

Dear Fellow Citizens of these United States,

*“Under my thumb, the girl who once had me down. Under my thumb, the girl who once pushed me around. It’s down to me. The way she does just what she’s told, down to me, the change has come, she’s under my thumb.”*

Are any of you ladies offended by those lyrics? You should be. They hint at male domination, even oppression, of women. The Rolling Stones got away with it. But that doesn’t make it right.

When Peter wrote the words of our text, the early Christian church was under the thumb of the Roman government, a government that was persecuting Christians. So what did Peter say about this oppressive regime. Did he say, “Rebel. Throw off the oppressors.” No, he said, “Submit.”

Our government is not nearly as oppressive as the Romans. Oh, yes, we didn’t always appreciate the governor’s rules for masks and social distancing. But we understand that we are still

### UNDER THE THUMB

of our government. Yet even being under the thumb is not all bad. We still rejoice in our freedom.

I. We submit to those in authority because it is God’s will. Peter writes, **“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority.”** When it comes to government, we have to remember what Paul wrote, **“There is no authority except that which God has established.”** God is in control of every government.

Yes, we may wonder why a brutal regime stays in power. We may wonder why God allows dictators to continue. But Jesus taught us all we need to know. We respect those in authority even as Jesus did. He says, **“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”**

What God desires in the nations of this world is good order, not anarchy. He is not an advocate of mob behavior. So one of the chief jobs of a nation is to serve and protect its citizens. **“Submit to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors who are sent by God to punish those who do wrong and commend those who do right.”** When that is happening, we can be thankful that we are under the thumb of a good government.

All of this is to our advantage as Christians. Peter writes, **“It is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.”** Unbelievers will throw all sorts of accusations against Christians. They will bring up past offences that happened in some church bodies and blame every Christian for those sins. They may vilify us because we trust in God’s Word. We may be mocked for not jumping on the bandwagon when our society promotes loose morals. But they cannot deny our good behavior as citizens. Silence the fools out there by being good citizens under God.

Our good behavior may even have a positive result. **“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God.”** When we live good lives, the accusations of unbelievers will appear foolish. Hopefully, the result will be that some will see the hope and joy in our lives, and wonder what we have that they don’t have. Well, that’s simple, isn’t it? We have Christ Jesus as our Savior. We have the joy of sins forgiven. We have the prospect of eternal life in heaven. With those promises, we can live under the thumb of any government, good or bad.

II. Not only do we willingly submit to those in authority, we also, especially in this country, rejoice in our freedoms.

The 4<sup>th</sup> of July is all about our freedom as a nation. We have many freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. We cherish those freedoms. But most of all, we rejoice in the free exercise of religion that we have in this country. That means that we can gather on a Sunday to worship our Lord. It means we have the freedom to study God's Word at home and at church. We have the freedom to express our beliefs and share our faith with people who don't know Jesus. We can invite them to worship with us.

Why is this freedom so precious? Well, we know that in some countries around the world, those freedoms are not available to Bible-believing Christians. Some governments make it almost impossible to talk about the faith in public. And some governments look the other way when Christians are being persecuted. That's why we cherish our freedom in this country.

Yet, our political freedoms, guaranteed by our nation, are nothing compared to our ultimate freedom. Jesus suffered on the cross because of our sins, and by his death he saved us. We have the best freedom. We are free from the burden of our guilt. Every sin has been forgiven through Christ our Savior. By his glorious resurrection, Jesus has assured us that we have a future of perfect freedom in heaven.

Finally, let's never forget that Jesus has won for us freedom from the devil. Yes, Satan is still a bother to us. And we have to admit that we have not always resisted his temptations. But we have power over the devil, if you and I will just use it. Paul, in Titus, encourages us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to say "Yes" to living self-controlled, upright and godly lives. Rejoice in the freedom that only Christ can give.

Then use that freedom wisely. Peter speaks an encouragement and a warning. **"Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil."** Don't misunderstand. Being free in Christ does not mean that you and I can do whatever we want. We still want to avoid sin. Sadly, some Christian denominations have fallen into a trap. They insist that if the government approves of some behavior, then the church should adopt the same attitude. The result is that some Christian denominations approve of sins such as abortion on demand and gay marriage. However, we know that such behaviors are still wrong in God's eyes. We understand that just because the government makes it legal, doesn't mean that it is moral.

Therefore we will use our freedom properly. Peter writes, **"Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor."** We will show respect for those in authority. We will pray for the president, the members of Congress, the governor, and all the other elected officials. We pray that they will act wisely for the good of the nation.

At the same time we will continue to show our love for our fellow believers. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians: **"Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible."** That's serving one another in love.

So use your civic freedom wisely. Stay involved in what is going on in our nation. Remember to vote. Get involved in politics if you wish. Even rejoice as you pay your taxes, because Paul reminds us, **"The authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing."**

Rejoice that you are under the thumb of a benevolent government, and rejoice to use your freedom in Christ to the glory of God. Amen.