

# Of the Civil Magistrate

by Conrad Mbewe

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*As Christians, we should submit to all authority because of our respect for God and our desire for order in society.*

**Duration:** 50:08

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:37, Romans 13:1-4, Colossians 3:22-24, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 2:13-25

**Topics:** "Submission to Authority", "Christian Obedience"

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## Description

Conrad Mbewe emphasizes the importance of submission to civil authority as a reflection of one's relationship with God, drawing from 1 Peter 2. He explains that true Christians, transformed by their faith, will naturally respect and obey the authorities established by God, as this promotes order in society and reflects a heart changed by Christ. Mbewe highlights that submission is not contingent on the fairness of authority but is a testament to one's consciousness of God and a path to spiritual maturity. He warns against hypocrisy in claiming to submit to God while rebelling against human authority, urging believers to seek genuine transformation in their hearts. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of obedience as a reflection of one's faith and relationship with God.

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## Transcript

Thank you, you may be seated, and as you do so, please stand with me to 1 Peter and Chapter 2. 1 Peter and Chapter 2. We are continuing in our series of studies in the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, and basically all we are seeking to do is to show what this pulpit and indeed this church has stood for from its very commencement some 20 years ago. We have argued that a church ought to have a very clear message, not just a message radiating from its pulpit, but a message which is on the lips of its membership as they are in the world, interacting with the world, that they have a common message, and it ought to be the message of God. What God has said in His Word, we have said that the central message is definitely one that is about salvation.

God has come into the world through His Son in order to bring us back to God, so that we might know God, that we may love God, that we may be a truly worshipping people, exalting Him who indeed has not only made us, but been gracious to us in bringing us to Himself. And so as we have made our way through our doctrinal statement, we have deliberately been using it as a message to the world, rather than simply an in-house message in which we are reminding ourselves within closed doors as to what it is we believe in contradistinction to what the world is saying. We have deliberately been saying, no, no, no, we need to

take this message in its evangelistic emphasis and share it with the world.

And the last time that we are looking at this, we are looking at our understanding of oath and vow. And what we are saying there is that this is not simply something that we are learning or seeking to share with the world concerning the law of cause. Ultimately, the whole concern of this matter is a concern for the truth, that between human beings there must be truth, that we need to jealously gather.

Therefore, to live with respect to one another in such a way that only when I swear, only when I say, *akalumbashe*, that is when you should believe what I am saying, ought to be thrown out of the window completely. When we speak, when we communicate, we must be doing so truthfully. As the text that we read went on to say, let your yes be yes and your no, no.

Anything beyond that comes from the evil one. And what we said was that when Jesus saves you, he gives you a real desire for truth. You want to speak the truth.

You want to be truthful. And therefore, even though your boss at work comes to you and asks you to cook up the figures, since half this church comprises accountants, I'm sure that's fairly applicable, you say, no, I can't do that because I'm a Christian. God has changed my heart.

I cannot go about deceiving other people. I must be truthful. Thankfully, God burned that in our hearts and minds.

We deliberately want it to be that way. Not because we are afraid that we might be caught, but simply because of the fear of God, the God of truth, the God who himself is truth. Well, this morning we're moving on to yet another subject, and that is that of civil authority.

And in 1 Peter 2 and verse 13, the Apostle Peter says, 1 Peter 2 and verse 13, Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men, whether to the king as the supreme authority, or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil.

Live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone. Love the brotherhood of believers.

Fear God. Honor the king. Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. But to this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His step.

He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth. When the hell-day insulted Him, He did not retaliate. When He suffered, He made no threats.

Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.

For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your soul. We'll end our reading there, though when we later on come to look at it, we'll peep into chapter 3 as

well. What we're learning really today is the simple fact that when God changes you, when you are converted, when you become a Christian, one of the practical effects of that, and anybody will be able to see it, is that you end up with a hearty submission to all authority.

The one place where it becomes particularly evident is in the home. Because previously you may have been extremely rebellious, you wanted to have your own way, but it isn't before long when your parents suddenly notice that you've become an obedient child. And they begin to wonder what it is that has taken place.

And the trust that your answer will be, I have become a Christian. Jesus takes away from you that stony, hard, rebellious heart. He removes it and instead puts within you a malleable heart that is obedient and especially obedient to the will of God.

