks down on a William Wilberforce, or Pastor John Newton’s advice, or Hannah More’s passion ... in fact, the

³ Karen Swallow Prior, *Fierce Convictions: The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More* (Nelson Books, 2014), p. 113

⁴ Ibid, p. 18

⁵ Ibid. p. 19

unbelieving world now looks on most of what they did and says, *“Those were really good works ... those were good things they did!”*

4. I believe we need a new generation of Wilberforces, Newtons and Hannah More’s. We need a fresh generation of firebrands in education and finance and law.
 - a. We need a Christian conscience on the Boards of Education through out this country.
 - b. We need Christians with wisdom in the field of law enforcement and in the fields of banking and tax reform. We need Christians in every phase of life.
 - c. We need to pray, as Paul challenged the church at Philippi in **Phil. 4:22** to pray, for those in *“Caesar’s household”* in Rome – those in Caesar’s administration.

So in our generation today, that would mean we need believers in the Dáil, TD’s and in the cabinet and committees that keep showing up in the news.

We need wise believers in the discussion on our national debt; when you think of the debt that the next generation is going to have to live with, it’s no wonder babies are crying when they’re born.

Our Irish Debt Per Capita in 2016 is \$ 46,408 – the second highest in the world⁶ – compared to \$ 61,733 in the US and \$ 34,014 in the UK.⁷

We need men and women who love Christ first and foremost, but who, like William Wilberforce, accept their post as that of God’s assignment – who will love Christ enough to introduce Him wisely and winsomely into their business, their school, their post, their classroom, and into every phase of life. And that’s exactly what Peter has in mind.

Now, with that in mind, let’s dive into Peter’s exhortation.

II. FIRST OF ALL – NOTICE AGAIN THE COMMAND TO SUBMIT – VS. 13

A. Submit yourselves

1. Literally, place yourselves in an attitude and posture of submission. Peter’s words carry a sense of determination.
 - a. *“Submit yourselves.” Which means*—it doesn’t matter if you elected them or not. These people certainly didn’t elect Nero.
 - b. *It doesn’t matter if you agree with them or not*—it doesn’t matter if you like them or not. There was little to agree or like about Nero.
2. Paul writes to the believers living under the shadow of Nero in Rome this way; *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God...”* (Romans 13:1-2).

B. Political representatives in any country have been placed in their positions of power by God. —In other words, you might not have wanted them, but God evidently did.

1. Imagine this startling statement of God’s sovereignty—‘God establishes every political office and every governing official.
 - a. He wasn’t surprised by Nero’s rise to power – or anyone else’s in history, for that matter.

⁶ <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/politics/national-debt-now-44000-per-head-35904197.html> ,

⁷ *“National debt now €44,000 per head”*, Sunday 18 March 2018

⁷ <https://countryeconomy.com/countries/compare/ireland/uk>

- b. In fact, He orchestrated their rise to power. He put them in their position.'
2. So in plain terms, here's the surprising truth for the Romans and the Irish and every other country represented in earshot of this message. After all the campaigning and all the praying and all the talking and all the debating and all the voting; **God's candidate is always elected.**
3. Now at this point in Peter's letter, this would have been a great time for Peter to roll out the Christian's strategy for unseating Nero
 - Persecution was brewing
 - Nero had obviously lost his grip on sanity
 - And while we're at it's time to overthrow the Roman Senate
4. But isn't that the way of the world?
 - a. The world is usually working on those power moves—they live and breathe that stuff.
 - b. In fact, it won't be long before political rivals will cut Nero's throat. **NOTE** that very few Caesar's died natural deaths.
 - c. So how does a church show itself to be uniquely different?
 - 1) The members are given to excellent behaviour and good works.
 - 2) So long as the Scriptures are not violated – a Christian should be known for quiet respect and submission to just law.
5. The verb here translated "*submit yourselves*" is actually a military term that refers to rank under.
 - a. It refers to one who is in subjection to a superior in rank
 - b. Soldiers might not like their orders—they may not agree with their orders—it might even cost them their lives to follow their orders; but they fall in and follow their commanding officer.
 - c. **The Christian happens to have a higher perspective.**
 - 1) He sees above politics and parliaments of the day.
 - 2) The believer knows ultimately that God is in control and God's purposes are being fulfilled, by submission to even a tyrannical superior.
 - 3) As believers we are called to demonstrate good works by continuing to do our best and literally help our world around us by providing truth and wisdom and grace.

