

Submission

to

Authorities



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Submission to Authorities

This is a topic that at times elicits strong emotions. In our fleshly nature, we tend to rebel against authority. The first act of rebellion was in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve disobeyed a specific command that was given them.

In the New Testament we have some very specific commands that are given in relation to submitting to Government and authorities. It should be noted that when these commands were given, Rome was the occupying force in Israel and much of the known world. Jesus was persecuted by the religious leaders and yet commanded obedience to them. Paul, as he was writing had also been persecuted and beaten, yet he also commanded obedience to the authorities. Peter, as he was writing his first letter was addressing Christians who were being persecuted and commanded them to obey the authorities anyway. While some may charge that bad rulers need not be obeyed or that false information being presented by authorities frees them from their obligation to obey, this is not allowed by the Scriptures. Peter, in 1 Pet 2:18, after commanding obedience to authorities also tells those that have unreasonable masters must still be submitted to. This principle also applies to unreasonable governments. People who call themselves Christians and disobey Government and authorities bring Christianity into disrepute. The prophet Nathan told David that his sin of adultery with Bathsheba gave occasion for the enemies of God to blaspheme. (2 Sam 2:14) The apostle Paul in Ro 2:24 also speaks about the Name of God being blasphemed because of their sin.

From all of these Scriptures, it is obvious that Christians are to obey their Government and other authorities since opposing the authorities is opposing God.

Here are the main Scriptures that speak to this subject:

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. (Matt. 23:1–3 NAS95)

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist have been appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists that authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of that authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword in vain, for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of that wrath, but also because of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. (Rom. 13:1–6 LSB)

These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you. Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to

slander no one, to be peaceable, considerate, demonstrating all gentleness to all men. (Titus 2:15–3:2 LSB)

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. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. (1 Pet. 2:13–18 NAS95)

The verse that is sometimes used to object to this is:

“But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to hear you rather than God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”” (Acts 4:19-20 LSB)

We need to carefully look at what the apostles were specifically talking about. The religious leaders had commanded them not to speak about Jesus any more. We need to be careful in the use of this verse. Different people will draw different lines here between where the boundary is between obeying the authorities and obeying God. We need to realize that we have a rebellious spirit within us and sometimes, it seems we use that verse as an excuse to rebel against authority. Also, this does not mean that we should not be involved in politics, but rather do it within the framework of the law to move towards godly laws. It would be prudent to examine the lives of Jesus and the apostles to see how they dealt with the issue.