What that means is simply this, that if you are still continuing in your rebellious ways, and all you now have added is terminology like born again and praise the Lord, and you now carry a Bible and attend the Baptist church along the road, that doesn't make you a Christian. It simply means God hasn't yet changed your heart. Because when He does so, one of the ways in which you see it is this submission, this yielding to authority.

Now clearly in our text, that's what the Apostle Peter is dealing with. And thankfully, he gives a number of reasons why a true believer will yield to all kinds of authorities that are instituted in his community and in his world. The very first reason that is given here is that a Christian does so because of his respect for God.

Because of his consciousness of God Himself. Look at our text again. In chapter 2 verse 18 the Bible says, Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men.

Now that little phrase there is quite deliberate. You see the reason why a Christian respects authority is because he knows that ultimately it points to my submission to the authority of God Himself. In fact when you go through this passage that we have read together, you cannot miss this regular reference to God.

It's not just in our first passage. But look at verse 15 for instance. The Bible tells us there, Because it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

Again in verse 16, Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil. Live as servants of God. In other words disobedience is because you want to serve God.

You want to obey God's will. And consequently you yield yourself to those under whom you are. We notice exactly the same thing in verse 17.

But let's quickly go to verse 19 and 20 because there it comes out in a slightly different way. Verse 19, For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering, Notice this, Because he is conscious of God. So if I'm going to yield to a very difficult master, A harsh person, It is primarily because I'm conscious of God.

Who God is. And therefore it is really under the eye of God that I am submitting. What it means therefore is that true submission doesn't peep over the shoulder.

You're not looking to see whether the person whose laws you're supposed to be obeying is around or not. That doesn't matter. Why? Because God is always around.

So even if I'm at work and my boss has gone off on a rather long journey for the whole week, It doesn't become an issue of the car being away and therefore the mice having a grand opportunity. And the whole place becomes a little living hell on planet earth. No! There is still the fact that ultimately it is under God that obedience must be rendered.

And therefore whether this person, human being is there or not, We must continue to live as though we are under the eye of God. And ultimately it is God's commendation we want. Verse 20, But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong or endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, This is commendable before God.

This is commendable before God. And it is God's smile you are interested in ultimately. Not that of your parrot.

Not that of your boss at work. Not that of your district commissioner and so on and so forth. It is ultimately God's smile that you want.

And that's the reason why. And even in the midst of being ill-treated and mistreated by those in authority, The example given of the Lord Jesus shows that it is because of this God-centeredness, God-consciousness, That He bore the unjust treatment to His very death. We read in verse 23, When the world insults at Him, He did not retaliate.

When He suffered, He made no threat. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. In other words, to God.

You, my fellow human beings, may mistreat me. That is not the most important issue for me. I have committed my cause to God.

I am conscious of God. I want His commendation. And therefore, whatever it is men do to me is completely unimportant.

What we learn from the Bible, therefore, Is that every authority instituted in the world has been put there by God Himself. And that's what we see in Romans chapter 13 and verse 1, the famous text. I'm sure those of you who have a preview in your own homes about what text I'm likely to use, Might have thought I would be in Romans 13, verse 1, And sorry, this time you were wrong.

But we will be there a few times, so 50%. Verse 1, Romans 13, verse 1, Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities. Why? For there is no authority except that which God has established.

The authorities that exist have been established by God. That's the bottom line. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted.

And those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. That's the understanding of the Christian. That my parents have been put over me by God.

They may not be perfect. They may have a lot of shortcomings. But they did not just happen to be there by some evolutionary theory that has been taking place over eons, millions of years.

It is by a deliberate act of God. God did not want me to simply fall out of the sky and fall onto the ground like Mr. Bean. He wanted me to be born out of real parents so that I might yield obedience to him.

And even as you go through life and you're going through school, God again has deliberately put all kinds of authorities there for you. Your class monitor, your prefects, your teachers, the headmaster, and so on. All these structures are a deliberate act on the part of God.

Even when you're through with school and you end up in a workplace, and you've got your immediate boss, and your boss's boss, and your boss's boss's boss, until finally you've got your MD who lives in a totally different town, and perhaps you see him once a year. All those structures are God-given. God has provided for all that.

