

Overview: Authority figures are part of life. We encounter them in the family, in school, in government, in sports, in the work place and in church. Some of us have fond memories of leaders, bosses, parents, pastors and others. Others remember some of those as a cause of grief, disappointment, and even anger. Paul the Apostle cautioned fathers to “not exasperate your children.” (Eph.6:4) Children who have experienced a difficult parental figure have a hard time following the admonition to “honor your father and mother” and other authority figures. Most of us have grappled with following the Biblical admonitions to respect and honor persons in authority.

Peter faced this on several levels. One was with the religious authorities who threatened him and the other apostles if they continued to spread their message of Jesus (Acts 4). Also, he lived in the world of the Roman Empire where the ruthless pagan Nero was the Emperor. Yet amazingly he calls believers, himself included, to submit, respect and honor all authorities, including Nero the supreme ruler.

Tens of thousands of people, many Mennonites included, died and suffered immensely under the rule of Joseph Stalin in Russia. A visitor to Siberia in 2011 asked a church leader, Brother Wall, if they rejoiced when Stalin died. He answered, “The Bible instructs us to pray for our leaders, and that leaders are placed in authority by God for a reason; therefore, we prayed for Stalin and did not rejoice at his death.” What a great role model for us in our tumultuous political situation!

God has established a hierarchy of leadership that is to prevail in the home, church, job, government. God is a God of order and purpose. Our text calls us to the actions of submission, respect, honor, and doing good. Both leaders and followers are accountable to God. Many church problems and splits have come about because of leadership or followership issues. A priority is for us to be born of the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, and led by the Spirit. That involves submitting our lives to Christ’s lordship and obeying his authoritative Word.

Bible Study: 1 Peter 2:11-17

1. Jesus is both our Savior and our greatest example for living. How did he, as a true man, exemplify the things Peter calls us to do in relation to persons in authority? (1 Pet.2:19-23). What can we learn from his response to Pilot in John 19:7-11?
2. 1 Peter 2:13 says, “submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake . . .” What do you understand that to mean?
3. Disrespect for and resisting persons in authority is a growing problem in our society and sometimes in the church. If you agree, what do you see as contributing factors/root causes?
4. Verse 17 begins, “Show proper respect to everyone.” Literally, honor everyone; recognize the value of every person. Identify several things about all people that are reasons to see them as having value whether a believer or unbeliever, a criminal or immoral person, rich or poor, good leader or poor leader.
5. The best of leaders have strengths and weaknesses. When did you have a person in authority over you that was hard to relate to or fully appreciate but still you must admit that they were a good leader?
6. What are some possible responses or actions you can take when you disagree with something a pastor teaches/preaches, how he leads, or you think something is moving us in the wrong direction? How can you disagree and still follow and support him and the church’s ministry?
7. Many disparaging things are said on social media, in personal conversations, and the coffee shop about the President, presidential candidates or others in authority. Maybe you have done that. How might you try to lift such conversations to a respectful level that is in keeping with the divine directives in this text?
8. As our nation grows more and more pagan and anti-Christian, we will see more and more laws and policies placed upon us that will pressure us to compromise our faith, maybe even deny Christ. At what point must we say, “Sorry, but I can’t do that or I won’t do that?” How can we object and still show respect to persons in authority? Have you ever faced such a situation?
9. In verse 17 Peter asks believers to fear God and honor (respect) the king. How is fear different than honor? (after some discussion read Matt.10:28)