

True Freedom

“Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God” ([1 Peter 2:16](#)).

- [1 Peter 2:15–17](#)

As the Gospel spread, and as pagans converted to Christianity, several charges arose against the early church. Pagan misunderstandings of the Lord’s Supper and the love believers have for one another led to claims that the first Christians practiced cannibalism and incest. Many of the earliest believers were also falsely accused of secretly plotting against the Roman government.

Ignorance was behind many of these claims, just as ignorance is still behind many attacks on the Christian faith today. The church has no recourse but to deal with such ignorance. Today’s passage shows us that one way we can answer our misinformed critics is to live exemplary lives of submission to human authorities. It is by our subjection to our rulers as good citizens that we can silence many of the ignorant charges against us ([1 Peter 2:15](#)).

Yet not only are we to be good citizens, we are also to go beyond the normal duties we owe society. Verse 17 tells us we must “honor everyone.” Not only must we be submissive to the laws of the land (insofar as they do not require us to sin), we must show respect to people even if they are not in authority over us. We must treat everyone with the dignity they possess in bearing the image of God.

Lest we think our submission to earthly authorities impinges on our freedom, Peter also reminds us in today’s passage that we are indeed free (v. 16). As Christians, we possess a freedom that non-believers cannot enjoy. If we are in Christ, then we are free from the curse that the Law brings to the disobedient ([Gal. 3:13](#)), and we are free from the reigning power of sin over our lives ([Rom. 6:22](#)).

Because of this we can see that the freedom we enjoy is not a freedom to do evil. We must never use our freedom as an excuse for disobeying authority ([1 Peter 2:16](#)). Our freedom is a freedom to serve. As John Calvin says, our freedom

is “a free servitude, and a serving freedom. For as we ought to be the servants of God, that we may enjoy this benefit, so moderation is required in the use of it. In this way, indeed, our consciences become free; but this prevents us not to serve God, who requires us also to be subject to men.”

Application of God

The passage we have been studying over the past two days can be applied not only to the civil authority but also to any institution that exercises authority over us. Because we are to be subject to “every human institution” we must also obey our supervisors and anyone else with authority. Do you submit to your supervisors at work, or do you secretly dishonor them by speaking ill of them to others? Do what you can to honor your supervisors both publicly and privately.

Passages for Further Study

[Ex. 20:12](#)

[Luke 2:41–52](#)

[Rom. 6:17–19; 13:1–7](#)

[Gal. 5:13](#)