You come on into our immediate community and society, you find exactly the same thing. You will have all kinds of authorities over you. That's why in our text the statement is, Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men.

And it begins with the king and it goes down to the lowest level. It doesn't matter who it is. We are to respect that authority.

And even when you come into the context of the church, it's exactly the same thing. The church is not a place where each and every person is entitled to their own little world of authority. There is eldership there.

And they're given authority in the church. And the church members are to yield obedience to its eldership. I'm sure Hebrews chapter 13, 17 makes that point abundantly clear.

What is this telling us then? As a test of your religion, it is simply this, that it is sheer hypocrisy to claim, to submit to the rule of God, whom you do not see when you are a total rebel before those who are in authority over you, whom you actually see. That's not Christianity. That's not godliness.

That's the worst form of hypocrisy. Because every authority instituted among men has been instituted by God. There are but regions coming to you on God's behalf.

And therefore to be on your knees, praying to God, and saying to Him, Have Thine own way, Lord. Have Thine own way. Thou art the porter.

I am the clay. And then when you rise from your feet, anybody who tries to touch you, Hey, this is my right. Why are you... That's not Christianity.

That's not godliness. What you are proving there is that you actually don't respect God. That's only the first reason we see here.

And the second one, the Christian submits to all authority because he loves order in society. The Christian himself has a love for order, a well-ordered life, a well-ordered society, a well-ordered church, a well-ordered nation. When you go to our text, you immediately begin to see that that's the reason why we are not simply to submit to the king.

We are to go beyond the king. We are to submit to all those who are in authority, and you can see order there. Look again at verse 13.

1 Peter 2 and verse 13. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men, whether to the king as the supreme authority, or to governors who are sent by him. Notice there.

This order sent by him to punish those who do wrong. And again, we notice in verse 16, rather verse 18. Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect.

I mean, we've gone right from the king at the highest level, we've come down to governors, and we've now reached the lowest level. The slaves submitting themselves to their immediate owners, their masters. And as I said to you, chapter 3 and verse 1 even enters into the home.

Why? In the same way, be submissive to your husband. In exactly the same way, there is structure in society. There is order in society.

And it's a deliberate act on the part of God, because God is a God of order. You just have to look at God's creation. And you will see order there.

I mean, just look at our own solar system. And look at the way in which the planets move around the sun at their own speeds, in their own orbits. And then the moons also going around the various planets.

In our case, as Earth, we've got our moon also having its own regular rounds, following the rules and the law of creation. And when you look at just the way in which God has created, even just the brute beasts of the field, the trees and the plants and the birds and the air and everything, you cannot help but come away saying, there is order in God's world. Well, of course, sin has come in and tried to ruin all that.

And that's the reason why God, in order to ensure a check, if not an altogether check made to sin, has provided authority. Authority in His world. It is because He is concerned that there should be order.

I often think there's only one place where order can be absent. Just one. And that's in a bachelor's bedroom.

But you see, because that's His own domain. Full stop. If you go in there, you will say, what are you doing here? Eh? So and so.

But you see, the moment you go beyond the bachelor's bedroom, you're going beyond. You're going to be mixing with a few people. You need to decide on rules and regulations.

Who's going to decide on whether you should drive on the right side or on the left side of the road? You? Well, if you leave it to everybody, then when I wake up on the right side of the bed, I want to drive on the right side of the road also. And suddenly you woke up on the left side and you want to drive on your left side. And your left and mine, because we are heading in the same direction, ends up being on the same side.

I'm driving a truck. You are in a little Mr. Bean's little car. Obviously, there's going to be regular clashing in the world.

If there isn't somebody somewhere with the right, with the authority to make a declaration whether you've woken up on the right side or on the wrong side of your bed, everybody drive on the left. Everybody. And if you think because you are born out of royal blood, you can drive on whichever side you want, you find yourself in the cells for a few weeks.

So that things might dawn on you that beyond your bedroom, there are rules, there are laws, there's authority which you must obey. That's the whole issue of God providing these authorities beyond your immediate personal life. And to make sure that sin is curbed, God gives the power to punish to those in authority.