C. Now in case you thought there might be loopholes to this command, Peter closes them all down by mentioning every institution and every governmental authority.

1. **Notice, vs. 13** starts at the top of the food chain – "*Submit yourselves*" ... *whether it be to the king, as supreme*" – humanly speaking, he is the one in ultimate authority (that's the top of the heap)
 - In an African village this would be the chief
 - In a communist country, this would be the chairman
 - In a democratic country, this would be the president or prime minister
 - For the believers in Peter's generation, this would be the emperor
2. Then Peter adds in **vs. 14**, not just to the king, but "*unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him.*"

- a. In other words, any official representing the emperor was also to be submitted to.
- b. **THIS** wouldn't have been any easier – especially during the days of Peter.
- 3. **AND** keep in mind that just because someone is ultimately appointed by God, that doesn't mean they don't need correcting or challenging.
 - a. John the Baptist challenged Herod – another governor – for his adulterous marriage to his sister-in-law in **Luke 3:19**.
 - b. Pontius Pilate was a governor. And it was to Pilate that Jesus Christ delivered **that higher perspective** in **John 19:10-11** the same that Peter delivered and the same as I'm preaching to this day.

John 19:10 – *“Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? 11] Jesus answered, Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above...”*

- c. Felix was another governor during the days of the Apostles.
 - 1) We know from **Acts 24** that Felix was given to accepting bribes. We're told that Paul had a private conversation with Felix on one occasion and the Scriptures tell us that Paul talked to him about *“... righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.”*
 - 2) I'd love to know what Paul told him ... *what we do know* is that the Bible says that *“Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way...”* (Acts 24:25)
- 4. **Conviction and warning and the gospel message** were delivered in these cases, but the overarching principle in that delivery was that of respect for their office.
 - a. So the command is clear ... although, depending on where you're living in the world – and when – it might be more distressing and difficult than we can imagine today where we live.
 - b. For us – in this land of multiple freedoms and blessings – submitting to authority means that we refuse to cut corners and wink at laws and run down leaders and refuse to submit to ordinances and parking tickets and state codes and safety requirements—unless we get caught.

D. One illustration From US Tax Laws

In their book, co-authors Levitt and Dubner explained how a simple change in the U.S. tax rules ended up exposing incredible deception – which more than likely involved Christians and non-Christians alike.

In the 1980's, an **I.R.S.** research officer in Washington just had that feeling that taxpayers were incorrectly claiming dependents for the sake of extra exemptions. Sometimes it was a genuine mistake, but sometimes the claims were comically fraudulent – with one example of a dependent whose name was listed as *Fluffy* – obviously a pet and not a child (at least one would hope).

So this officer decided that the best way to clean up the mess was to require taxpayers to list their children's Social Security number (PPSN – Personal Public Service Number). But no one agreed and his idea never made it out of the agency.

A few years later, as Congress clamoured for more tax revenue, this man's idea was brought up – and it was immediately rushed forward and put into law for tax year 1986. When the returns finally came in, **seven million dependents** had suddenly vanished from the tax rolls. **Seven million!** This officer and his bosses were shocked. Pets and phantom children had disappeared. And that year, his idea generated 3 billion in additional tax dollars.⁸

⁸ Steven Levitt & Stephen Dubner, *Freakonomics* (Morrow, 2006), p. 239:
www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2008/january/10012808.html

E. Now if you're wondering what the role of government really is – and it does indeed include collecting taxes – Paul, in fact, tells Christians to pay their taxes honestly and completely.

