PETER'S EPISTLES: PREPARING FOR ETERNITY
X. Relating Well To The Government
(1 Peter 2:13-17)

I. Introduction

A. Before the Apostle Peter began to minister for the Lord in the Church, his outlook was impacted by Christ's prophecy in John 21:18-19 that he would be crucified for Christ. Eternity was thus often on Peter's mind.

B. We view Peter's epistles that highlight preparing for eternity, and in 1 Peter 2:13-17, Peter taught us how to relate well to the secular government. We view this passage for our insight, application and edification:

II. Relating Well To The Government, 1 Peter 2:13-17.

A. In addressing the believer's relationship to the secular government, Peter based his directives on the Biblical basis for all human relationships in general, what then leads to government relationships in particular.

B. With this in mind, we note that he wrote for believers to obey every law of man for the Lord's sake, be it the laws of Rome's emperor as the supreme authority or to governors who are sent by him to punish wrongdoers and to commend those who do right, 1 Peter 2:13-14. Since we American believers today live under a constitutional republic, by way of application, we are to obey federal, state and town civil authorities and laws.

C. The phrase "for the Lord's sake" in verse 13b refers to the believer's obligation to obey human government since it is a divine institution that was begun in Genesis 9:6 right after the Noahic Flood and has continued on down through history even into the current dispensation of the Church, Romans 13:1-4.

D. There is a limit to this directive, for "Christians are to observe man-made laws carefully as long as those laws do not conflict with the clear teaching of Scripture (cf. Acts 4:19)." (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 847) Though human government is a divine institution, the believer must give priority to obeying God over that institution.

E. Peter explained that a believer's obedience to human government authorities is God's will, that by living law-abiding lives, we can muzzle (***phimoun***) the ignorant talk of foolish men who in Peter's time were slandering Christians among other things for allegedly being cannibals for eating and drinking of the Lord's body in communion and allegedly traitorously worshiping a competitor King Jesus versus Rome's Emperor! (1 Peter 2:15; Ibid.; F. F. Bruce, Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament, 1974, p. 26, 28)

F. Peter clarified that believers were not undermining their Christian liberty by submitting to governmental authorities, for they were to obey government laws as an act of obedience to the Lord, 1 Peter 2:16a.

G. Nevertheless, though being free from bondage to all men, believers were not to use their spiritual liberty as a cover for evil, for believers are on the one hand free men in relation to other people, but servants of God called to live as His slaves, and thus to obey God's will by heeding human government, 1 Peter 2:16b.

H. Peter concluded this section on the believer's relation to human government with a four-point summary, v. 17:

1. Believers in Christ are to respect everyone in society, 1 Peter 2:17a. Every human being has been created in God's image and thus deserves to be respected by believers, cf. Genesis 1:27; B. K. C., N. T., loc. cit. Such humans may be wicked criminals or social outcasts, but since they bear God's image, they are to be respected regardless of gender, ethnicity, race or language. (Genesis 1:27; 10:1-32)
2. Believers in Christ are to love the brotherhood of believers in Christ, 1 Peter 2:17b. Fellow believers are more than just other human beings who deserve to be honored for bearing God's image, but they are also fellow spiritual brethren in Christ to be loved as such. (Ibid.)
3. Believers in Christ are to "revere" (***phobeisthe***) God to where they obey Him, 1 Peter 2:17c; Ibid.
4. Believers in Christ are to "honor" (***timao***) the king, the Roman emperor, 1 Peter 2:17d; Ibid. This goes for other officials who are not as high in rank as the emperor, for God has put all in authority who are in authority, so all those in government authority are to be honored for their office, Ibid.

Lesson: (1) Since God created every human being in His image, the believer owes respect to every human being. (2) Since God created human government to punish evildoers and to reward those who do good, the believer owes respect and obedience to every human government official and law, the exception being if the believer must obey God over the human government or government law. (3) Since God created every believer as a fellow heir with Christ, every believer owes not only respect for every other believer who exists in God's image, but he also owes every other believer love since all believers are spiritual brethren in Christ.

Application: May we view our relationship to the government not only as a duty to heed its laws and officials, but as a part of all of the relationship guidelines God has established at creation, after the Flood, and in Christ.