We see that back there in Romans 13. Romans 13. We stopped at verse 2, but listen to verse 3 and verse 4. Romans 13, verse 3 and verse 4. The Bible says this, For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong, do you want to be free from the fear of the one authority? Then do what is right, and he will commend you.

For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

That's what authority is there about. It's to do also with the power to punish. The power to punish.

Sometimes I fear that in a lot of Baptist circles, we lose this, especially with respect to eldership. Somehow in our extreme congregational mindset, we have made the High Court or Supreme Court of Christ's Church the members' meeting. In fact, some have even put it in the Constitution as the highest court is the members' meeting, where everybody is entitled to one vote.

Whoever you are, elder, deacon, church member, one vote. And anything to do with discipline must happen there. After a vote, we must all vote.

Imagine that happening in the other areas of life. In your home, your parents saying you must all be home by 18 hours, and you say, let's vote. They would be losing each time.

You know that. Authority is from above. It's given.

And it's given to those who are appointed into positions of authority. And we need to recognize that. And indeed, we need to respect it so that there may be order.

And that's why, in some churches, they basically represent the law of the jungle. Anybody's doing anything they want under the pretext we are obeying Christ. No order.

No sense that we are going somewhere. And even if the elders were to say, let's have this meeting and let's do this and the other, it's just a suggestion. We can throw it off our minds if we want.

Each one is a god in his own right. You cannot run churches that way. And oftentimes, there is such a high turnover in the leadership of the church because of the high stress factor.

There must be order. And that order comes from the authority. And that authority is given the power to punish.

But you see, for the true child of God, because of that God consciousness and the change in the heart, that desire for order in itself helps to ensure obedience. It helps to ensure submission because in the heart, there is a desire that life in the home, in the church, in society, in the workplace, in the school, wherever it might be, life there must be well ordered. In our text, we are told not only to obey kings but also governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and commend those who do right.

Is there order in your immediate environment? And are you an asset in that direction? Or are you the kind of person who at every excuse, you must have a different mind and you must rest your own mind? Doesn't matter what your leadership is, you must have your own way. And in the end, the entire system, the entire institution is lame, it cripples, it can't achieve anything. Because when the leadership has said we ought to do this, when you are at your home, you are giving every reason why that is wrong and therefore, you will not be party to it and consequently, you infect other people's minds and they develop their own rebellious attitude and in the end, nothing happens.

We see it in homes, don't we? You're raising up your child or children properly and then visitors come and before long, your children also throw off the yoke of the oppressor. Since when did you become an oppressor? It's the language that has come into the home. We can be like that in the church, we can be like that in the workplace, we can be like that in the school, anywhere else.

We become the core of a place becoming ungovernable. The problem is our own heart. Our heart are rebellious.

Well, there is a third reason that I must give after my usual pattern of three points and it is a Christian submits to all authority because he recognizes that this is one path for his own spiritual maturity, one path for his own growth and often, this is when you have to submit to those whose rules are unfair. Those who are harsh and cruel and unloving who on the one hand use you to achieve their end and on the other are not really interested in giving you a fair reward for what you have done and all the difficulty to submit to such. Indeed, there is a conspiracy that takes place within your own heart.

On the one hand, your own sense of justice is not right, is not fair and then there is also your own fallen ego which is also rising there saying, look, we Tumbukas should not accept this kind of treatment from beggars and that breeds rebellion. In fact, the Apostle Peter spends most of his time in this section dealing with the same issue as he deals with slaves. Let's go on to verse 18.

Notice what he says there. Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect not only to those who are good and considerate. You see, those to whom when you go there and say, you know, I'm not feeling well.

They are quick to say, okay, okay, okay, go, rest. But even the one who says, so? We are all not feeling well. Come on, get on with your work.

But also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because his conscience of God. But how is it your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing right and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

Now, you see, if there's anything that distinguishes a true Christian from a non-Christian, it's at this point. Because you see, for the non-Christian, they will obey you 100%. As long as what you are suggesting is what they also want.

100%. But the moment you are tyrannical, harsh, that is the very excuse for rebellion. It's like, come 50%, I'll come 50% and we'll meet halfway.

So the non-Christian's reason for rebellion is always somehow found in the one who is in authority. Always. No, but why should he demand this from me when I know that he's always doing this and she's always doing that.