Romans 13:7 – *“Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.”*

1. On one occasion in **Matthew 17**, Jesus was asked if He was going to pay his taxes and He effectively said, “YES”.
 - a. He promptly told Peter to go fishing and He told him that the first fish he caught would have a coin in its mouth that would cover both His and Peter’s taxes. *Now that’s the way to pay your taxes—go fishing!*
 - b. We don’t get to perform that miracle – so don’t bother going fishing at tax time – but while we don’t get to perform the miracle, we are commanded to perform the principle – *pay your taxes!*
2. But is that all that government is supposed to do – collect and spend our taxes?
 - a. Peter actually gives a pretty interesting summary of the job description of a good government – **Notice 1Pet. 2:14.** *“Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him”* (the king) – **now notice** – *“for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well”* (i.e. a good doer – one who is a benefit to others)
 - b. To punish what’s not right and praise those who do what’s right – by the way, that sounds like moral legislation to me!
 - c. **The idea that morality can’t be legislated is a myth.**
 - 1) From laws that punish murder and paedophilia and theft—to requiring seat belts and safety ordinances and drunk driving restrictions – **ALL of which is designed to protect life.**
 - 2) **ALL of that** is legislation driven by an internal moral compass regarding the value of life and right and wrong.
 - 3) Which, by the way, emphasizes again the opportunity of the Christian who enters their world of influence with their moral foundation based on the character of God.
 - 4) Your world is held accountable in defining what’s evil and is to be encouraged in rewarding what’s good—because you inform them!
3. *“...For the punishment...and for the praise...”* —that’s the signature intention of God’s design for those in authority. **Peter uses two words here.**
 - a. First, he uses a Gk. word for *“punishment”* that effectively shatters the ideology that God isn’t interested in anything other than reforming the criminal and protecting society from further crimes.
 - 1) **NO**, the word Peter uses actually includes some kind of appropriate retribution; here’s the definition of the word in the Greek language –
 - a) The inflicting of just punishment on the one who has harmed another⁹
 - b) It is to avenge an injustice. Twice it is used in statements that *“vengeance”* belongs to God (Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30).
 - 2) So the governing authority is actually commissioned by God to hand out penalties and to punish those who violate just law.

⁹ D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (BMH Books, 1984), p. 166

- b. **But that isn't all.** They are also given the responsibility to “praise” those who do what is right.
- 1) The word Peter uses here can be translated, commending, or recognizing.¹⁰
 - a) In Great Britain, outstanding citizens are given knighthood – a special commendation and status.
 - b) They also dispense special awards to people in the United Kingdom who've done an admirable job in their vocation.

There was a particular documentary where Queen Elizabeth rewarded a number of people for various achievements.

It was incredibly touching to watch one man – a shepherd who had bred sheep his entire life – who had faithfully weathered that incredibly difficult occupation with all its hazards – and it documented his tearful joy as he knelt before his queen and received from her a special commendation. What a great thing that was.

- 2) In various countries people are given achievement awards, keys to the city and honorary doctorates. The community at large awards the prestigious Nobel prizes for those who excelled in their fields.
- 3) Has it ever occurred to you that in the mind of God, the government is responsible not only for the security of its citizens, but in fostering their moral well-being. Punishing evil—and rewarding good.
4. People who are in a position of authority – from the school teacher to the judge to the senator ... when they make awards with character and conviction, they are fulfilling God's unique role for you and me in that field ... and a nation that is filled with people like that happens to be incredibly blessed.

Today, it's estimated that 1/3rd of all Christians live in some form of civil freedom while the vast majority – more than 2/3rds live in some sort of repressive government.¹¹

But imagine what it was like in Peter's day ... and more and more in our own day, when everything is being turned upside down – more and more we see evil is being rewarded and good is being punished.

So why bother with submission to that kind of authority?

Peter assumed you'd ask that question

III. PETER GIVES TWO INCENTIVES FOR SUBMITTING.

A. First, notice vs. 15 – “For so is the will of God...”

1. In other words, when we do these things, we are obeying the Lord's direction.
2. BTW, you are also recognizing that ultimately God placed kings and governors in power for His purposes—and in doing so, God most often doesn't explain Himself.
3. What if the government, does not act in the way appointed by God? We should not be worried because God is in charge of them and it is God who will judge them accordingly.
 - a. In other words, God might be ignored by government, but God will have the last word.
 - b. In the meantime, God has given us His word on the matter – “For so is the will of God...”

