

What About ... Peter's Statement: "Fear God and honor the King"

By DR. DAVID A. DEWITT

Peter wrote: *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king (1 Peter 2:13-17).*

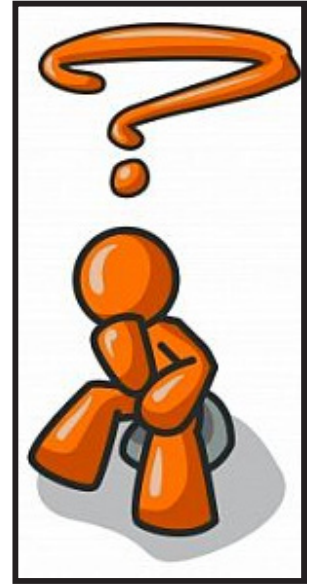
Let's compare fearing God with honoring the king. The Greek words are very common. The word for *fear* (φοβέω, *phobeo*) is where English gets its word "phobia." Peter's word φοβεῖσθε (*phobeisthe*) means "you [plural] are to be afraid." The word for *honor* (τιμᾶω *tima* – long "a") means "honor" in the sense of "to fix the value" (Strong's). Peter's word τιμᾶτε (*timate*) means "you [plural] are to place value on."

The popular thing to say in our post-modern secular society, including our post-modern secular church, is that we should have awe, reverence, and respect for God but not be afraid of Him. But remember:

The difference between "fear" and "respect" is: respect is on my terms, and fear is on His terms

For example, if I respect my professor, I might send him a "thank you" note, go by and personally tell him I appreciate his work, or even have a party in his honor. But whatever I do, I decide what respect looks like. On the other hand, if I'm being chased by a bear in the woods, he decides what that looks like. When I honor, revere, or respect someone, I am in control. When I fear, I am no longer in control of the situation. The one I fear is in control.

But what happens when a political leader leads with fear? We've seen this in history—from the Roman Caesars to Hitler to modern-day Ahmadinejad—dictators have used fear to gain power. To fear the king means the king determines what that looks like. In America, fear is created with the idea of a "crisis." We have a banking crisis (so we need more government control). We have a health care crisis (so we need more government control). We have a global warming crisis (so we need more government control). We have an oil spill (so we need more government control). But the real long-term, or maybe not-so-long-term, goal is leadership by fear. Listen to interviews, and you will often hear: "Aren't you afraid about this or that?" "Yes, I am afraid of this, and I am worried about that."



Remember—the difference between worry and concern is that worry assumes God is not sovereign. Worry is the result of misplaced fear.

**The Apostle Peter said:
Fear God and honor the king.
Our secular society says:
"Honor God and fear the king."**

Peter honored the king in that he taught submission to government. But he feared God, not the government. So when the government told him to disobey God, Peter disobeyed the government (Acts 4:18-20). In other words, his response to the government was on God's terms. To honor the king means I determine what that looks like. But if I fear God, then God determines what that looks like. And it looks like submission, unless the government tells us to disobey God. The real problem, though, is that our secular society (with its secular churches) tells us to not be afraid of God but to define "fear" as "awe and respect." That means God is not controlling our lives. But if we allow the king to make us fearful, he is in control. That's why we need to *fear God and honor the king*, not the other way around. Or as Jesus said: *Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).*