So why should I? Why should I? Well, in a sense you are right. That person needs to put his act together. But it's absolutely no excuse for you going into rebellion.

Just that. And to prove the point here, the apostle Peter uses the example of Jesus. Now, if there was ever a miscarriage of justice, it took place when the most perfect human who ever lived on planet earth, Jesus, underwent his trial.

The ill treatment he went through under his own Jewish leader. What are we told in the Bible concerning his example? Did he rebel? The Bible tells us, verse 21, to this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.

When they held their insults at him, he did not retaliate. Wow! For us usually that's the excuse. When your boss goes into a tantrum and calls you all kinds of names, you turn around and you multiply names also on him.

If you want, you can charge me. We will see where this thing will go. Nobody says this to him and gets away with it.

And you can storm out of his office and slam the door behind you. When they held their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threat.

What did he do instead? He entrusted himself to him who judges. What an example! To say, God will avenge me in this situation is not mine to put up a fight now. I leave it to him.

He has my cause in his hands. As we were learning in the prayer meeting from the book of Nahum, God will ultimately take care of me. And you see, it is this cure where God changes your heart to a point where your ego doesn't win the day.

It is this which is being referred to in this passage concerning the healing. Verse 24 rather goes on to say, He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we may die to sin, this rebellious attitude, and live for righteousness. And goes on to say, By his wounds you have been healed.

There is nothing in this entire chapter about disease, physical disease. It's about rebellion. Rebellion against human authority.

Rebellion against divine authority. And we are being told that Jesus came to cure that. And that's what he has done to us.

For you were all like sheep going astray in your own rebellious ways. This sheep goes there. This other sheep goes there.

This sheep goes there. Wherever your own hearts are taking you, you would not yield to authority. But through the death on the cross, you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your soul.

The final authority is God-centeredness. That's what happens to a person when he becomes a Christian. He is no longer interested so much in whether some human authority is peeping at him.

No! The will of God becomes his bread. And he wants to do that that is right in the eyes of God and also in the eyes of men. And that's the school that sanctifies.

If you want to grow in grace, it's when you are in a home, in a church, in a workplace, where you are not having a fair deal. And it's really hard for you. Everything in you feels like let me put up a gallant fight.

And somewhere in your own heart, there's something that is saying no. No. Leave it to God.

God will handle everything. That's God working in you. And that's how people grow in gentleness, in love, in obedience.

It is when they have got people like that over them. For those of you who are married to difficult men, I'm going to say non-Christians, but I think there are some Christians who are difficult men. That's where good, gracious wives are born.

In that home where the husband is closer to a monster than a human being. Obviously, we do not wish that for any wife, but you still can't miss the beauty of character that comes out of that contact. The yielding to that authority is because I know I'll come out a better Christian.

A better Christian. Very well then, do you claim to be a Christian? Well, here is one of the areas in which you can put your professional faith to the test. Are you obedient? Are you submissive? Or are you a little god on your own? You only submit and yield when it is already in fact your will and your desire.

Friends, here is where we must clearly say, stop cheating yourself thinking you are a Christian when your heart is ultimately only in love with yourself. You don't care about obedience. Full of pride! And still claiming you are obedient to God.

But every other human being, it's my right, and this is my right, and what right have you got to say this to me? It's right, and right, and right all the way. If Jesus was to fight on the basis of his right, he would have never gone to the cross. And you and I would still perish in our sin.

But what he said to the Father was this, Father, if it be thy will, take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet not my way, but yours be done. Does that describe you? Does that describe you? If it doesn't, I plead with you, as I do every week, go to Christ, give him your heart, ask him to change you, and I can fully well assure you he will.

He's done it to many others who at one time were well-known for their rebellious spirit, but now are like lambs in the arms of a shepherd, yielding to authority, even human authority. I say again, don't gamble on this issue, because if you think you obey God on earth, but don't obey human beings, you are cheating only yourself. God will not allow you into his heaven, because there he is alone the authority.

And he knows, from the way you are going about life, that if he allowed you into his heaven, there would be two gods, him and yourself. So take your heart to Christ until he changes it, so that you may obey his will. Amen.

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