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Life Application Bible, 1 & 2 Peter/Jude (Tyndale House, 1995), p. 66

B. Secondly, you are not only obeying the Lord's direction, you are silencing the Lord's opposition

1. **Notice the rest of vs. 15** – “...that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:”
2. Peter doesn't pull any punches here does he?
 - a. Peter refers to those who are spreading slander about the Christians – and we know from history that the Christians were being slandered.
 - b. Some vilified Christ's disciples as being treasonous to the Emperor – that they were inciting sedition and planning to overthrow the government.
3. **So how do you silence that?**
 - a. By showing respect for the King and the government—you certainly can't burn incense to the emperor and worship him.
 - b. BUT that doesn't mean you march on Rome and try to unseat him either. You silence them in that manner.
 - c. We are commanded to cooperate with the rulers as far as conscience will allow. We are to do this ‘for the Lord's sake’—so that His Good News and His people will be respected.
 - d. If we are to be persecuted, it should be for obeying God, not for breaking moral or civil laws.
4. Literally, when Peter writes, “put to **silence** the ignorance of foolish men” the word “silence” means to “muzzle” them.
 - a. Peter implies that these slanderous people are mad dogs constantly yelping and snapping and biting at their heels.¹²
 - b. Further, Peter describes them here as ignorant.
You must “muzzle” the ignorance of foolish men!
 - 1) Ignorance here doesn't mean the critics were uneducated. It has nothing to do with their placement scores, leaving certification, etc.
 - 2) This is a reference to willful, hostile rejection of the truth ... they are yapping and snapping and biting.
5. This makes Peter's counsel all the more remarkable. How do you silence the vicious, hostile, biting slander of people who are repressing the truth?
 - a. **NOT** by barking louder! **NOT** by snapping and yelping and biting back.
 - b. **Get this!** – they know intuitively the truth ... and they know the rumbling of that suppression in their gut—which only makes them yelp and snap all the more viciously. And what they'd love to do is bring you down to their level of engagement.
 - c. Peter is telling us here that if there will be any silencing of our critics, it will not be because we are stronger or bigger or louder—but that we meet their vicious attack, not by self-defence, but through humble well-doing.
 - d. In other words, we respond with excellent behaviour and good deeds and respectful attitudes toward the office of authority—that authority, which we know, is ultimately under the authority of our God.

C. China

¹² Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Hopeful: I Peter (David C Cook, 1982), p. 72

According to Open Doors Ministry, Chinese government officials became fed up with sky-high rates of crime, drug addiction, and sickness in one particular county in the Yunnan province of China.

In desperation, if you can believe it, they turned for help in the mid 1990s to those who were considered model citizens in their area—who so happened to be, Christians.

One official interviewed said, “We had to admit that these people were a dead loss because of their addiction to opium,” – and he didn’t want to be named. He said further, “Their addiction made them weak and sick. Then they would go to one of their priests, who required animal sacrifices of such extravagance that the people became poor. And because they were now even more destitute, they stole from one another and law and order deteriorated. It was a vicious cycle that no amount of government propaganda could break.

He continued, “We noticed, that in some villages in the county, there were people who were peace loving. There was no drug problem, or any stealing or social order problems. These households also seemed to have plenty of chickens and pigs.

So we commissioned a survey to find out why these villages were different. To our astonishment and embarrassment, we discovered the key factor was that these villages had a majority of Christians.

The article recorded how officials launched a daring experiment in 1998 the likes of which were unthinkable in China—they picked out the worst village, which had 240 people, 107 of which were hopelessly addicted to opium.

Christians agreed to be bussed into the village – with the government covering the expenses – and the villagers were herded together by the police and the Christians told their personal testimonies of faith in Christ and the difference He had made in the way they lived.

They visited several times. And a year later, there were 17 new Christians in this village; these 17 individual Christians soon became established financially because they stopped spending money on drugs. Eight of the 17 soon saved enough money to purchase sewing machines and start small businesses.

By early 2002, 83 of the villagers (out of 240) had become Christians and their village was changing. The government official said – and I quote – “We have begun extending this strategy to many other villages since then.”¹³

D. And what are these officials now accusing Christians of doing wrong?

Nothing! Because of their good works—and their peaceful law abiding lives, the gospel became intriguing ... and people came to faith in Christ.

The gospel replaced opium with chickens and pigs ... the gospel turned law-breakers into law-abiding citizens.

The change that occurred in one life, changed families ... and changed families changed a village ... and that village has now affected a county ... and who knows ... it may one day change their country.

Where do you start? It doesn’t sound all that dramatic, does it?

But here it is ... for the Lord’s sake ... be good citizens ... respect the law and those in authority ... this is the will of God and ... by doing what is right, you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

11 March '18, AM – River Valley BC – Maynooth, Co. Kildare

¹³ The Pastors Connection (Open Doors USA e-mail, August 2002); Kelly Callaghan, prayer and courier coordinator, Open Doors USA